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Cables say Israel favours Suleiman

Preference for Egypt's new vice-president to succeed Mubarak disclosed by leaked documents obtained by WikiLeaks

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Omar Suleiman, Egypt's recently appointed vice-president, has long been seen by Israel as the favoured successor to Hosni Mubarak, the current president, according to a leaked diplomatic cable obtained by [WikiLeaks](http://www.wikileaks.org), the whistleblower website, and published by the UK daily, [The Telegraph](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

The August 2008 cable said David Hacham, a senior adviser at the Israeli ministry of defence (MoD), told US officials the Israelis expected Suleiman, spelt Soliman in some cables, to take over.

"Hacham noted that the Israelis believe Soliman is likely to serve as at least an interim president if Mubarak dies or is incapacitated," the cable sent from the US embassy in Tel Aviv said.

"We defer to Embassy Cairo for analysis of Egyptian succession scenarios, but there is no question that Israel is most comfortable with the prospect of Omar Soliman," the memo cited US diplomats as saying.

The cable said Hacham was full of praise for Suleiman, even noting that "a 'hot line' set up between the MoD and Egyptian General Intelligence Service is now in daily use".

Suleiman was Egypt's intelligence chief since 1993 and had been a frequent visitor to Israel and a mediator in its conflict with the Palestinians.

He was appointed Egypt's vice-president late last month following pressure by mass demonstrators in the country calling for an immediate end to Mubarak's 30-year rule.

Hillary Clinton, the US secretary of state, backed Suleiman on Saturday as the best candidate to lead a "transition" government as Mubarak continues to cling to power.

Mubarak has said he only intends to leave office in September at the end of his current term. But on Tuesday Suleiman announced that Mubarak would set up a committee that would carry out constitutional and legislative amendments to enable a shift of power.

Questions raised

The *Telegraph's* report followed an earlier one by Reuters news agency on Monday, which also received leaked diplomatic cables via WikiLeaks.

Reuters reported that Suleiman had previously harshly criticised Egypt's opposition Muslim Brotherhood in his communications with US officials.

Significantly, Suleiman held a meeting with opposition leaders, including the Muslim Brotherhood, on Sunday in a bid to end a political crisis that has seen hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets in opposition to Mubarak's rule.

The leaked cables raised questions over whether Suleiman could be seen as an honest broker in any negotiations regarding the next steps for Egypt.

In the cables obtained by Reuters, Suleiman is reported to have told US officials that the Muslim Brotherhood was creating armed groups, most notably "the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Gama'a Islamiya [Islamic Group]" it said.

He is also said to take "an especially hard line on Tehran", and in one dated January 2, 2008, Suleiman is quoted as saying that Iran remained "a significant threat to Egypt".

'Technically illegal'

The cable obtained by Reuters went on to say: "The principal danger, in Soliman's view, was the [Muslim Brotherhood] group's exploitation of religion to influence and mobilise the public."

It continues: "Soliman termed the MB's recent success in the parliamentary elections as 'unfortunate', adding his view that although the group was technically illegal, existing Egyptian laws were insufficient to keep the MB in check."

The elections referred to were those in November and December in 2005, in which the Muslim Brotherhood made substantial gains.

The [inclusion of the Brotherhood in the opposition's talks](#) with Suleiman are considered significant as the group is formally banned in Egypt, although its activities are tolerated.

The document's obtained by the *Telegraph* also disclosed that Suleiman explored the idea of allowing Israeli troops into the Egyptian border area of Philadelphi in a bid to stop arms being smuggled to Palestinian fighters in Gaza.

Mubarak has long attempted to paint his rule of Egypt as a counterbalance to an "Islamist threat".

"In their moments of greatest frustration, (Egypt Defence Minister) Tantawi and Soliman each have claimed that the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) would be 'welcome' to re-invade Philadelphi, if the IDF thought that would stop the smuggling," the cable said.

The memo later revealed that Suleiman wanted Gaza to "go hungry but not starve" and for Hamas, the Palestinian group which governs the besieged enclave, to be "isolated".