

# Anglo-Americans playing 'Rahman card'?

by Joseph Brewda

Are the U.S. and British governments attempting to overthrow Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak just as they overthrew the Shah of Iran in 1979, or killed Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981? That is the question informed circles in the Mideast and elsewhere are asking, given the U.S. government's behavior in respect to the supposed Islamic terrorist Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman. Rahman, the blind Egyptian cleric of Jersey City, New Jersey suddenly became prominent in the United States and internationally in February, after claims that his followers were responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center on Feb. 26. On July 1, Rahman was detained pending deportation to Egypt, after his followers were arrested in a supposed plot to blow up the United Nations building and kill Mubarak, among other people.

That Mubarak might be overthrown has long been considered likely, especially since the publication of Bernard Lewis's article "Rethinking the Middle East" appeared in the fall issue of the Council on Foreign Relations quarterly *Foreign Affairs*. Lewis is the Princeton University academic and British intelligence official who oversaw the 1979 overthrow of the Shah and installation of Ayatollah Khomeini; Secretary of State Warren Christopher, then Carter's undersecretary of state, aided Lewis in that project. In his important signal piece, Lewis projected that "Islamic fundamentalism" would become the "most attractive alternative" to secular nationalism associated with Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Gulf war. The states of the region, he reported, are vulnerable to a process of "Lebanonization," whereby they can be disintegrated into a "chaos of squabbling, feuds, fighting sects, tribes, and parties."

Mubarak, having deeply discredited himself by his abject compliance to U.S. demands during the Gulf war, has become a spent instrument. Egypt may now be subject to "Lebanonization."

## Preparing a coup

The reasons why some observers think that an Anglo-American move is afoot to dispense with Mubarak, perhaps by an assassination, and possibly within six months, is the following.

1) The claims made against Rahman et al. in respect to the World Trade Center bombing and U.N. bomb plot

conspiracy by the U.S. government and press make no sense, and only a fool could believe them. But to the American public at least, such claims give the (false) impression that Rahman represents some powerful, growing fundamentalist force in Egypt, reminiscent of Ayatollah Khomeini, especially given the increasing number of terrorist incidents attributed to Rahman's followers in Egypt. That Egypt is on the brink of chaos has become a theme of diverse former U.S. government officials. Former Mideast National Security Council staffer Richard Haas, for one, has put out the claim that Egypt is in a "pre-crisis stage." Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* have carried prominent articles falsely claiming deep unrest in the Egyptian military. All the propagandistic preconditions are being prepared, it appears, for launching a U.S.-backed military coup in Egypt, possibly including Mubarak's assassination, or alternatively, a protracted terrorist destabilization eventually leading to a new Egyptian regime with an Islamic face.

2) Simultaneous with this media campaign, a wave of terrorist incidents have hit Egypt, including one in al-Tahrir Square in the heart of Cairo on the same day as the World Trade Center bombing. But, while many of these incidents are probably the work of indigenous movements, particularly those targeting Egyptian Christians in the south, the one that hit al-Tahrir Square, as well as others aimed at tourists, were coordinated by the Israeli government in part through its embassies, consulates, and cultural centers in Cairo and Alexandria. An Israeli campaign against Egypt of this sort could never take place without U.S. or British approval.

3) U.S. Ambassador Robert Pellitreau has made increasingly harsh demands on Mubarak to liberalize the economy, grant more democratic concessions, and ease up on repression of the Islamic movement. In practice such demands mean creating vastly increased unemployment and inflation while allowing increased ability for foreign agencies to operate within Egypt. Harsh criticism of Egypt by Amnesty International and Mideast Watch, controlled by British and U.S. intelligence respectively, have been promoted by U.S. government outlets. At the same time, labor attaché James Soriano, the CIA station chief in Egypt, has been stepping up his contact and coordination with the Muslim Brotherhood and diverse Islamic terrorist organizations, including those nominally associated with Rahman.

4) The U.S. military, which has immense influence with the Egyptian Army, has increasingly ensured selective promotion of those Egyptian officers who are religious Muslims, particularly those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Claiming dissatisfaction with Mubarak, U.S. officials are letting it be known that the \$1.3 billion that Egypt currently receives in annual military aid will be cut; other non-military funds now distributed to the Egyptian government will instead be increasingly granted to private organizations. "The U.S. government is the friend of the Egyptian people regardless of its government" is the oft-stated message.