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From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is happy to present the December issue of **Beehive**. The current issue examines reactions in the Arab world to the declaration made by US President Donald Trump, which recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The first article deals with the attempts by leaders of Palestinian discourse, particularly the Fatah and Hamas movements, to inflame passions and provoke mass protests, while Palestinian users expressed their discontent with the weakness displayed by leaders of the Arab world and the divisions in the Palestinian leadership that, in their opinion, allowed “underhanded opportunism” to win the day. The survey then continues with an analysis the moderate official position of Saudi Arabia to the declaration, and the scant attention that it received on Saudi SNS because, *inter alia*, Iran is considered a much more substantial threat to the kingdom. The final article reviews how public discourse in Turkey was re-directed from scandals implicating senior officials of the Erdoğan government to the issue of Jerusalem, which unified all players in the Turkish political arena.

Enjoy!

“The New Balfour Declaration:” Trump’s Speech as Reflected in Palestinian Discourse

Dr. Michael Barak

The issue of Jerusalem frequently engages leaders of Palestinian discourse, secular and religious, especially those from the Fatah and Hamas movements, who seek to keep the issue on the agenda, and to fix Jerusalem in the world’s consciousness as the Palestinian capital that is inseparable from the Muslim nation. The recent declaration by US President Donald Trump, which officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was an opportunity for these leaders to generate online discourse on the subject, and to encourage popular protest, although the latter remained quite limited. The Palestinian movements also took advantage of the moment in order to attempt to raise political capital and improve their own standing. The Palestinian public, on the other hand, expressed dissatisfaction with the Arab world generally and the Palestinian leadership specifically, because of the political rifts and absence of willingness to work towards unity and reconciliation. This has, in turn, ostensibly enabled the United States and Israel to establish a new reality.

The discourse led by Hamas supporters on social networking sites (SNS) emphasized the narrative that the conflict is not merely a national conflict but also a religious one, because Jerusalem is considered one of the three holiest sites of Islam. Hence, according to them every Muslim must oppose the supposed American-Zionist plot to Judaize it. The movement tried to market propaganda messages by reusing old hashtags, such as “#Al-Aqsa Intifada,”¹ and introduced new ones in response to the American recognition of Jerusalem and the 30th anniversary of Hamas’ founding.² Moreover, the movement harnessed SNS to recruit activists and to encourage them to launch popular protests against Israeli security forces. For example, Hamas called on Palestinian women to go to the al-Aqsa Mosque plaza on Fridays to demonstrate their presence in the compound, distribute food to the demonstrators, and morally support the Muslim men who were called upon to escalate the protest.³

Fatah supporters also expressed their antipathy towards the Trump declaration and stressed that “Jerusalem is not for sale.” As an act of protest, users replaced their profile pictures on SNS with the Palestinian flag, with the caption “Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine.” Ashraf Jum’a, a member of the Palestinian parliament in the West Bank, used his Facebook account to call for taking active steps against the declaration, such as



In one frequently circulated image taken from Twitter, Donald Trump is shown being spanked with a sandal by a woman dressed in the Palestinian flag.

boycotting Israeli and American products, and increasing protests against Jerusalem on SNS and in the field.⁴

In the discourse that developed on SNS, Palestinian users described the American declaration as the “New Balfour Declaration,”⁵ and some thanked Trump for his success in uniting all Muslims around the subject, using the hashtag “#Jerusalem unites us” (#القدس_توحدنا).⁶ Nonetheless, these reactions were accompanied by the Palestinians’ great disappointment with the deep rift revealed in the Arab world in general and in Palestinian society in particular, which created fertile ground for the United States and Israel to lead the process of recognition. A user from Hebron remarked sarcastically that the lone official response by the Arab rulers to the burning problems of the Arab world came in the form of a dance, referring to the reception that Trump received from his Saudi hosts last May, when he joined in a traditional sword dance.⁷ A user from Gaza expressed a similar feeling when he said, “The Palestinians are busy with salaries, jobs and reconciliation. The Arabs are occupied with dancers, drums and banquets, while the United States and Israel are plotting to Judaize the Palestinian identity of Jerusalem.”⁸ Palestinian users from Ramallah, as well as those from Arab countries, criticized the officials and countries in the Arab world who seek to promote normalization with Israel, such as Saudi Arabia.⁹ From their perspective, the recent development regarding Jerusalem, and the strengthening of Israel’s status, stem not from the Zionists’ acumen but rather from the folly of the Arabs, who are engaged in internecine strife and are distancing themselves from the nations of the world.¹⁰ Palestinian users from the West Bank and Syria, who identify with Fatah, blamed the leadership of Hamas, particularly Ismail Haniyeh, head of the Hamas political bureau, for abandoning – to their mind – the path of struggle against Israel. Instead, they preferred boasts over deeds, and enriching the movement’s assets thanks to, among other things, Saudi and Qatari funding.¹¹ These responses are indicative of the prevailing rift, alienation and distrust felt on the Palestinian street towards the Arab leadership in general, and the Palestinian leadership, in particular. They also helped to explain the lack of motivation many Palestinians showed in their responses to calls from Hamas and Fatah to take to the streets.

On SNS these sentiments were expressed by political cartoons that mocked the weakness of Arab leaders in response to the declaration.¹² Thus, for example, in [one caricature](#), Trump is shown as a bully dragging the Arab world behind him. The Arabs are portrayed as defeatist and submissive, perched on pointed milestones, beginning with the Balfour Declaration and ending with the Trump Declaration, and call after the President, “this [declaration] harms the peace process,” while at the same time treading on the decomposing corpse of the peace process.

The vote of the United Nations General Assembly on December 21 against the American declaration was favorably received by Palestinian users, and the discourse surrounding the vote was somewhat euphoric. Some described the vote as a disgraceful failure for the United States and Israel.¹³ Users reacted contemptuously to Trump’s threat to freeze aid intended for countries that voted against the US, and asked him to make good on his threat, because it would reduce US influence on other countries.¹⁴ Users noted that the resistance proves that the era of American

hegemony in the world has ended, and called on the Arab countries to learn from Venezuela's opposition to the declaration.¹⁵

The discourse that developed among Palestinians on SNS following the Trump Declaration is characterized by deep distaste for the United States and Israel, who seem to have successfully unified the Palestinian public around Jerusalem, despite its great diversity. However, it also reflects a sense of distress and weakness among many Palestinian users who regard the American declaration as a warning sign and an indication of things to come, as well as a symptom of what ails the Arab world, which is so immersed in internal struggles and strife that narrow interests prevent it from acting on behalf of Jerusalem. It seems that this, among other things, has influenced the Palestinian public's weak response to attempts by the Palestinian movements to motivate mass protests of the declaration.

Lip Service: Saudi Reactions to Trump's Declaration

Dr. Nachum Shiloh

Immediately following US President Donald Trump's speech recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the Saudi government released an official statement stressing that there is a broad international consensus that opposes the declaration because it violates the rights of the Palestinian people, and the statement further called upon the American administration to retract it.¹⁶ On December 13, when the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) met in Istanbul to denounce the declaration, the Saudi king called for the implementation of a political solution to the region's problems, first and foremost among them the Palestinian problem. He added that Saudi Arabia supports the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right to establish an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.¹⁷ The Saudi response to the Trump Declaration was low-key, carefully considered and non-inflammatory. This was not only because the Iranian threat, which is currently considered the most serious threat to Saudi Arabia, dominates the discourse, but also because of the Saudi desire to maintain a close relationship with the United States, and perhaps also because Saudi Arabia shares some political and security interests with Israel.

The moderate tone adopted by the Saudi government was followed by other officials in the kingdom. For example, on its official Twitter account the Foreign Ministry was careful to present a position similar to that taken by the monarch. Their Tweets on the subject included moderate condemnation of Trump's statement, expressions of support for the Palestinians, and emphasis on the importance of implementing the 2002 Saudi peace initiative. However, the Foreign Ministry's Twitter account dealt with the issue of Jerusalem for only two days, before returning to the issue of greatest concern to the Saudi kingdom, namely the Iranian threat.¹⁸



The Five-Point Document, [from the Twitter account](#) of the Saudi Press Agency.

A similar trend was found on social networking services (SNS) identified with the Saudi religious establishment. The Saudi Council of Senior Scholars (*Majlis Hay'at Kibar al-'Ulama*) published a short 5-point document on the subject stating that Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque have a very important place in Islam, and for the existence of all Muslims; the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has led the Arab and Islamic countries in fulfilling their duty to assist the Palestinians; treatment of the

Palestinian issue must include reference to the importance of Jerusalem to Muslims; any peace agreement must be based on justice and the granting of rights to the Palestinians; and Jerusalem is hallowed land that the Qur'an has commanded to bless. With its moderate and restrained language, the document not only failed to stir passion, but also made clear that the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia is prepared for an agreement with Israel based on the 1967 borders and the division of Jerusalem. In the days following the publication of the document, the Council resumed its discussion of theological and domestic issues.¹⁹

In the discourse that developed on SNS, a sharper tone was evident, especially among young Saudis. Along with the expected resentment expressed against the United States and Israel, there were many unusual reactions on Twitter and YouTube, including harsh criticism of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian leadership, and the Palestinian problem itself. This was due to a wave of inflammatory statements in the Palestinian media and Palestinian social networks against King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who were accused of “selling Jerusalem” and “betraying Jerusalem.” These statements were made against the backdrop of articles claiming that the crown prince recently suggested to Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) that the future capital of Palestine could be established in Abu Dis instead of East Jerusalem. One of the most prominent hashtag was “#May you and your problem burn,” in which the word “problem” was deliberately misspelled, apparently with the aim of humiliating the Palestinians and expressing disdain for their cause. This was distributed by the so-called “Saudi electronic committees,” a designation that is presumably intended to create the impression that it is a community, not individual users.

Many of the young Saudis who participated in the discourse argued that the Palestinians dare not curse Saudi Arabia and the Saudi royal family, considering the many years in which the Saudis supported them by contributing vast sums of money. For example, one Saudi citizen, Riyadh al-Zahrani, uploaded a picture of a campaign requesting donations for the Palestinian that appeared in an old Saudi newspaper and wrote: “I am one

of the Saudi people, and when I was a schoolboy, I donated some of my food money to Palestine, but now that I am grown, I see that the turncoats tread on the picture of our king and curse my homeland, which gave them billions, and now I say: ‘May you and your problem burn.’ May Allah not grant you the benefit of the money that came at the cost of my meal.”²⁰

A review of leading Twitter accounts in Saudi Arabia claiming to represent residents of large cities, found references to the statement, but mainly as a transitory media item. In some cases, there is



Advertisement requesting donations for the Palestinians, from the Twitter account of Riyadh al-Zahrani

even a hint of undermining the consensus on Jerusalem. For example, a survey conducted by the “Twitter Jedda” account, which has 189,000 followers, asked if Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Palestine. Of the 590 participants in the survey, 87% responded positively. Although this is a high percentage of supporters, the very fact that some people in Saudi Arabia question the correctness of the claim is significant. Moreover, the low number of respondents to the question attests to users’ limited interest in the subject. Therefore, it is no surprise that a few days after the declaration, the subject was no longer mentioned by these accounts.²¹ Furthermore, there was a complete disregard for the Jerusalem issue among Twitter accounts representing small cities and towns, especially border towns; these instead chose to focus on the current affairs of their residents.

The limited interest in this issue was also evident on other public pages. For example, the Facebook pages associated with the Saudi Shi’i opposition in the eastern district, such as *al-Awamiyya* Online (*al-Awamiyah ‘ala al-Shabkha*) and others, dealt with issues concerning their specific constituency, with emphasis on the measures taken against them by the Saudi authorities).²² Another example is the Twitter account of the newspaper *Najran al-Yawm*, which dealt almost exclusively with the situation on the border with Yemen and the steep-trajectory rockets frequently fired from that country into Saudi territory. Unsurprisingly, then, the most prominent images published on that account were of the remnants of missiles and rockets fired from Yemen, not of the mosques on the Temple Mount.²³ This clearly reflect the prevailing perception held among the Saudi leadership and on the Saudi street that Iran is the country’s main enemy, and therefore the most important issue on the Saudi agenda.

In conclusion, although SNS did include some heated rhetoric against the United States and Israel following the Trump declaration, it can be said that the responses were low-key, in part because of the line led by the government. The religious establishment has remained in step with the political authorities on this issue, too. Among Saudis, the Iranian threat and the internal affairs of the Kingdom are much more deserving of their interest; it is clear that the average Saudi is more concerned about insults made by Palestinians against the king than about the issue of Jerusalem and its status for the Palestinians.

The Unity of Jerusalem in the Shadow of Corruption Charges

Dr. Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

In the beginning of December 2017, US President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel fell like ripe fruit into the hands of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. At the time, Erdoğan was attempting to draw attention away from various corruption scandals in the United States and Turkey, in which senior officials of his government were implicated. The public discourse that developed in response to news of the scandals revealed the schism within Turkish society, while the issue of Jerusalem unified all political actors in Turkey, in the old Erdoğanian style of using foreign issues as leverage in the domestic political arena.

The corruption scandal topping the headlines in Turkey centers on Iranian-Turkish businessman Reza Zarrab, who was trusted by Erdoğan and his associates for years until December 2013, when he was accused of offering an associate of Erdoğan a large bribe in return for assistance in bypassing international sanctions against Iran. During the investigation, Zarrab remained in custody for two months. Thanks to government intervention, he was released and the judges cleared him of all charges.

In March 2016, Zarrab returned to the headlines in Turkey after he fled the country and subsequently turned himself in to authorities in the United States. His flight and subsequent actions were motivated by a fear that Ankara would eventually extradite him to Tehran on charges that he had stolen huge sums from the Iranian state treasury, which could ultimately lead to his execution. Following a plea bargain signed with the United States, Zarrab became a state witness providing incriminating evidence in a case then being made against the Turkish state-owned bank Halkbank, whose deputy director, Hakan Atilla, is also in United States custody. The detailed evidence Zarrab provided became a hot topic of discussion on Turkish social networking services (SNS), while the established media in Turkey chose to report only superficial details of the case. Independent journalists disseminated the information on YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. During the trial in the United States it was revealed, *inter alia*, that senior ministers in the Turkish government were accused of taking bribes valued at millions of dollars, in addition to receiving costly gifts. It is important to note that accusations of bypassing the sanctions against Iran expose Halkbank and other banks in Turkey to serious fines.

When news of the affair reached them, secular users took advantage of the opportunity to attack Erdoğan and his followers. They tagged Erdoğan's associates as corrupt, and shared a photograph taken in the city of Trabzon where Zarrab and Erdoğan are seen sitting in the ranks of dignitaries at the front of the stage. Users scoffed at the confidence Erdoğan's supporters placed in Zarrab, and called for a government investigation and for Erdoğan to resign.²⁴

Conversely, Erdoğan's supporters rejected these claims, and presented the trial in the United States as a plot by exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen, who the Turkish government believes is also the mastermind behind the failed coup attempt of July 2016. These supporters believe that both

Gülen and Zarrab are American agents. As part of their struggle, Erdoğan's supporters led a solidarity campaign with Halkbank, under the slogan, "The US has no jurisdiction in Turkey."²⁵ Turkish secularists, for their part, disavowed the campaign and did not allow Erdoğan's supporters to turn the affair into a national struggle against the United States, using the hashtag, "#We are not in the same boat."²⁶ Shortly afterwards, another corruption scandal was exposed by opposition leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, in which Erdoğan's associates were accused of allegedly receiving bribes from various sources, which they smuggled to the Isle of Man, a well-known tax haven. This episode was also the focus of significant attention on SNS. Secular users shared photographs of a document unearthed by Kılıçdaroğlu related to the affair, and uploaded various videos that addressed questions of corruption to the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs.²⁷

In the shadow of the anger surrounding the corruption affairs, the opportunity Erdoğan had sought to change the public discourse appeared in the form of Trump's declaration recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In accordance with his long-held approach, the Turkish president chose to strongly criticize Israel, and proclaimed that he would not recognize the declaration, saying, "Jerusalem is the red line for Muslims." This line became a slogan that his supporters circulated on SNS.²⁸ A few days later, Erdoğan spoke to his supporters with large maps of the Land of Israel behind him, enabling him to point to what he called "the theft of the Palestinian territory" during the address.



Poster stating: "Jerusalem is the red line for Muslims," [from Twitter](#).

Erdoğan made exceptionally strident remarks against Israel when he referred to the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad about the boxthorn tree. According to this text, in the apocalyptic war at the end of days, trees are expected to reveal the location of the Jews to Muslims, but the boxthorn, identified in the Islamic literature as a "Jewish tree," would prevent this. The Turkish president chose this image to send a warning to Israel: "Those who think of themselves as land owners in Jerusalem will not find a single tree to hide behind tomorrow." This extraordinary statement appeared on posters with pictures of the president, aimed at enlisting the support of the people and increasing awareness about the issue of Jerusalem. Behind the professional editing and distribution of these posters was the "Cyber Army" of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which was founded in 2013 and employs over 12,000 people. Participants in the heated discourse against Israel and the United States, aimed at preventing the "Judaization of Jerusalem," as they call it, included Erdoğan's supporters and various non-governmental organizations, such as the Islamic İHH, Our Heritage, the Jerusalem Academy, and To Jerusalem. They invited the masses to take part in huge demonstrations organized throughout Turkey under the slogan, "Jerusalem belongs to Islam."²⁹

Despite attempts by many secular users to emphasize the danger of diverting public discourse from the issue of corruption to that of Jerusalem, such users also chose to support Erdoğan's position vis-à-vis the United States and Israel. This position is also common among the opposition parties, which have witnessed the beneficial effect that Erdoğan's verbal attacks on Israel have delivered at the ballot box for many years. Therefore, the opposition also chooses to adopt a belligerent approach, apparently to prevent the ruling party from taking advantage of the issue of Jerusalem and to alone reap all of the benefit. Alternatively, these groups may wish to avoid remaining on the "wrong" side of the discourse. Despite their extraordinary support for the state's position, secular users did not hesitate to mock the Turkish president by calling on him "to lead the Muslim world" and to bring about recognition of northern Cyprus as a sovereign state, and to not act only on behalf of the Palestinians.

The speed at which the issue of Jerusalem displaced corruption as the focus of discourse on Turkish SNS shows the ease with which foreign affairs issues can sometimes be "spun" to change Turkey's domestic public agenda. In spite of the divisions in Turkish society, Jerusalem, or more precisely, an anti-Israeli stance, are common social conventions shared by all factions, who are well aware of the political benefits inherent in these positions. The solidarity shown on SNS surrounding Trump's declaration, and the joint proclamation by the parties in the Turkish parliament that they refuse to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, illustrates this well.

¹ #انتفاضة_القدس

² #القدس_عاصمة_فلسطين; #HandsOffJerusalem حماس30;

³ #جمعة_الإرادة

⁴ December 21, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/ashrafMjomaa/posts/1489811637723195>

⁵ #القدس_عاصمتنا; #انتفاضة_العاصمة

⁶ December 22, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/RamallahNewsOfficialPage/posts/1825891660818599> ;

#القدس_عاصمة_فلسطين

⁷ December 18, 2017:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=918567691625789&id=100004176996201 ;

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=918567691625789&id=100004176996201

⁸ December 6, 2017:

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2077663452455233&id=100006347956187

⁹ December 14, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/mawtinii/permalink/2154897471431771/>

¹⁰ December 18, 2017: <https://twitter.com/ahamidhi7c/status/942717163802169344>

¹¹ December 23, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/RamallahNewsOfficialPage/posts/1827356277338804>

¹² December 23, 2017: https://twitter.com/rasha_elali/status/944731962501103616

¹³ December 22-23, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/MaanNews.net/posts/1766302123420810>

¹⁴ December 21, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/Ramallah.Mix1/posts/1890882590945006>; December 22, 2017:

<https://www.facebook.com/RamallahNewsOfficialPage/posts/1825387357535696>; Two popular singers from Nablus dedicated a song of praise to the Palestinian's victory in the UN on December 21, 2017.

See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70y0JDx6Q8k>;

<https://www.facebook.com/RamallahNewsOfficialPage/videos/1825251684215930/>

¹⁵ December 21, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/RamallahNewsOfficialPage/videos/1825206537553778/>

¹⁶ December 20, 2017: <http://www.sabanew.net/viewstory.php?id=26203>

¹⁷ December 20, 2017: <https://goo.gl/14GuvZ>

¹⁸ December 21, 2017: <https://twitter.com/ksamofa>

¹⁹ December 21, 2017: https://twitter.com/ssa_at?lang=en

²⁰ December 21, 2017: <https://goo.gl/yqiHY8>

²¹ December 21, 2017: https://twitter.com/jeddah_ar?lang=en

²² December 21, 2017: <https://www.facebook.com/AwamiA.Book/>

²³ December 21, 2017: <https://twitter.com/nairantoday?lang=en>

²⁴ #RezaZarrab #Ayakkabikutusu

²⁵ #ABDTürkiyeyiYargılayamaz

²⁶ #AynıGemideDegiliz

²⁷ #KılıçdaroğluYineHaklıÇıktı #IsleofMan #ManAdası #ManKafa

²⁸ #KudusKırmızıCizgimizdir #Kudüs

²⁹ #Kudüsİslamındır #KudüsİslamındırMitingi #KudüseSahipÇık #YenikapıdaKudüsRuhu #100YıllıkKanlıİşgal