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## From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is proud to present the July issue of **Beehive**. In the current issue, we discuss Iranian SNS responses to the annual conference of Mojahedin-e Khalq, an Iranian opposition group whose support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War remains a searing national trauma. We also evaluate the past month of Turkish turbulence, with an LGBTQ Pride Parade, an opposition leader's protest march, and the anniversary of last year's failed coup attempt. Finally, we analyze the release of a new single by Lebanese singer Fayrouz, now a controversial figure, despite having once been a symbol of Lebanese and Arab nationalism - partially due to her support for the Palestinian cause.

Beehive will be on summer hiatus next month, and will return in September.

Enjoy!

## **We Hate Mojahedin-e Khalq: SNS Respond to a Conference of the Iranian Opposition**

Dr. Raz Zimmt

In early July, Iran's National Resistance Council, the political wing of the opposition group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK), held its annual conference at the Villepinte Exhibition Center in a suburb of Paris. The conference sparked angry reactions and public criticism on Iran's social networking sites (SNS). This anger was exacerbated by Saudi and US representation at the conference, which was seen as evidence of Saudi and American efforts to instigate political change in Iran through compromising support of a terrorist organization widely considered traitorous by Iranians.

MEK's ideology combines Shi'ite Islam with Marxism. During the early 1970s, the organization emerged in opposition to the Iranian monarchy. The United States and the European Union previously designated MEK as a terrorist organization due to its involvement in terrorist attacks in Iran, with several attacks against Western (including American and Israeli) targets. Shortly after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, MEK and the new regime fell into severe conflict, with the regime implementing strongly suppressive measures against MEK. As a result, the organization transferred most of its activities to Iraq, where it aligned itself with the Saddam Hussein regime. In the 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq War, MEK even participated in several Iraqi army operations against Iran. As a result, MEK was left with very little support in Iran proper, with many Iranians considering MEK activists traitors. In recent years, there has been no evidence of the organization's involvement in terrorism. Instead, it focuses mainly on political activity in Europe and the United States aimed at enlisting support for regime change in Iran. Nonetheless, critics believe this political activity is merely a façade.

This year's annual MEK conference was chaired by the organization's leader, Maryam Rajavi, and attended by hundreds of participants from around the world, including Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, who formerly served as head of Saudi intelligence, as well as largely hawkish former US officials, including the former ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, former US Senator Joseph Lieberman (Ind.-Conn.), and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani. In their speeches at the conference, these senior officials harshly criticized the Islamic republic, accused it of supporting terrorism, and called for regime change in Tehran.

The conference aroused strong reactions in Iran. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who ended an official visit to Paris on the eve of the conference, criticized France for permitting the opposition group to operate within its borders, saying that regional and European countries are well aware of MEK's terrorist activities.<sup>1</sup> Ali Akbar Velayati, the Iranian Supreme Leader's advisor on international affairs, emphasized that hosting terrorists would not contribute to regional or international peace.<sup>2</sup> On SNS, thousands of Iranian users

mobilized a virtual campaign against the organization using the English and Persian hashtags “Iran hates MEK” and “No to MEK.”<sup>3</sup> The posts included insults and slurs against members of the organization accused of causing the death of thousands of Iranian citizens. Users contended that MEK is a terrorist organization entirely unrepresentative of the Iranian people, and devoid of popular support. They stressed that opposition to MEK unites Iranians, regardless of ideology or political outlook. As one user tweeted, “There is no difference between conservatives, reformists or independents! We all agree on hatred for *Munafakin* [a derogatory term for the MEK, meaning hypocrites or false Muslims].”<sup>4</sup>

Predictably, the main criticism of the organization was based on its alignment with the Iraqi regime during the Iran-Iraq war. Iranian users called MEK members “betrayers of the homeland” and “traitors,” accusing them of collaborating with the Ba’ath regime’s chemical attack on the citizens of Iran during the summer of 1987. “When Iranian women and children trembled in fear of Iraqi missiles, the MEK drank *faludeh* [a cold Iranian beverage],” wrote one commenter.<sup>5</sup> Many users emphasized that the Iranian people would neither forget nor forgive the organization for its historic misalignment.

Along with expressions of hatred towards the opposition group, users also attacked its supporters in the West and Saudi Arabia. Many users compared MEK to ISIS, arguing that there was no difference between supporting the Iranian opposition group and supporting the Islamic terror organization. Western support for MEK, spearheaded by American politicians close to the current administration, was considered further proof of the West’s hypocrisy. Critics contended that while Western countries claim to defend democracy and human rights against terrorism, they perpetuate a terrorist organization responsible for thousands of innocent civilians’ deaths, and for serious human rights violations in internment camps it operated in Iraq. “Trump administration wants to back an Islamist terrorist cult (MEK) to bring democracy to Iran. What a sick joke,”<sup>6</sup> tweeted one user. Meanwhile, Saudi support for this opposition group reignited Iranian hostility towards Saudi Arabia, which has been the target of Iranian users’ hatred and racism for the past several years of worsening relations between the countries. “Saudi Arabia supports Maryam Rajavi as leader of Iran, but within Saudi Arabia women have no right to drive!” read one tweet.<sup>7</sup>



Poster against MEK and its leader Maryam Rajavi, showing her with vampire fangs. The caption reads “We hate.” Source: Twitter.

The angry reactions aroused by MEK's conference in Paris attest to the intensity of the hostility towards the organization among Iranian citizens, including critics of the regime. Most of the Iranian public view the organization's conduct since the Islamic revolution as a series of treacheries that climaxed with the organization's support of the Saddam regime during the Iran-Iraq war, which remains a traumatic memory for Iranians. Therefore, Iranians consider any support for MEK to be an illegitimate offence against national pride. The Iranian public's aversion to foreign interventions and allies of Iran's enemies sporadically captivates SNS discourse,<sup>8</sup> as exhibited by the conference's backlash.

## **All Inclusive: Pride, Justice, and Heroism in Turkey**

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

During July, three confrontations permeated Turkish social networking sites (SNS). While the LGBTQ community struggled to hold a Pride Parade, the chairman of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) led a several thousand person march on Istanbul. Both occurred against the backdrop of the failed coup attempt's contentious anniversary. In a country that has been in a state of emergency for the past year, these controversies illuminated Turkey's complex social interplay.

Since 2003, the LGBTQ community in Turkey has been working to attain legal recognition of LGBTQ status and rights. As part of this effort, the community holds annual Pride Parades. The first Turkish Pride Parade was in 2003, with 30 participants. Over the years, Turks' awareness of LGBTQ issues has increased, culminating in a 2013 Parade of 100,000 participants - an achievement that can be partially attributed to the Parade's concurrence with the Gezi Park riots. However, 2015 marked a negative turning point for the Pride Parade, which was banned by authorities on the grounds that it might offend believers, as it was scheduled during Ramadan. Although the ban was reapplied in subsequent years, the LGBTQ community struggled to continue holding the annual Parade, in the hope that participants would not be arrested.

Like past years, the LGBTQ community and its allies organized the annual Pride Parade using social networks, primarily Facebook, where the official event page was posted. Using the slogan "Get used to it, we're here," the community urged Turks to gather at Taksim Square, located next to Gezi Park. In addition to support the community received on SNS, quite a few users strongly opposed the march, and called on authorities to intervene.<sup>9</sup> Members of the Alperen Hearths, a conservative nationalist movement, were among the most aggressive commenters. In a media statement, the movement's chairman, Kürşat Mican warned the authorities against lifting the ban on the parade. He threatened that if the authorities were to mistakenly permit the parade to take place, he and his supporters would prevent the LGBTQ community from marching in Istanbul.<sup>10</sup> Despite the Alperen Hearths' threats and

the denial of an official permit, members of the LGBTQ community nonetheless attempted to hold a Parade in Istanbul. They encountered resistance from the Istanbul Police, with the arrest of 22 participants.

As SNS responded to the Pride Parade, a second march, this one from Ankara to Istanbul, was headed by CHP chairman and opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. The secular leader initiated the march to protest the arrest of a CHP member of parliament, Enis Berberoglu, on charges of espionage. At a press conference, Kılıçdaroğlu stated that he intended to walk from Ankara to Istanbul, about 350 km (220 miles), at the end of which he would hold a Justice Rally. Kılıçdaroğlu's march was well received on SNS,

and thousands of people began following him towards Istanbul. Many users supported Kılıçdaroğlu, using the hashtag "We are on the road to justice,"<sup>11</sup> and distributed caricatures portraying a lack of law and justice in Turkey (see image).<sup>12</sup> Conversely, supporters of the administration considered Berberoglu's arrest legitimate, as part of a series of mass arrests carried out by the administration since the failed coup attempt. They criticized Kılıçdaroğlu, claiming that he intended to create disorder, rather than serve justice.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, many Islamist users tweeted declarations that justice ought to be sought in Islam, not in the streets. Using the hashtag "Look for justice in Islam," these users claimed that Kılıçdaroğlu's supporters are detached from the Turkish people and religion.

As promised, following the completion of Kılıçdaroğlu's 24 day march, he held an estimated one million person rally in the vast Maltepe Square on the Asian side of Istanbul. At the rally, demands were made for rights, rule of law, and justice. In his speech, Kılıçdaroğlu declared July 9, the day of the rally, a day of hope and revitalization for the Turkish people. Kılıçdaroğlu thereby sought to minimize the importance of July 15, which Erdoğan had declared the Independence Day of New Turkey, commemorating last year's failed coup attempt. Erdoğan's supporters strongly criticized Kılıçdaroğlu for the date of his rally, and accused him of dividing the people.



The accused: "I am waiting for a ruling."  
The Judge: "So are we."  
Source: Twitter.

The anniversary of the failed coup attempt was also discussed on SNS. Some users accompanied the hashtag “the heroic story of July 15”<sup>14</sup> with pictures and memories of those who blocked rebel soldiers with their bodies during the attempted coup. In contrast, many secular users questioned the authenticity of the coup attempt, and called it a “theatrical performance” using the hashtag “the truth about July 15.”<sup>15</sup> In turn, this outraged users who had lost loved ones during the riots. To mark the anniversary, the President’s Office produced a banner portraying Turkish citizens fighting off the defeated rebellious soldiers. Erdoğan’s supporters widely distributed the banner, provoking outrage. Many users, both secular and nationalist, protested the portrayal of Turkish soldiers in defeat, as well as the lack of distinction between the rebels and the rest of the Turkish army. In addition, many users severely criticized television channels’ use of the banner’s logo, which incorporated the crescent and star of the Turkish flag to commemorate July 15 (on the lower right side of the image).



Banner marking the anniversary of the failed coup attempt, honoring the fallen and wounded.

The sequence of events facing Turkey last month evoked intolerant hostility on SNS, delineating the divisions between Turkey's different political camps. Despite the precarious situation, the completion of the Istanbul Justice Rally without incident could be considered an achievement reflecting various camps' capacity to acknowledge each other's positions. Alternatively, it could indicate that pragmatic desire to reduce public tension induced the Turkish government to permit the march. The same cannot be said of the LGBTQ community's treatment, with the LGBTQ community seemingly further than ever from attaining legal recognition in Turkey, which is becoming an increasingly conservative state.

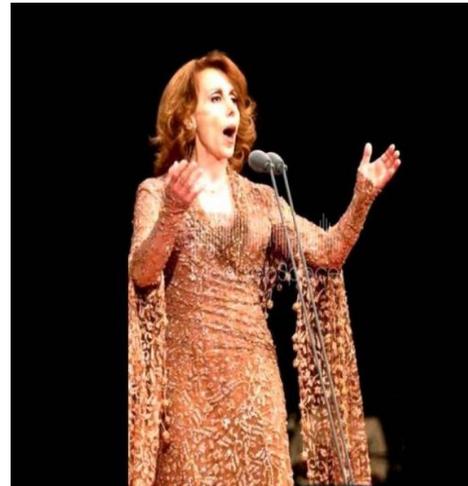
## Fayrouz and Arab Nationalism

Moran Levanoni

In June 2017, something remarkable happened in the world of Arab music. After a seven year hiatus, Lebanese singer Fayrouz, the stage name of Nouhad Wadie Haddad, released the first single from her new album, titled “On My Mind [*Bebalee* in Arabic],” which is due to be released in September.<sup>16</sup> The 81-year-old, velvet-voiced Fayrouz has recorded no fewer than 685 songs – establishing herself as a symbol of Lebanese and Arab nationalism. Her songs have been performed in musicals, films, and concerts throughout the Arab world, Europe, and America, and appear on more than 60 albums. Her recent single, “For Whom [*Lamin*],” was released on YouTube and social networking sites (SNS)<sup>17</sup> on June 21, and is

dedicated to her late husband, the legendary producer Assi Rahbani, 31 years after his death. This is Fayrouz's cover of a song by Pierre Delanoë (lyrics) and Gilbert Bécaud (music), translated into Arabic by her daughter Reema, who produced the current album. The revolutions in the Arab world and the war in Syria have plunged Fayrouz's music and her support for the Palestinian cause into a controversy dividing supporters of the Syrian regime and Hezbollah from the opposition groups, especially inside Syria and Lebanon.

Fayrouz's position as a symbol of Lebanese nationalism is attributed to her unforgettable performance at the Ba'albek Festival in the Lebanese Beka'a in 1957. Fayrouz was cast in the show "Harvest Days," produced by the brothers Mansour and Assi Rahbani (whom she later married), as a counterweight to the hegemony of Egyptian artists, led by Oum Kalthoum, in the world of Arab music. In a performance that became the festival's highlight, Fayrouz appeared to be floating, bathed in light beside the marble pillars of the Temple of Jupiter, and sang the immortal words, "Oh Lebanon, green and beautiful..."<sup>18</sup> in her common Lebanese accent.



Fayrouz performing. Source: the Qalam el-Nas website.

The audience went wild, and Camille Chamoun and his wife, then president and first lady, congratulated her on the success. The first lady even awarded Fayrouz a medal of honor after the performance.<sup>19</sup> In the wake of the festival, Fayrouz's career blossomed, and nationalist motifs remained central to her roles in the Rahbani brothers' musical productions.<sup>20</sup> For example, on Lebanese Independence Day in 1962, the show "Return of the Soldier [*Odat al-Askar*]" was produced in honor of the Loyalty Day instituted by the Lebanese president following a failed coup by the Syrian National Party (PPS), signaling support for the Lebanese government and army.<sup>21</sup>

At the time, the nationalist motif integrated well with other prominent contemporary manifestations of Arab nationalism, particularly the Arab world's favorable attitude towards the Palestinian cause. Fayrouz, an ardent supporter of the Palestinians, made firm statements on the subject. As early as 1955, at the invitation of then Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Rahbani brothers and Fayrouz began producing a Palestinian show in Egypt for the radio station *Sot al-Arab*. For this project, they arranged songs by Gazan poet Hashem Rashid<sup>22</sup> and produced a 15-minute work called "We Will Return One Day [*Sanarga Yoman*]," which was played on Arab stations and portrayed Gamal Abdel Nasser as the standard-bearer of Arab nationalism. Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad also honored Fayrouz and her songs, as the Syrian usage of the Palestinian issue was pivotal to leading the Arab world in what was called "the policy of resistance [*Muqawama*] and prevention

[*Memnada*]."<sup>23</sup> In a 1977 performance in Damascus, Fayrouz premiered several songs sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, earning herself rousing acclamation throughout the Arab world. The performance included a medley of songs about cities in the Middle East, including Damascus, Amman, Kuwait, coastal Alexandria, and Baghdad, with a combative centerpiece dedicated to Jerusalem – a song called “Flower of the Cities [*Zahara Almadan*].”<sup>24</sup> She also sang “The Bells of Return [*Ajras al-Odeh*]” by Nizar Qabbani, “Take me to Beit Shean [*Khuduny Lebisan*],” and “Jaffa [*Yafa*],” all of which called for a return to Palestine.

However, the last six years have fissured Syrian support for the Palestinian cause, in part because of the ambivalent behavior of the Palestinians vis-à-vis the civil war in Syria. While one prominent Palestinian camp chose active support for the Assad regime, and was thus strongly disparaged by the Syrian opposition, another prominent camp, headed by Hamas, supported radical Islamic factions, including ISIS - despite ISIS' long siege on the al-Yarmouk Palestinian Refugee Camp. These Palestinian alignments were considered interference in Syria's internal affairs. Meanwhile, Fayrouz herself was criticized for a statement by her eldest son, Ziad Rahbani, in December 2013. He claimed, “Fayrouz loves Hassan Nasrallah and if she were in Assad's place, she would have done exactly as he did.”<sup>25</sup> The statement was later denied by Fayrouz's spokesperson, but this denial did not avert Syrian opposition groups' anger. There was an ensuing break in the relationship between Ziad and Fayrouz, which is likely why he did not produce her current album, despite having produced some of her previous albums.

Consequently, when rumors spread about Fayrouz's new album and a planned performance in Damascus, the online Syrian opposition journal *Zaman al-Wasl* stated, “If Fayrouz is planning to appear in Damascus, it is better that she refrain from doing so.”<sup>26</sup> Al-Mayadeen, a satellite television channel related to Hezbollah, reported more sympathetically on Fayrouz's album. In response, Facebook user Mazen Sadeq wrote, “Where is your national news, channel of the Ba'ath Party?” Another user, Louwy Nazzal, asked sarcastically, “This is news from al-Aqsa about resistance and prevention?”<sup>27</sup> A Saudi reader commented on the al-Arabiya website, “The bells of return ring, but from whence are you returning, Fayrouz? The nation turned its back and is immersed in prevention from the Golan to Jaffa,”<sup>28</sup> which was his way of expressing that the Palestinian people are immersed in internal affairs, and have lost interest in returning to Israeli territory. Beyond dismissing Fayrouz because of the statement attributed to her, he also criticized her support for the Palestinian cause.

Fayrouz's artistic conduct illustrates how popular music can promote a public agenda, as the Emir in Rahbani's play, “The Days of Fakhr a-Din,” tells the singer Attar al-Lail, played by Fayrouz: “I will be the sword and you shall be the song.” However, the issues of Lebanese, Syrian, or Palestinian nationalism are no longer top priorities for the region's residents. Furthermore, the divergence of large parts of the Syrian public from the Palestinian cause,

which is identified with Fayrouz, has weakened her popular appeal. Nonetheless, Fayrouz remains a cultural icon and a wonderfully unique singer, with a mass of fans that continue to cherish memories of the past.

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<sup>1</sup> "Iranian FM decries France green light to MKO activities," *Press TV*, July 1, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "Velayati Blasts France for Hosting MKO Terrorists," *Fars News Agency*, July 3, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> #IranHatesMEK-ı #No2MEK

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/sadat07/status/881940592195796992>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/tousheh/status/881193724402962435>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://twitter.com/AtheistIran/status/881221824175984640>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/sepehrad2/status/881755804449349633>.

<sup>8</sup> In this context, see Iranians' responses to a letter in which Iranian activists in exile urged US President Trump to adopt an aggressive policy towards Iran (Raz Zimmt, "Critics or Traitors? Responses to Iranian Exiles' Letter to Trump," *Beehive*, 5(1), January 2017, <http://dayan.org/file/19284/download?token=QzJ24rTz>).

<sup>9</sup> LGBT Yürüyüşü Yasaklansın.

<sup>10</sup> "Alperen Ocakları Onur Yürüyüşü'nü yine tehdit etti: Yürütmeyeceğiz," *Cumhuriyet*, June 19, 2017

<http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/764178/Alperen-Ocaklari-Onur-Yuruyusu-nu-yine-tehdit-et-ti-Yurutmeyecegiz.html>.

<sup>11</sup> #AdaletinYolundayız #AdaletOlmazsa.

<sup>12</sup> <https://twitter.com/atakanegemen24/status/879669530603257856>.

<sup>13</sup> #MeseleAdaletDeğil.

<sup>14</sup> 15 Temmuz Destanı.

<sup>15</sup> 15 Temmuz Gerçeği.

<sup>16</sup> "Fayrouz Tasadar 'Lamin'... 'Ilaik ow Alai ow Mish Lashai,'" *al-Nahar*, June 21, 2017,

<https://www.annahar.com/article/605322>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://play.anghami.com/song/23820811>, accessed July 8, 2017 and since removed.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: Fairouz and Rahabani Nation* (London: Routledge, 2007), 40.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 41-42.

<sup>20</sup> "Fairouz," *al-Mashriq: The Levant, Cultural Riches from the Countries of the Mediterranean*,

<http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/700/780/fairuz/index.html>, accessed July 8, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Stone, 53.

<sup>22</sup> M. Mansur, *Al-Kharita al-Shi'ariyya fi al-Ughniya al-Rahbaniyya* (Dimashq: Dar mamduh llnashar watawzi', 2009), 81.

<sup>23</sup> "Prevention [*Memanada*]" was a term coined by Hafez al-Assad in the late 1990s to describe a policy of fighting Israel through indirect confrontation, unlike "resistance [*Muqawama*]." He used this term to explain his decision to refrain from attacking Israel.

<sup>24</sup> In a song written by the Rahbani brothers and performed for the first time at the Cedar Festival in 1978, they wrote, "The child in the cave [Jesus] and his mother Mary both weep for those who were expelled [from their land]."

<sup>25</sup> "Al-fnnan Ziad al-rahbani: Fairuz tuhib Hassan Nasarallah walaw kanat mahall al-Assad lfa'alat ma yafaluhu alaan," *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, December 13, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.zamanalwsl.net/news/79477.html>.

<sup>27</sup> [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=2089278214431050&substory\\_index=0&id=345180182174204](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2089278214431050&substory_index=0&id=345180182174204), accessed July 18, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Yara al-Andri, "Fairuz Sahibat al-Sawt al-Khalid...Lam Tamat," *al-Arabiya*, March 11, 2012, comment 112, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/10/199788.html>, accessed July 10, 2017.