

Mubarak and sons detained as Egypt's military continues crackdown

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Ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak and his two sons have been detained for 15 days while Egyptian prosecutors conduct an investigation into their multi-billion-dollar embezzlement and corruption.

A statement by the country's prosecutor general said that the probe would also examine who was responsible for orders to shoot down demonstrators during the 18 days of mass protests that ended in Mubarak's resignation on February 11. According to incomplete estimates, at least 800 were killed by security forces.

The announcement that the three men were being detained came Wednesday, just hours after it was reported that Mubarak, who ruled Egypt with Washington's support for three decades, had been hospitalized. He reportedly suffered heart problems during interrogation in Sharm El-Sheikh, the Red Sea resort where he had been under house arrest at his palace. Doctors said that his condition was stable.

Many within the opposition in Egypt questioned the medical report, suggesting that it may be part of a plot by the military-controlled regime in Cairo to avoid prosecuting the former dictator.

"A lot of Egyptians, particularly in Tahrir Square, said this is just ridiculous, this is a lie, it's a game ... they even accuse the army—the new rulers of the country in the interim phase—of actually orchestrating this to find some way out of prosecuting Mubarak," *Al Jazeera's* Zeina Khodr reported from Cairo.

Mubarak's sons, Gamal and Alaa, were arrested and bundled into a police van outside a courthouse in Sharm El-Sheikh. *Al Jazeera* reported that as they were taken away, "an angry crowd of 2,000 people pelted the car with water bottles, stones and their flip-flops, a sign of disrespect in the Arab world."

Gamal, 47, a former Bank of America investment banker and private equity fund partner, was a leading figure in the ruling National Democratic Party and was being groomed as Hosni Mubarak's successor. He played a leading role in the implementation of "free market" economic policies that included sweeping privatizations and an open door to foreign investment. While enriching the Mubarak family and a layer of businessmen, politicians and military officers close to the regime, these policies led to unprecedented levels of social inequality. Hostility to his dynastic succession played a role in

fueling the mass upheavals that have gripped Egypt since last January.

His older brother, Alaa, steered clear of politics, but like his brother and father is believed to have accumulated billions of dollars in business dealings.

It was reported that Hosni Mubarak's wife, Suzanne, has also been questioned in connection with some \$145 million that is believed to have been funneled from aid to the Library of Alexandria, where she chaired the board of trustees, into her private foreign bank accounts.

Ahramonline quoted a source within the infamous Tora Prison, where the Mubarak regime jailed and tortured many of its opponents, as saying that the ex-dictator's sons were brought in wearing white prison jumpsuits and that Gamal appeared to be in "total disbelief".

Among those tortured at Tora were alleged terror suspects abducted by the US Central Intelligence Agency under its "extraordinary rendition" program that sent them to third countries to be interrogated under torture.

The arrests of the Mubaraks follow the detention of several other prominent ex-members of the regime, including former National Democratic Party Secretary General Safwat al-Sherif, former People's Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour, former Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, and Zakareya Azmi, Hosni Mubarak's former chief of staff. According to published reports in Egypt, Nazif and Azmi have provided evidence linking Gamal to corrupt deals, commissions and kickbacks on contracts with foreign companies.

On April 10, the *Washington Post* reported on a document sent by Egypt's senior prosecutor to Washington and other foreign governments asking for assistance in uncovering hidden overseas assets of the Mubarak family, including "hundreds of billions of dollars worth of cash, gold and other state-owned valuables."

The document charged that Gamal and Alaa Mubarak "seized public monies and partnered with businessmen, investors, importers and exporters by force to realize profit without basis other than that they are the sons of the president." It details one alleged scheme in which the brothers and their partners bought up "one of the debts of Egypt for 35 percent of its value and then collected the full 100 percent value from the Egyptian

budget.”

All of this took place as successive US administrations proclaimed the Mubarak regime to be its closest friend and ally and a pillar of stability in the Middle East.

Egypt’s stock market reacted favorably to the arrest of the Mubaraks, with its benchmark index climbing almost 2 percent on Wednesday.

“People are anticipating that there will be less protests and more stability,” Mostafa Abdel-Aziz, a senior broker with the Beltone Financial investment bank told the Associated Press. “The hope is that this news will satisfy more of the protesters.”

There is no doubt that this is the aim of the ruling military junta in ordering the detention of the ex-dictator and his sons. Backed by the US, it is determined to suppress the revolutionary struggles that have shaken Egypt for the past two-and-a-half months and stabilize the rule of the military-controlled regime, minus the Mubaraks and some of their closest cronies.

While staging these detentions with the aim of defusing some of the mass anger among the Egyptian people, the military regime has also stepped up direct repression. Continuing to rule under the emergency decree that has been in place since the assassination of Anwar Sadat 30 years ago, the regime has moved to implement a new decree outlawing all forms of protest and strikes. And twice in the past week, it has used lethal violence to drive demonstrators from Tahrir Square.

Among the most telling actions is its sentencing to three years in prison of Maikel Nabil, a 26-year-old political activist and pacifist for posting a column on his web site last month entitled “The Army and the People Wasn’t Ever One Hand.”

Providing a detailed account—substantiated by photographs and video clips—of the actions of the military from the beginning of the mass demonstrations until the aftermath of Mubarak’s resignation, Nabil concluded, “The revolution until now has succeeded in getting rid of the dictator, but the dictatorship is still there.”

Of those so-called oppositionists who have accepted the army’s claims to be on the side of the revolution, he wrote, “Some of them wanted to take advantage of the presence of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to get some political positions by making deals with the Supreme Council. They knew that they cannot achieve such positions through regular democratic process. ... And some of them had connections with the secret service before the revolution was declared.”

He described how, when the mass demonstrations began, the chief of staff of the army, Gen. Sami Anan, was in Washington assuring the Obama administration that the military would stand behind Mubarak.

Nabil also recounted how, in the course of the first demonstrations, the military sent out jeeps to supply live ammunition to the police to kill protesters.

From January 29 until Mubarak’s resignation on February 11, he writes, the military, concluding it could not drown the

protests in blood, moved from direct clashes with the demonstrators to “managing the conflict through indirect mechanisms.” These included the use of troops and tanks to pen the demonstrations into Tahrir Square, continuous threats of force, and standing by as Mubarak’s secret police thugs attacked the protesters. It also carried out mass arrests, with, according to Nabil, some 10,000 Egyptians detained at military camps, where many were subjected to torture and some were killed. Some of them, he said, are still being held.

The column also documents the repression carried out since Mubarak’s resignation, including the beating, detention and torture of demonstrators by the military.

In addition to the attacks in Tahrir Square, it reports repression unleashed against Egyptian workers carrying out strikes and protests across the country.

He writes: “On February 16, 2011, the armed forces besieged the employees of the manpower offices who were sitting-in in front of the ministry of manpower in Nasr City and attempted to forcibly disperse them. ... In the same day, the armed forces prevented the journalists from entering Mahala Textile Company (to cover the sit in of its laborers), as well as preventing the second shift laborers from joining their fellows inside the company and ordering them to return to their homes. ... And on February 14, 2011 the armed forces published a statement saying that they will never tolerate any demonstrations or sit-ins. ... On March 3, 2011, the military police arrested 20 EBESCO laborers and battered one of them.”

Nabil was tried by a military court on charges of “insulting the military” and “disturbing public security.” The evidence against him amounted to a CD with the contents of the March 8 posting on his web site.

While his lawyers were told that the military judge would rule in the case on Tuesday, he handed down the sentence without warning on Sunday, with no defense attorney present.



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