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*Hosni Mubarak's son is readied for succession.*

## JOINING THE DYNASTY CLUB

By Anouar Boukhars



Is Hosni Mubarak's 26-year rule really coming to an end? Persistent rumors of a sharp decline in the health of the Egyptian president and speculation about what will take place after the dictator's death are increasingly being heard. Mubarak has vehemently denied all reports of failing health, accusing "those who spread rumors" of intentionally trying to destabilize Egypt.

Even his wife, Suzanne Mubarak, weighed in, condemning those "renegade" journalists whose sole intent is to "sow anger and mistrust". In a rare television appearance, the first lady called for all rumormongers to be held accountable for their profoundly "un-Egyptian" conduct.

In another move to squash the endless speculation about what will take shape after the end of the "Age of Mubarak", the regime unleashed one of the biggest campaigns against public dissent in several years. The recent detentions of a number of journalists and the ruthless crackdown on the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood are a clear attempt by the Egyptian regime to cripple all its critics and political rivals and ensure a smooth transition of power. The regime is understandably anxious to tighten its control and impose order. In recent months, the country has been plagued by a number of large-scale labor strikes and simmering discontent in the Sinai, where Bedouin protests against state discrimination and police abuse turned into rampages against government buildings and other state symbols.

Wilberforce Quarterly seeks to publish thoughtful analysis and balanced information on a broad range of security and strategic issues confronting the United States and its allies. The journal's goal is to satisfy the need for independent research on important security issues and generate scholarly discussion and greater public awareness of the changing patterns of international relations. The journal was founded by Marshall Mitchell, Executive Vice President; Anouar Boukhars, Director of Wilberforce Centre for Defense and Security Policy, and Reverend Dr. Floyd H. Flake, president of Wilberforce University and former member of Congress. The opinions expressed within are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Wilberforce University.

To be sure, Egypt's economy has registered a healthy growth in the last years but food prices have skyrocketed, poverty continues to grow and income remains stagnant.

In the midst of this tense transitional phase, the heir-apparent to the presidency, Mubarak's son, Gamal, is positioning himself as a major player on the political scene, creating a sense of inevitability about his meteoric rise to power. This does not mean that he is a definite shoo-in for the presidency. Recent history has seen the military directly and indirectly dominating Egyptian politics, and it is common knowledge that whoever assumes the presidency must have its blessing. For now, however, the leading contender for the presidency is the president's son, despite his denials of harboring any ambitions to hold "any executive position".

If this scenario materializes, Egypt will finally join the Middle Eastern dynasty club and set a trend for more cases where sons become heirs to their fathers' governments of elites. The leaders of Libya and Yemen will enthusiastically take a cue from this experience. The army and security services, the backbone of these regimes, are unlikely to torpedo any succession that preserves the status quo. Egypt is no exception, and Gamal Mubarak and his coterie of advisors and supporters within the NDP understand that no smooth potential transfer of power is possible without the support of senior officers. In addition to winning the army to his side, Gamal has quickly ascended the ladder of powers within the ruling party and enhanced his credentials as a young liberal reformer. As an economic advisor to his father, he is credited by many in the business community in Egypt and abroad with helping to overhaul the stagnant economy and create the conditions for economic growth.

Debate about Gamal's desire to succeed his father picked up steam with his recent marriage to the daughter of a well-known businessman and contractor, Mahmoud el-Gamal. While tying the knot may have nothing to do with his eventual ascent to power, some observers are convinced that the marriage reinforces his chances of becoming president. But regardless of whether Gamal replicates the feats of the sons who succeeded their fathers in Jordan, Morocco and Syria, one thing is certain. The next leader of Egypt will emerge from Mubarak's inner circle. The government's crackdown on any and all political challengers is part of a wide campaign to mobilize state power, reassure the business community and secure the support of the army. The major players of the system share the same goals of maintaining stability at all costs.

The fallout from a direct takeover of power by the military or a turbulent breakdown in the transition process might have a deleterious impact not only on the Arab world's most populous nation but on the whole region. Given the debilitating weakness of the democratic forces in Egypt and the regime's determination to weaken its adversaries and crush its formidable challengers,

a father-son succession might be the least undesirable outcome. Gamal is no democrat and no one is under the illusion that, once at the helm of the country, he will take bold steps to move Egypt toward greater freedoms and lead Middle East democratization. The kings of Jordan, Morocco and Syria's president Bashar al-Assad once promised that they would be agents of reform and progress when they succeeded their fathers. Once in power, they reneged on the core of their promises. Today, it is a small and impoverished country like Mauritania that leads the cause of democracy in the Arab world.- *First Published in bitterlemons-international.org, 25/10/2007*

**THE HAMAS TAKEOVER OF GAZA**

By Omar Karmi

On June 13, a couple of Hamas fighters were happily posing for pictures with their semi-automatic guns and black masks inside the just-captured northern Gaza headquarters of the Palestinian Authority's National Security Service.

The PA's Fateh-led forces were all melting away, and fighters loyal to Hamas were sweeping aside everything in their path.

"What now," I asked one young fighter who identified himself as Abu Ayman. I meant to probe what Hamas would do once it was in sole charge of Gaza. Abu Ayman, however, was reluctant to answer, thinking he was being asked for information about the next military operation.

"I can't tell you that," he said before adding, "but don't go near the Suraya today."

The Suraya, the combined home of the Palestinian police, security and intelligence forces in Gaza City, duly fell to Hamas later that day. It took only another day for Hamas to complete its rout of all the Fateh-led security force compounds as well as the presidential headquarters. In little less than four days, 12 years of Fateh security domination in the Gaza Strip had come to an end. Hamas had won elections a year-and-a-half earlier. It had now asserted its military muscle as well. To some within the movement it was a show of strength that meant it could never again be set aside, whether by Fateh or by international actors.

But two months down the line the impoverished strip of land, home to some 1.4 million people, is more isolated than ever. The West Bank PA of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has joined in the international boycott of Gaza and ordered public sector employees to stay at home if they want to be paid. On the streets, garbage is not being collected and the beaches are strewn with litter. Unemployment has spiked dramatically to well over 50 percent. Eighty percent of Gazans are dependent on international aid in order to eat and opinion polls show Hamas, for the first time in years, slowly losing popular support.

**A MOMENTUM OF ITS OWN**

Hamas leaders have been at pains to deny that the takeover of Gaza was in any way a long-planned operation as Fateh leaders have charged. Nevertheless, an element of planning was certainly evident in some of the operations. In the attack that ended Fateh resistance at the central Gaza headquarters of the Preventive Security in Khan Younis, a tunnel was dug under a building that was then blown up from beneath. It clearly hadn't been dug in a day.

In addition, the effectiveness with which Hamas' military wing moved from one head quarters to another also suggested a degree of planning. Like Abu Ayman above, the men with the guns knew what was happening next. On the other hand, there also seems to be enough evidence to suggest that Hamas' political leadership never intended for the clashes to go that far. Hamas' exiled leader Khalid Meshaal issued a public plea from

Damascus for the fighting to stop that went unheeded, unusual for a group that prides itself on its discipline. Other leaders on the ground in Gaza concede that at some point the takeover simply took on a momentum of its own, that it was never meant to go beyond security services seen as loyal to Fateh's erstwhile Gaza strongman Mohammad Dahlan.

"The security service strongholds just collapsed," says Ahmed Yousef, an advisor to Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. "And when the fighters got to the presidential headquarters there were no forces left and people had started looting. We had to go in and assert control."

Also clashes between elements of the security services and Hamas had reached critical levels in early June and Gazans were increasingly afraid to leave their houses. Lawlessness was rampant and, since the abduction of BBC journalist Alan Johnston, even foreign journalists were reluctant to go to Gaza. Hamas leaders clearly believe that the clashes were deliberate attempts at stymieing any chance of success of the unity government that had been agreed between Fateh and Hamas in Mecca in February. The close and increasingly public connection between PA security forces and US security envoy Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton also convinced leaders that they were the target of a conspiracy led by Dahlan and with the support of the US.

"We did not use force in order to subvert democracy," says spokesman Ayman Taher. "We used force to protect democracy."

**LESSONS NOT LEARNT**

In fact, the increased instability in Gaza can be traced back to January 2006 and Hamas' victory in parliamentary elections. The decision by the international community led by Washington to boycott any Hamas-led government and the subsequent sanctions against financial aid to the PA made it almost impossible for the movement to govern from the beginning.

Israel seized the opportunity to tighten its closure on Gaza in contravention of the US-brokered Agreement on Movement and Access that should have seen restrictions on the movement on goods and people in and out of Gaza gradually ease, and hopes that the 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip settlements would lead to economic recovery were soon dashed.

And while the impact of the sanctions were lessened by a significant increase in Arab aid as well as the advent of the Temporary International Mechanism to secure that international aid would reach social hardship cases directly, the government was effectively paralyzed. Cut out of the financial loop, parliament could approve no budget for 2006 and none for 2007. The some 160,000 public sector employees across the occupied Palestinian territories went largely unpaid and unemployment rose.

Nevertheless, Hamas refused to bow to the Quartet's three conditions that it recognize Israel, reject the armed resistance and adhere to previously signed agreements. Its reasoning was simple and found a receptive audience among Palestinians. Israel did not recognize a Palestinian state and therefore should not expect to receive such recognition; it is the right of any occupied people to resist a military occupation; and finally, Israel did not adhere to previously signed agreements, and until it withdrew its forces to pre-October 2000 positions should not expect Hamas to do the same thing.

Politically, the impact of financial sanctions backfired. As many Palestinian analysts argued, they simply removed the responsibility from Hamas to govern in what was already a near-impossible situation. Hamas and people in general could blame the international community for their woes. Hamas' popular support suffered no significant setback.

But the security situation in Gaza deteriorated and Hamas struggled to assert control over the traditionally Fateh-led security services. In spite of ongoing negotiations in Cairo between the factions, clashes spread peaking in December 2006 and then in late January and early February 2007. Finally, Hamas and Fateh agreed, with Saudi mediation, to form a national unity government, but it was not enough to end international sanctions. On the contrary, the US instead announced an increase in both material and financial assistance to security services under the direct control of Abbas and the scene was set for the final showdown in June.

#### RIDING THE STORM

Order has returned to the streets of Gaza. The beaches, dirty though they may be, are filled with people day and night. Alan Johnston was released and no other kidnaps have taken place. No one carries his gun in public anymore. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggest demand for guns has fallen so much that prices are going down and Gazans joke that weapons are now being smuggled back to Egypt. In terms of security, Gazan lives have significantly improved.

But the closure on Gaza is tighter than ever and 80,000 jobs were lost in the last two months. Abbas' decision to sack the Haniyeh government and install his own technocrat government has led the international community to lift sanctions against the PA and

salaries are being paid again. But in Gaza they are being paid on the condition that public sector employees do not go back to work.

There are neither official nor unofficial talks between Fateh and Hamas on reconciliation at the moment though plenty of feelers are out. Hamas' position is that it is willing to talk to Abbas at any time but that it will offer no apology for what happened. Abbas maintains that Hamas must first allow back the security services and apologize for its actions in June. Meanwhile, the Palestinian president is vigorously pursuing his diplomatic option with Israel and the US, and the latter is pumping more money into the presidential guards.

In effect, Hamas in Gaza and the Abbas-led PA of the West Bank are engaged in a massive game of chicken. Abbas is under no illusion that negotiations with Israel will offer any acceptable agreement and even if it did, Hamas is quite capable of playing the spoiler. Hamas reads the situation the same way, but is presiding over a failed economy and an increasingly impoverished Gaza Strip. Privately, some Hamas leaders express exasperation at the situation and accept responsibility for their own role in creating it.

A compromise between the two factions is inevitable at some stage. The nature of that compromise depends entirely on what position Abbas and Hamas find themselves in after the US-sponsored November meeting that is to trash out some kind of negotiated progress between Israel and the Palestinians. Abbas will want to ensure some tangible success to convince Palestinians that he is on the right track. Hamas, in a tighter position than they might have wished, will want to ensure that the Gaza Strip does not fold completely and hope to ride the worst of the storm.

But in the longer term, much more is at stake. Internally, Palestinians are now firmly in the regional struggle between western-leaning regimes and Islamist-oriented opposition movements. The major difference is that the Palestinian situation is at the vanguard and could be crucial for how that struggle in rest of the region of the region plays itself out. "The future of Hamas is the future of the world," says Yousef. "The US should have dealt with us after the elections. Now, other organizations in the region will look at us and draw the lesson that elections will not be respected, that only bullets, not ballots, count."

## **GERMANY ARRESTS FUEL FEAR OF HOMEGROWN TERRORISM**

By Anouar Boukhars

The fear of Islamist terrorism has reached new heights in Europe. A recent survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Compagnia di San Paolo, a research center in Turin, Italy, documented a sharp increase in the number of Europeans who are becoming increasingly nervous about their vulnerability to terrorism (<http://www.transatlantictrends.org>). About two-thirds of Europeans are resigned to the fact that living with terrorist threats might become part of their daily life. Some 70 percent of Germans feel that they are likely to suffer a terrorist attack, which is a 32 percent increase since 2005. These high numbers preceded the latest arrests of terrorist suspects in Denmark, Germany and Austria. Indeed, since the September 11 attacks on the United States, Europe has become a favorite target for Islamist terrorists. The number of plots discovered and foiled has forced many in Europe to try to understand why the continent has become a hunting ground for terrorist recruits, and how the extreme alienation and anti-state orientations of some Muslim European nationals develop and evolve into murderous forms of jihadism.

The fact that two of the three terror suspects arrested recently in Germany were converts to Islam shocked the country. Deputy CDU floor leader Wolfgang Bosbach concurred with the assessment that tends to see conversion to Islam as leading to radicalization and to ultimate recruitment by a terrorist organization. "We know that some who convert become radicalized," Bosbach argued (*Spiegel Online*, September 12). Of course, this is not the first time that converts have been involved in terrorist networks. In 2005, a Belgian female convert stunned the country when she blew herself up in Baghdad in a failed suicide attack against U.S. forces. In Britain, people are still perplexed that one of the suspects arrested in the foiled transatlantic airline bomb was the son "of a Conservative Party activist." This growing trend of converts embracing radical Islam has raised several questions about the role of Islam in radicalization.

Nevertheless, it is not the conversion to Islam that is the prime factor in the new converts becoming terrorists. It is the group they associate with once they embrace Islam that creates the conditions conducive for radicalization. Radicalization, as Stefan Reichmuth, a professor of Islamic studies at the Ruhr University in Bochum, pointed out, occurs "in the context of acquaintances, the environment or the networks that one encounters after converting" (*Deutsche Welle*, September 11). Gudrun Ensslin, one of the leaders of the left-wing rebels of Germany's Red Army Faction, became radicalized after she joined a group of disgruntled and angry middle-class youth who saw themselves as fighting the "arch capitalists." This daughter of a protestant pastor did not veer into extremism because of her religious background.

She did so when she "fell in with a group of far-leftists unhappy with German society" (*Deutsche Welle*, September 11).

Clearly, young converts are more susceptible to the "anti-imperialist" dimension of transnational jihadism, as is shown by the small number of disaffected European nationals who came to find solace in an anti-system Islamist supportive milieu that promises a way out of alienation and delinquency into a new life of jihadi brotherhood capable of challenging what it sees as a hegemonic and discriminatory Western system. It is, therefore, a mistake to view the jihadis' terrorist madness as emanating exclusively from a crude moral absolutism. After all, the targets of the German suspects were not Christian landmarks, but the U.S. military air facility at Ramstein, an important transport hub for the U.S. war command and its operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and U.S. and Uzbek consular facilities in Germany. The goal was to put pressure on both the German and Uzbek governments to close the Termez base in southern Uzbekistan. Germany uses the base for logistical support for its 3,000 soldiers in Afghanistan. A communiqué posted online on September 11 by the Islamic Jihad Union, a group affiliated with al-Qaeda which splintered from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, claimed that the IJU had intended to attack the United States and Uzbekistan because of their "injustice and brutal policies toward Muslims and Islam" (*Spiegel Online*, September 12).

It is increasingly evident that the jihadi enterprise draws strength in part from its development out of, and alongside, strong opposition to perceived Western expansionist policies. This strong rejection of the West's perceived politico-ideological hegemony and its "free market" globalization is what helps to drive some jihadi actions. Nevertheless, a great number of Europeans think it is Islam that is the main motivating factor for terrorism. More pragmatic officials and experts, however, believe that instead of criminalizing Islam, it is necessary to criminalize attending terrorist training camps and strictly enforce the zero-tolerance policy for inciting centers in cities like Ulm and adjacent Neu-Ulm, where Fritz Gelowicz, a "little blond boy" raised in a popular middle-class family in largely Roman Catholic Bavaria, was introduced to the deadly ideology of terror, met Mohammed Atta, the ringleader of the September 11, 2001, attacks, and learned about terror training camps in Afghanistan (*The Times*, September 9).

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## IRAQI TERROR TRIAL EXPOSES BELGIUM'S MUSLIM DILEMMA

By Anouar Boukhars

The recent start of the Belgian Iraq terror trial of six men accused of recruiting Europe's first female suicide bomber has once again put the country's Muslim minority in the spotlight, arousing significant levels of discomfort, concern and fear among Belgium's Muslims (*Le Soir*, October 15). The fact that one of the accused is a converted Muslim accentuated the fear of growing local Muslim radicalism. Pascal Cruyppenninck and four other Belgians of North African descent have been charged with belonging to a terrorist group that recruited, among others, Muriel Degauque, a 38-year-old female convert to Islam who killed herself in a suicide bombing in Baquba, north of Baghdad (*Le VIF/L'Express*, December 12, 2005). This case has convinced many Belgians that the country is quickly emerging as a jihadist hub for launching terrorist attacks in other countries, as well as their own (*La Libre Belgique*, October 15). Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt warned that the suicide bomber recruitment trial provided proof of "how well-rooted international terrorism networks are in western Europe," (*Belfast Telegraph*, October 16).

The current trial is not the first of its type in Belgium. In February 2006, three leaders of a Belgian cell of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group were found guilty for their role in the March 11, 2004 Madrid train bombings. Another case involved the conviction of 18 militants in September 2003, including a former professional soccer player from Tunisia, Nizar Trabelsi. The latter was found guilty for trying to execute orders from Osama Bin Laden's network to bomb the U.S. air base at Kleine Brogel, housing U.S. military personnel and nuclear missiles (*Expatica*, November 2005). Another culprit, Tarek Maaroufi, was sentenced to six years in prison for his role in providing fake Belgian passports to the militants who killed anti-Taliban Afghan military commander Ahmed Shah Massoud on September 9, 2001 (*PBS*, January 25, 2005).

These trials and other arrests bring to light how Belgium has become a support base for terrorist organizations. One report by the Belgian parliament's intelligence committee warned as early as 2002 that Islamic extremists were turning Belgium into a "launch pad for terrorists," thanks in part to the country's "open-door immigration policy" and "hands-off" approach to Belgium's mosques. Perhaps the most controversial and unsubstantiated finding of the committee's report concerned the claim that Belgium not only harbors many Islamic clerics linked to bin Laden, but also a fifth column that threatens to destabilize the country (*The Daily Telegraph*, June 3, 2002). These inflammatory statements unfortunately serve to fuel the conspiracy theories about Belgium's half million Muslims, including 10,000 to 15,000 converts (*Qantara.de*, October 10).

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has already warned of the increasing demonization of Islam and the dangers of populist political rhetoric becoming the defining condition of the new Belgium. The increasingly popular Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) party is notorious for its Islamophobia. The party was called Vlaams Blok ("Flemish Bloc") before it was found guilty in court for violating anti-racist laws. On the sixth anniversary of the September 11 attacks on the United States, police arrested two leaders of this extreme right party for staging an illegal march against the threat they claim Islam poses to the civilized world. The mayor of Brussels, Freddy Thielemans, had refused to grant permission for the protest "Stop Islamisation of Europe," calling the organizers an inflammatory group. Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, called the protestors bigots: "It is very important to remember that the freedom of assembly and expression can be restricted to protect the rights and freedoms of others, including the freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (*AFP*, September 12).

Today, the only thing that seems to unite a divided Belgium—a country on the verge of breaking up into Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia—is a fear of immigration and Islam, not just as a radical fringe, but also as a religion (*International Herald Tribune*, October 9). There is a growing consensus that the country's culture has suffered tremendously in the promotion of a failed multicultural policy that celebrated cultural distinctions and special treatments for a faith community that refuses to embrace the country's values of tolerance, equality and freedom. As a result, the public discourse has become more culturalist and policy responses are increasingly colored more by ideology than by much needed pragmatism. To be sure, Belgians are understandably concerned about the threat that radical Muslims pose to the country. The Iraq terror trial is a clear example of the danger posed by terrorist groups using the country as a platform to launch terror attacks on other countries. It is not, however, Belgium's multiculturalism that is to blame for the rise of home-grown Islamist terrorism and the current crisis of citizenship and unity, but rather the unsuccessful implementation of the multiculturalist model.

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