

The CIA's Role in Egypt's Regime Change? Who Is Omar Suleiman?

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One of the “new” names being mentioned as a possible alternative to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Omar Suleiman, is actually not so new to anyone who has followed the American policy of renditions for terror suspects. After dissolving his cabinet yesterday, Mubarak appointed Suleiman vice-president, and according to many commentators he is poised to be a potential successor, and an alternative to Mubarak’s son and intended heir until now, Gamal Mubarak. Suleiman is a well-known quantity in Washington. Suave, sophisticated, and fluent in English, he has served for years as the main conduit between the United States and Mubarak. While he has a reputation for loyalty and effectiveness, he also carries some controversial baggage from the standpoint of those looking for a clean slate on human rights. As I described in my book “[The Dark Side](#),” since 1993 Suleiman has headed the feared Egyptian general intelligence service. In that capacity, he was the C.I.A.’s point man in Egypt for renditions—the covert program in which the C.I.A. snatched terror suspects from around the world and returned them to Egypt and elsewhere for interrogation, often under brutal circumstances.

As laid out in greater detail by Stephen Grey, in his book “[Ghost Plane](#),” beginning in the nineteen-nineties, Suleiman negotiated directly with top Agency officials. Every rendition was greenlighted at the highest levels of both the U.S. and Egyptian intelligence agencies. Edward S. Walker, Jr., a former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, described Suleiman as “very bright, very realistic,” adding that he was cognizant that there was a downside to “some of the negative things that the Egyptians engaged in, of torture and so on. But he was not squeamish, by the way.”

Technically, U.S. law required the C.I.A. to seek “assurances” from Egypt that rendered suspects wouldn’t face torture. But under Suleiman’s reign at the intelligence service, such assurances were considered close to worthless. As Michael Scheuer, a former C.I.A. officer who helped set up the practice of rendition, later testified before Congress, even if such “assurances” were written in indelible ink, “they weren’t worth a bucket of warm spit.”

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