

OUR TORTURER, OMAR SULEIMAN, WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT-WILL WE HELP HIM?

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After earlier stating he would not run in the upcoming Egyptian Presidential race, Omar Suleiman announced on Friday he would file to run for President (with the Army's help gathering the 30,000 signatures he would need to collect in just one day).

Omar Suleiman, one of the most powerful figures of Mubarak's regime, had said earlier this week that he would not run. But he said he changed his mind after hundreds of people rallied in Cairo to support a bid.

[snip]

Hundreds rallied Friday in Cairo to call for him to run for president.

Suleiman said that helped change his mind.

"I can only meet the call and run in the presidential race, despite the constraints and difficulties I made clear in my former statement," he said in a statement carried by the official MENA news agency on Friday. He said he faces administrative obstacles, but did not elaborate.

The AJE piece above describes how the Presidential race has devolved into all sides responding to Islamists—who had a big win in Parliamentary elections—deciding to run. Suleiman's decision seems to be just another step in that process.

Mr. Suleiman's decision raises the possibility that, one year after an uprising that was spurred in part by the Mubarak regime's brutality, torture, and oppression, one of the architects of that repression could become Egypt's first post-Mubarak president.

Some see his candidacy as a response by Egypt's military rulers to the Muslim Brotherhood's recent decision to field a presidential candidate – a decision that broke a year-long promise to stay out of the race. Omar Ashour, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, says Suleiman's candidacy raises the possibility that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which is currently ruling Egypt, may rig the elections to favor the former intelligence chief.

Some observers suggest Suleiman's move is just be an effort to make Amr Moussa look credible by comparison.

But as Jeff Stein reviews, in many ways he'd be the most palatable candidate to the West, largely because of our long history of cooperating with him on things like torturing Ibn Shaikh al-Libi to generate propaganda with which to start the Iraq War. People predicted Suleiman might succeed Hosni Mubarak long before the Arab Uprising.

"An open question is whether he can count on help from his longtime friends in the CIA," I wrote back in January 2011.

"Ask who they posit as a possible successor," a State Department expert on the region told me then. "Bet you a beer, the name Omar Suleiman comes up more often than most."

The Wall Street Journal's Jerusalem correspondent, Charles Levinson, also

saw it coming, I wrote.

In a December 2010 piece, Levinson pronounced Suleiman “the most likely successor ... President Mubarak’s closest aide, charged with handling the country’s most sensitive issues.

“He also has close working relations with the U.S. and a lifetime of experience inside Egypt’s military and intelligence apparatus,” Levinson wrote.

Likewise, the Voice of America said on Jan. 28, 2011, “Suleiman is seen by some analysts as a possible successor to the president.”

“He earned international respect for his role as a mediator in Middle East affairs and for curbing Islamic extremism.”

An editorialist at Pakistan’s “International News” also predicted that “Suleiman will probably scupper his boss’s plans [to install his son], even if the aspiring intelligence guru himself is as young as 75.”

Given the timing, I’m not sure Suleiman—or his backers, possibly including the US—have thought through what they hope to accomplish with his candidacy, or what efforts they plan to use to steal the election.

But since the Muslim Brotherhood won the Parliamentary election, the US seems to have jettisoned even the lofty rhetoric about seeing democracy in the Middle East (it was rarely backed by action), in favor of the authoritarian partners we know. At that level, Suleiman’s decision to run may well reflect as badly on the US as it does on Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.