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# BeeHive

Middle East Social Media

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## From the Editors

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is proud to present the May issue of **Beehive**. In this issue, we explore Iranians' criticism of their regime's choice to allocate resources to hostility towards Israel, rather than investing in its own citizens. This criticism surfaces against the background of the pragmatic approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict presented by the revised Hamas charter published in May. We also analyze the unprecedented support on social networking sites for the struggle of Palestinian prisoners, and Palestinian users discontent with the Palestinian Authority's chairman, who in contrast to Marwan Barghouti, is seen as taking insufficient action to advance the prisoners' cause. We conclude with the internal tension between the secular and Islamic publics in Turkey, as exhibited in Erdoğan's supporters' attempts to undermine Atatürk's legacy and recast national symbols in the image of the president.

**Enjoy!**

## No More Palestinian than the Palestinians: Iranians React to the Hamas Revised Charter

Dr. Raz Zimmt

The revised charter published by Hamas at the beginning of May provoked lively debate on Iran's social networking sites (SNS). As Hamas' stances appear to be softening, Iranian discourse expressed widespread criticism of the regime's continued hostility towards Israel and support for the Palestinians. From the perspective of many Iranian users, Hamas' statement means that Iran is unjustified in adopting a more radical approach to Israel than that taken by the Palestinians, and that instead, the Iranian regime should prioritize the plight of its own citizens. The public discourse in Iran exposes alienation and disappointment vis-à-vis the Palestinians, as well as anger over the price that Iran pays for its continued support.

At a press conference held in Doha, Qatar on May 1, Hamas political bureau chairman Khaled Mashal unveiled the organization's new statement of principles and policies. In terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this revised charter presents a moderated version of the original Hamas charter of 1988. It avoids the blatant anti-Semitism of the previous charter, refrains from calling for the destruction of Israel, and agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state within 1967 borders, although it does not relinquish all of Palestine or the right of resistance. While the official media in Iran conveyed little interest, SNS thoroughly discussed Hamas' changed position - particularly in light of the Iranian regime's hostility toward Israel and denial of Israel's right to exist, which has remained uncompromisingly consistent since the Islamic revolution.

Iranian criticism of the Palestinians has historical roots dating back to the 1980s, when Palestinians supported Iraq in its war against Iran. Public criticism of Hamas has increased in recent years, due to its alignment with the Syrian rebels, contrary to Iran's position. As Tehran has increased support for President Assad's regime, Hamas has turned its back on the Axis of Resistance, an alliance headed by Iran, and including Syria and Hezbollah. Despite Hamas' longstanding involvement in the Axis of Resistance, it declared its support for the Syrian opposition. Furthermore, Iran perceived Hamas' support for the Saudi offensive in Yemen as another slap in the face, and evidence of Hamas' preference for Saudi Arabia and the Sunnis over Tehran. One SNS user described this tension, tweeting that Hamas is ideologically distant from Iran, is unprepared to pay any political price for Iran, and does not condemn the killing of Shi'ites in Iraq.<sup>1</sup>



**Drawing uploaded to Twitter, with the caption: "How Hamas treats Iran by recognizing Israel"**

The negative feelings toward Hamas were clearly reflected in users' reactions to the charter. Users questioned the justification of Iranian aid to Hamas, given Hamas' willingness to reformulate a policy toward Israel that contravenes the Iranian position. Most of the criticism was directed at the Iranian government, which continues to assist the Palestinians, including Hamas (mainly its military wing), rather than redressing the situation of Iranian citizens. Several users tweeted: "Not Gaza, not Lebanon, I will sacrifice my life for Iran." The reformist opposition adopted this slogan during the 2009 riots, as a demand for authorities to focus on solving the problems facing Iranian citizens, rather than participating in Muslim struggles around the world.<sup>2</sup> Users also criticized the regime's uncompromising ideological stance towards Israel, obtrusive against the backdrop of Hamas' modified position. One user cynically noted that in light of the Hamas document of principles, the Israeli and Iranian governments have become the only two entities that do not recognize the 1967 borders.<sup>3</sup> Some users even mockingly suggested that calls of "death to Hamas" be included alongside the traditional condemnations of Israel and the United States at the annual International Jerusalem (el-Quds) Day procession held in Iran on the last Friday of Ramadan.<sup>4</sup>

Reformists and critics of the regime skillfully leveraged the situation, exploiting the new statement of principles to bolster the position that Iran should reconsider its financial and military assistance to the Palestinians, and particularly to Hamas. In a tweet, exiled Iranian journalist Ahmad Batebi wondered how many schools, hospitals, and parks could have been built in Iran if not for years of Hamas funding.<sup>5</sup> Likely, recent reports that Iran is increasing its support for Hamas' military wing, following Yahya Sinwar's election as Hamas' new leader in Gaza, contributed to the criticism.

Right-wing conservative supporters of the regime mostly refrained from referring to the change in Hamas' position, although some sought to downplay its importance. For example, journalist Muhammad Kadri, of the conservative news agency Mehr, tweeted criticism of media outlets affiliated with the reformist camp, which insisted on presenting the Hamas charter as an expression of compromise, despite lack of recognition for 1967 borders.<sup>6</sup> Iranian hardliners' disregard for the Hamas charter reflects embarrassment at the change in Hamas' position, which could weaken Iran's justification for its uncompromising policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This is not the first time Iranian SNS have become a central arena for debate over Iran's policy toward the Palestinians. One such debate erupted in the summer of 2014, on the eve of an International Jerusalem Day marked by Israel's Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip. That year, the day meant to express Iran and the Muslim world's support for the Palestinians and their struggle for the "liberation of Jerusalem" triggered reservations. Many users felt that Iran should not help the Palestinians while its own citizens' situation remained politically and economically untenable. Furthermore, many expressed hostility towards Hamas, the Palestinians, and the Arabs in general.<sup>7</sup>

Iranian users' reactions to Hamas' revised charter are a further expression of the Iranian public's complex attitude towards the Palestinians. Iranians ideologically support the Palestinians' right to self-determination and their struggle for independence. However, the willingness of Palestinians, including Hamas, to negotiate with Israel and soften their position, causes some Iranians to question their government's rigidity, as it claims to be "more Palestinian than the Palestinians." Increasingly, Iranians express doubts about the expenses paid by the needy at home in trade for their country's unconditional support for the Palestinians.

## The Pizza Crisis: The Viral Palestinian Prisoners Campaigns

**Dr. Michael Barak**

Beginning on Palestinian Prisoners' Day, on April 17, Marwan Barghouti led nearly 1,200 Palestinian security prisoners in a hunger strike to protest the conditions of their detention in Israeli jails. The Honor Strike (*Akhtarab al-Karamah*), which ended on May 27, was accompanied by a public relations campaign on social networking sites (SNS). The campaign enjoyed unprecedented support among users in Arab countries and the Palestinian diaspora. In addition to expressing solidarity with the strikers, many Palestinian SNS users, including supporters of Fatah, expressed deep distaste for Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Users described Abbas as an opportunist seeking to suppress any threat to his standing, including the prisoners' strike. In contrast, many considered Barghouti, currently serving five consecutive life sentences and 40 additional years, a worthy leader capable of rehabilitating Fatah's image.

Over the course of the campaign, which received 4.5 million views, human rights organizations, BDS,<sup>8</sup> Arab media outlets,<sup>9</sup> and Arab users around the world<sup>10</sup> expressed solidarity with the prisoners' struggle. Palestinian users described the hunger strike as a heroic act that restored respect for the Palestinians and reengaged global awareness of the Palestinian problem.

<sup>11</sup>Barghouti was described as symbolizing the "new Palestine," inspiring the Palestinian public with the spirit of struggle. Arab users, including Palestinians, encouraged efforts to leverage the struggle by moving from online protest to popular revolt, confronting Israeli security forces and blocking the roads used by settlers.<sup>12</sup>



**Facebook profile picture of a Saudi user identifying with the prisoner's struggle by using the caption "Expressing solidarity"**

A related SNS campaign, the “Water and Salt Challenge,” which received an unprecedented nearly 9 million views, called on users to symbolize the hunger strikers’ nutrient consumption by drinking a glass of salt water and posting a picture or video.<sup>13</sup> Participants in this challenge included popular Arab artists, such as Gaza singer Mohammad Assaf,<sup>14</sup> the presenter of *Arabs Got Talent*, a reality show broadcast in the Gulf states and other Arab countries, and members of Barghouti’s family, such as his son Aarab and his great-granddaughter.

Another prominent SNS campaign called for a boycott of Pizza Hut, in response to the Israeli branch’s Twitter commercial ridiculing Barghouti after he was documented eating a *Tortit* sweet wafer. The commercial asked: “Barghouti, if you’re breaking the strike, wouldn’t pizza be better?” This SNS campaign was viewed tens of thousands of times, and shared several hundred thousand times. The video was later removed, and Pizza Hut severed its relationship with the advertising company.<sup>15</sup>

Many users, including Barghouti’s son, commented on the contribution SNS had made to keeping the prisoners’ struggle on the public agenda, and the need to reinforce such online activity.<sup>16</sup> Many users claimed that the *Tortit* issue was an Israeli propaganda conspiracy designed to sabotage the strike.<sup>17</sup>



**YouTube video showing users from Gaza drinking a glass of salt water, as a sign of the support for the prisoners' struggle**

The discourse on SNS also reflected a deep distaste for PA Chairman Abbas, expressed by both Hamas and Fatah supporters, due to his perceived indifference to his people’s fate. For example, one Palestinian user wondered why the Palestinian Authority chairman had not presented the issue of the prisoners during his visit with US President Donald Trump. Meanwhile, West Bank users demanded that Abbas stand with the prisoners and not bury his head in the sand. Other users contended that Abbas is unworthy of leading the Palestinian people. For example, one Palestinian user from Jordan stated: “Trump must understand that Mahmoud Abbas lost his legitimacy in 2009, and that he controls no one other than the Fatah gang.”<sup>18</sup> Hamas supporters further fanned the flames, claiming that in addition to ignoring the prisoners, the PA chairman had also imposed sanctions on the Gaza Strip. One Hamas supporter wrote: “Our prisoners are struggling in prison with their empty stomachs, and Gaza is fighting against Mahmoud Abbas’ closure with patience and determination.”<sup>19</sup> Another user remarked: “Israel has never cut off electricity in Gaza and has proven its humanity to the world, as opposed to the barbarism of Mahmoud Abbas!”<sup>20</sup> This user referenced the PA chairman’s threat to stop the financing the cost of electricity transmission from Israel to Gaza in April.

In contrast to Abbas' criticism, Barghouti achieved striking popularity among Fatah supporters. They consider him the only one able to restore unity to the national movement. One user from east Jerusalem posted: "Fatah has deviated from its path... it is no longer considered at the forefront of the struggle..." and added that Barghouti is working to get Fatah back on track. <sup>21</sup>Another user claimed that Abbas was benefiting from Barghouti's imprisonment because it kept the latter from realizing his political power.<sup>22</sup>Other Fatah supporters, including those from the Gaza Strip, wrote, "Marwan Barghouti represents me."<sup>23</sup>These and other statements prove that Barghouti continues to enjoy the broad popular support evident in the Fatah Central Committee elections of December 2016, in which Barghouti garnered a majority vote (930 out of 1300 votes).

After 41 days, the Palestinian prisoners' strike ended with Israeli Prison Service's agreement to double the number of visits prisoners can receive each month, from a single visit to two visits, and to discuss the remaining demands. Users described the strike's results as a glorious victory, which despite Israel's attempts, had strengthened the morale of the Palestinian people, and proven the necessity of demonstrating devotion to the struggle against Israel. <sup>24</sup> SNS were a key platform for maintaining international awareness of the Palestinian prisoners' situation. The dizzying success of the online campaigns confirmed the organizers' confidence in the importance of exploiting SNS in the struggle against Israel. These campaigns strengthened Barghouti's political power, against a backdrop of the Palestinian Authority's leadership succession struggles, in light of Abbas' imminent departure.

## **The War of Mothers: The Struggle over Atatürk's Legacy**

**Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak**

As discourse on Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's referendum victory and subsequent accusations of fraud has subsided, Turkish social networking sites' (SNS) focus has returned to tension between the secular and Islamic publics. This tension was reflected in SNS users' responses to *Deep History*, a Turkish television program about the love life of the republic's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. From many Turks' perspective, the program crossed a red line with its unprecedented portrayal of Atatürk's personal life. Meanwhile, International Mother's Day provided Erdoğan's conservative supporters with another opportunity to challenge Atatürk's legacy, attempting to replace Atatürk's mother with Erdoğan's mother as Turkey's national mother. The war of mothers represents a further attempt to convert Old Turkey into Erdoğan's New Turkey, shifting the monopolies and shapes of major symbols of the past. This exemplifies the profound changes all areas of Turkish life have undergone during the past 15 years.



Producers of *Deep History*, which was broadcast on May 8 on TVNET, a Turkish television channel identified with the Erdoğan administration, said that the program was intended to shed light on Atatürk's undisclosed history. *Deep History* featured public figures oppositional to Atatürk, who made claims about his "gallery of lovers." For example, historian Süleyman Yeşilyurt claimed that Atatürk had forbidden relations with his adopted daughter, the well-known historian Afet İnan, whom Yeşilyurt called "the undeclared wife of the president." To support this claim, the program's participants used, inter alia, the proximity of their respective bedrooms as evidence. The program became the focus of considerable attention on SNS. Many secular users claimed that *Deep History* was defamatory, dishonoring the founder of the republic. In response, users added Atatürk's picture to their Facebook profile pictures - a common sign of identification on SNS. Users called for a boycott of the magazine distributed by the program. Using the hashtag "Lawyers for the task,"<sup>25</sup> users also called on pro-Atatürk attorneys to take legal action against the program. The Atatürk Memory Protection Act, passed in 1951, provides for punitive measures in cases of physical or verbal violence against Atatürk's legacy. The law, opposed by Turkish Islamists, received international attention in 2007, after the Turkish judiciary blocked national access to YouTube because a video posted on the site desecrated Atatürk's legacy by portraying the republic's founder as a dog. In order for the court order to be cancelled, reopening Turkish access to the popular site, Turkish companies were forced to acquire the rights to the video and remove it. Indeed, the secular public's uproar in response to *Deep History* led to Yeşilyurt's arrest.<sup>26</sup>



**Founder of the Republic  
Atatürk with his mother  
Zübeyde Hanım**

SNS discourse about slights to Atatürk's legacy was reignited on International Mother's Day, on May 14. Reflecting an integral element of the Kemalist secular heritage, many secular users posted pictures of Atatürk's mother, Zübeyde Hanım, with captions like "Mothers can change the world," and messages congratulating her for successfully raising a son destined to save the homeland from foreign occupiers. For many years, the image of Zübeyde Hanım has been embedded in the Turkish educational system. Zübeyde Hanım is presented as a role model for young mothers, considering her struggle to raise little Mustafa on her own after the death of her husband Ali Rıza. For Turks, Zübeyde Hanım carries deep symbolic significance, with many buildings in Turkey bearing her name. However, while secular users marked Mother's Day with tributes to Atatürk's mother, supporters of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) instead praised Erdoğan's mother, Tenzile Erdoğan, using the slogan "Praise mothers who gave birth to heroes." This campaign to unseat Zübeyde Hanım as mother of the nation, in favor of Tenzile Erdoğan, reflected an attempt to reorder Turkish society, coronating President Erdoğan as founder of the New Turkey.



Meanwhile, in addition to secular and Islamist users, other camps joined the war of mothers. Left-wing users praised the mothers of journalist Uğur Mumcu, poet Nâzım Hikmet, and fighter Deniz Gezmiş, each representing a different sector in the leftist bloc. While Mumcu, who was assassinated by Islamists 1993, underscores secular and republican values, Marxist fighter Gezmiş, executed by the Turkish government in 1972, and Communist poet Hikmet, who died in exile in Russia in 1963, symbolize the diversity of the Turkish left. Conversely, right-wing users shared images of mothers who had lost their sons in the struggle against the Kurdish underground (PKK) and the recent Turkish military operation against ISIS in northern Syria. Supporters of the Turkish government mounted a campaign to sanctify the image of Ömer Halisdemir, a soldier who was killed after he shot a Turkish officer participating in the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, and praised his mother.<sup>27</sup>



**Turkish President Erdoğan with his mother in a picture that was part of the “Praise to mothers who gave birth to heroes” campaign**

Kurdish users also joined the discourse, praising the heroism and sacrifice of Kurdish mothers. Additionally, they recalled the Kurds who have been missing since the skirmishes between the Turkish army and PKK began in the 1990s. Kurdish users expressed hope that Kurdish and Turkish mothers would no longer need to mourn their children, and called for peace between the two sides.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the relative immunity that Atatürk still enjoys in Turkish symbolic and political space, the present discourse includes voices seeking to establish Erdoğan as the new founder of the Turkish state, overriding Atatürk’s iconic legacy. The war of mothers that developed on SNS is indicative of the segmentation dividing the public in Erdoğan’s New Turkey. For each camp, a different mother of the nation represents the ideal sociopolitical model for Turkish society.

<sup>1</sup>13.5.17: <https://twitter.com/namvarha/status/859225488308543492>.

<sup>2</sup>13.5.17: [https://twitter.com/Hesam\\_Nasrin/status/859136342202220545](https://twitter.com/Hesam_Nasrin/status/859136342202220545).

<sup>3</sup>13.5.17: <https://twitter.com/kiavash/status/859374430367215616>.

<sup>4</sup>13.5.17: <https://twitter.com/Koohyar/status/859125173345189888>.

<sup>5</sup>13.5.17: <https://twitter.com/radiojibi/status/859133602801516544>.

<sup>6</sup>13.5.17: <https://twitter.com/ghaderi62/status/859366633109950468>.

<sup>7</sup> Raz Zimmt, “Internal Debate in Iran over International Jerusalem Day Processions,” *Beehive*, Vol. 2, issue 7, July 2014. <http://dayan.org/content/bee-hive-middle-east-social-media-vol-2-issue-7-july-2014>;

<http://dayan.org/file/16418/download?token=7TbkRw0g>

<sup>8</sup>19.5.17: <https://www.facebook.com/BDSmovementarabic/>

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the support expressed on the Lebanese satellite channel Al-Mayadeen that used the hashtag #Al Mayadeen with the prisoners, 13.5.17: <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/الميادين مع الاسرى>

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- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, the tags used by Kuwaiti users: #الكويت\_تتضامن\_مع\_الأسرى\_الفلستينيين; #اضراب\_الكرامة; #DignityStrikeمتضامن; #أنا\_متضامن; [https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/اضراب\\_الكرامة/](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/اضراب_الكرامة/)
- <sup>11</sup> #اضراب\_الاسرى
- <sup>12</sup> 9.5.17: [https://twitter.com/escobar\\_007/status/862038914952945664](https://twitter.com/escobar_007/status/862038914952945664)
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, 9.5.17: <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/saltwaterchallenge>; #مي\_وملح; #تحدي\_مي\_وملح; Dean of the Birzeit University School of Education, 26.4.17: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EUxipVlj0k>
- <sup>14</sup> 25.4.17: <https://twitter.com/MohammedAssaf89/status/856942296067125248>
- <sup>15</sup> Pizza Hut franchisees in Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia published a false apology from Pizza Hut International for the affair: #بيترزا\_هت\_مكانك\_الزباله.BoycottPizzaHut.قاطعوا\_بيترزا\_هات; ; #بيترزا\_هت\_مكانك\_الزباله
- <sup>16</sup> See a similar response from a user in east Jerusalem, 30.4.17: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gU2W3Qqfbg4&t=1s>  
<https://www.facebook.com/algudsnewspaper/videos/10154633143242984/>
- <sup>17</sup> #اضراب\_الكرامة
- <sup>18</sup> 2.5.17: <https://twitter.com/MuayyadSuboh/status/859495022374379526>
- <sup>19</sup> 30.4.17: <https://twitter.com/kaala1247/status/858742932123373569>
- <sup>20</sup> #اضراب\_الاسرى
- <sup>21</sup> 23.4.17: <https://www.facebook.com/palestaine/posts/10155310863635530>
- <sup>22</sup> #اضراب\_الكرامة
- <sup>23</sup> 22.5.17: [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=620760441451527&id=100005527297876](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=620760441451527&id=100005527297876)
- <sup>24</sup> #اضراب\_الكرامة
- <sup>25</sup> #SavcilarGoreve #DerinTarih
- <sup>26</sup> Atatürk'e hakaret eden Süleyman Yeşilyurt tutuklandı: İşte ilk ifadesi, Cumhuriyet, May 12, 2017 [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/739308/Ataturk\\_e\\_hakaret\\_eden\\_Suleyman\\_Yesilyurt\\_tutuklandi\\_iste\\_ilk\\_ifadesi.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/739308/Ataturk_e_hakaret_eden_Suleyman_Yesilyurt_tutuklandi_iste_ilk_ifadesi.html) [Accessed: May 15, 2017]
- <sup>27</sup> #annesenbirtanesin, #AnnelerGünüKutluOlsun, kahraman şehitlerimizin anneleri, #mothersday
- <sup>28</sup> Kürt Anneler