

# BeeHive

השיח ברשתות החברתיות במזה"ת

Editors Dr. Harel Chorev, Smadar Shaul, and Sarah Jacobs

Volume 5, Issue 2, February 2017

## Table of Contents

Iranian Users Protest Trump's Muslim Ban .....	1
Sixth Anniversary of the January 25 Revolution .....	4

## **From the Editors**

The Doron Halpern Middle East Network Analysis Desk is proud to present the February issue of Beehive. In this issue, we learn about Iranians' pointed criticism of the US travel ban preventing Iranians from entering the country. We also follow the responses of Egyptian users, mostly supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the state of affairs in Egypt six years after the January 25 Revolution.

**Enjoy!**

## Iranian Users Protest Trump's Muslim Ban

Dr. Raz Zimmt

On January 27, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order indefinitely prohibiting Syrian refugees' entry into the United States, suspending the absorption of any refugees for 120 days, and preventing visa entry from seven Muslim countries, including Iran, for 90 days. Upon publication, the order provoked a storm in the US and abroad. Iran reacted vehemently, with Tehran's foreign ministry calling the order "an open insult to the Islamic world and the Iranian nation in particular." He added that the move would go down in history as "a fine gift to extremists and their supporters."<sup>1</sup> Iranian internet users also responded strongly, including those who, unlike supporters of the regime, usually show greater openness to the US, and including Iranian expatriates in the West. Users described the decision as unjust, injurious to innocent people, and a litmus test for Iran's complex attitude toward the United States.

Over the first days following the implementation of the order, social networking sites (SNS) were flooded with Iranian responses using the hashtags "No to the ban on migration," "Don't prohibit student visas," and "Stop the ban on Iran." Users shared the personal experiences of dozens of Iranians, some with US permanent residency ("green card"), detained in American airports or stranded in airports around the world without being able to reach the United States. The cases that attracted the most attention were those in which Iranian students, including PhD candidates at leading American universities, were detained or prevented from entering the US after being accepted into schools or returning from holidays with their families in Iran and Europe. These cases were presented as evidence that that the order mostly harms innocent civilians, rather than potential terrorists.

In the ensuing debate about the executive order on SNS, users emphasized the contribution of Iranian immigrants in the United States. Users contended that Iranian immigrants do not endanger US security, but rather contribute to US society, economy and culture. To support their argument, users listed the names of outstanding immigrants of Iranian origin, such as Maryam Mirzakhani, 2014 winner of the Fields Medal in mathematics and professor at Stanford University; Omid Kordestani, Executive Chairman of Twitter and former Chief Business Officer of Google; and Pierre Morad Omidyar, CEO, founder, and Chairman of eBay.

However, the bulk of the criticism focused on the fact that the order did not include citizens from Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, which are



**Tweet from the account of a BBC-Persian correspondent in the US. (January 29, 2017)**

considered leading “exporters of terrorism.” Notably, these were the countries of origin for most of the terrorists in the September 11 attacks. In contrast, Iran was included in the order, despite the fact that its citizens were not involved in September 11 or any of the terrorist attacks perpetrated on US soil since then. This was presented as evidence that President Trump’s decision, purported to prevent the entry of terrorists into the United States, was tainted by economic considerations related to his businesses in the Muslim countries excluded from the order. Iranians expressed similar feelings following a speech by President Bush in January 2002, which included Iran in the “axis of evil,” despite its contribution to US efforts to eradicate the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Iranian-born celebrities also participated in the online protests against the order. One such celebrity, director Asghar Farhadi, has won Academy Awards for his films "A Separation" and "The Salesman," the latter in a ceremony held in February. Farhadi announced that he would boycott the ceremony to protest the president’s policy. Iranian actress Taraneh



**A poster listing the number of Iranian students in the US. (Twitter)**

Alidoosti, who co-starred in Farhadi’s most recent film, joined the protest against the presidential decree. She tweeted that the order is “racist,” and announced that she too would boycott the Oscars.<sup>2</sup>

In counterpoint to criticism directed against President Trump, some held Iran responsible for the US administration's decision. Several users argued that the American president's opposition to Iran is unsurprising considering Iran's 38 years of US flag burnings and “Death to America” chants. They criticized Iran's contradictory attitude towards US citizens. From these users perspectives, Iranians hypocritically express hostility towards the US public, but wish to adopt American culture and immigrate to the US, and are hurt by expressions of US hostility towards Iran. Others pointed out the irony of the Iranian regime's struggle against the US order. One user ridiculed Iranian judiciary chief, Sadeq Larijani, who condemned the ban on Muslims in the United States on the grounds that it contravenes the principles of human rights. The user wondered how a person responsible for the yearly execution of thousands of Iranian citizens could accuse the US of violating human rights.<sup>3</sup> Others accused the Iranians of hypocrisy in light of their contemptuous and humiliating attitude towards the Afghan refugees seeking asylum in their own country. Another responded that Iranians, whose entry into the United States was banned, would have supported the decision if it had only prohibited the entry of Arabs.<sup>4</sup>

Although the executive order sparked angry reactions among Iranians of varying political views, supporters of the regime made few comments. They presented the order as further evidence of the United States’ historical enmity toward Iran. The relative indifference of the regime’s supporters is perhaps due to the fact that the order mainly affects students and

Iranians who belong to the educated middle class - populations often critical of the regime. Moreover, conservative right supporters of the Iranian regime are generally hostile to Iranians seeking to emigrate to the West, particularly to the United States, suspecting them of anti-revolutionary, liberal views.

Iranians perceived the restrictions on the entry of Iranian travelers to the United States as an unjust violation of their legitimate rights and an act of humiliation. As such, the order rekindled their well-known sensitivity towards displays of arrogance or insults to national pride. Widespread criticism of the executive order managed to unite residents and expatriates alike, despite the political differences that usually characterize Iranian society. Although the order was presented by the US administration as part of a comprehensive struggle against terrorism, its implementation was met by extensive Iranian opposition to a decision that, from their view, was influenced by irrelevant considerations. Iranians' strong response to the executive order demonstrates their perspective on the importance of US policy toward Iran, and their fear of escalation in bilateral relations during Trump's presidency.

## Sixth Anniversary of the January 25 Revolution

Dr. Michael Barak

January 25 marked six years since Egypt's popular revolution, ousting former President Hosni Mubarak's regime. The date sparked widespread discussion on social networking sites (SNS), in which hundreds of thousands of Egyptian users, especially supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, examined the progress Egypt has made on various issues since the revolution. The discourse was characterized by a deep sense of missed opportunity, feelings of having failed the revolution's goals, and frustrated hopelessness about the current regime's behavior. Building off of these difficult feelings, the Muslim Brotherhood is actively encouraging the Egyptian public to protest the current regime.

In the ensuing discourse on SNS, hundreds of thousands of Egyptian users accused the regime of crushing the dreams of the young and denying the needs of the people. These needs were defined as “three simple goals:” a living, freedom, and social justice. Users blamed Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi for Egypt's various ills, including its economic crisis. There were multiple accusations that the government has eliminated political opponents, suppressed freedom of expression, and even committed treason against the Egyptian homeland - considering its forfeiture of Egyptian sovereignty over the Tiran and Sanafir Islands, in favor of Saudi Arabian sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Some users expressed disapproval of Egypt's cooperation with Israel in the fight against the terrorist cells in Sinai Peninsula, describing this cooperation as an attempt to purify the Sinai of Muslim presence. Others noted that Egypt is led by Israel's dictates, using the hashtag “Israel manages Egypt,” which received approximately 75,000 views.<sup>6</sup>

Many users, mostly identified as supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, called for the



**“Let's go out and make a revolution.” A banner uploaded to Twitter as part of an online campaign “January 25 unites us” (#يناير\_يجمعنا).**

Egyptian people to continue the revolution until its objectives are achieved. They used the hashtag “January 25 unites us.”<sup>7</sup> Conversely, there were users who expressed skepticism about the people's readiness to answer the call. These users expressed a lack of confidence, even despair, about the extent to which it is possible to realize the objectives of the revolution. For example, one user declared, “the revolution went to hell.” Another user noted that the spirit of the revolution in Egypt was waning because it was being suppressed by the regime. He said that elements within the administration, “kidnapped the souls of young people, arrested them, accused them, and drove them out of their country.” In the opinion of many users, “the revolution was stolen” from the people,

meaning that authority over the country is instead concentrated in a small group of military personnel with narrow interests. However, other users tried to lift people's spirits - as one noted, "the only traitor to the revolution is someone who loses hope."<sup>8</sup>

The discourse gained significant momentum following January 28, when al-Sisi gave a speech to 1,300 young people in Aswan in Upper Egypt, discussing economic development and job creation for young people. Al-Sisi stressed that despite the country's great poverty, Egypt is devoting enormous efforts to the economy.<sup>9</sup> The speech was severely criticized on SNS. Young Egyptians, both secular and Islamist, protested the cost of living and the increase in poverty using the hashtag "al-Sisi broke us," which was used in approximately 40,000



**Caricature uploaded by the Muslim Brotherhood. The heading reads: "New taxes for Egyptians!!"**

comments. An Islamic user commented, "We know that we are very poor. This is because you [al-Sisi] and your gang have plundered the country for more than 60 years..."<sup>10</sup> A secular user claimed that all major economic projects designed to improve the Egyptian economy, such as excavating Suez Canal II, had run aground without proving themselves. Another user noted that the military regime is responsible for the destruction of many households, unable to feed their members due to the dramatic increase in the prices of sugar and oil.<sup>11</sup>

Muslim Brotherhood exiles living in Turkey participated in Egyptian public discourse on SNS. They escalated the rhetoric by uploading a propaganda video to Facebook, accusing al-Sisi of perpetuating poverty in the country with the expectation of Egyptian compliance. The ad called on Egypt's poor to break their silence and protest in the streets until the regime falls.<sup>12</sup> The expats' involvement in this discourse is not surprising, as many members of the Muslim Brotherhood have fled to Turkey, accepting Erdogan's offer of asylum after the overthrow of Morsi. While in Turkey, they have engaged in ongoing incitement against al-Sisi's regime. In addition to discussion on SNS, thousands of Muslim Brotherhood activists demonstrated on February 3 in several governorates, including Alexandria and Damietta. The protesters expressed their anger about the spread of poverty in the country and called for the al-Sisi regime to resign immediately, and for the army not to interfere in politics.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to widespread criticism, some users defended al-Sisi's policy. For example, in one post a user claimed that al-Sisi is smart enough to operate prudently in a complex reality, restoring Egypt to a leadership role in the Arab world. Other users mentioned that al-Sisi had saved Egypt from the control of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had attempted to lead the country into a less than ideal future. In the economic domain, a few users also rejected criticism, claiming that patience is needed, and that there are already signs of improvement. For example, one wrote: "Do you know that Egypt is exporting 1,500 tons of sugar every day

despite the crisis, and the price of a kilo of Egyptian sugar sold in Europe is the equivalent to £ 8?”<sup>14</sup>

Discourse on SNS surrounding the sixth anniversary of the January 25 Revolution reveals the presence of powerbrokers, especially within the Muslim Brotherhood, who do not intend to accept the rule of al-Sisi. From their perspective, the country's deteriorating economic situation is a badge of shame for the regime, and a sign that the Revolution of January 25 was nipped at the bud, but should be continued. At the moment, it seems that only supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood are protesting in public spaces. Responding to frustration expressed by SNS users, pro-regime users cited the regime's achievements and its determination to ensure the welfare of the inhabitants of Egypt. These responses express fear of successful Muslim Brotherhood incitement.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Iran to respond in kind to Trump’s insulting visa restrictions: Foreign Ministry”, *Press TV*, 28 Jan. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> [https://twitter.com/t\\_alidoosti/status/824578972637954048](https://twitter.com/t_alidoosti/status/824578972637954048)

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/Gavrch/status/826700290401456130>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/NasserHadiloo/status/825606496927019008>.

<sup>5</sup> See Michael Barak, “The Tiran and Sanafir Islands at the Heart of an Online Protest,” *Beehive*, vol. 4, no. 4, April 2016..

<sup>6</sup> #مصر\_تدار\_من\_إسرائيل

<sup>7</sup> #يناير\_يجمعنا

<sup>8</sup> يناير ; #المجلس\_خاين\_عشان ; #عودوا\_الى\_ثورتكم25 #يناير\_حتفضل\_ثورتنا ; #لساها\_ثورة\_يناير ;

<sup>9</sup> <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/3779>, 2 Feb. 2017; <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/3793>, 4 Feb. 2017.

<sup>10</sup> : [https://twitter.com/shady\\_salem/status/825351939391107072](https://twitter.com/shady_salem/status/825351939391107072), 28 January 2017.

<sup>11</sup> #مصري\_ناقصك\_ايه “As an Egyptian, where is overdraft?” #السيبي\_فقرنا

[https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/السيبي\\_فقرنا](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/السيبي_فقرنا)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Carlos.Latuff0/videos/1341572942567829/>, 29 Jan. 2017.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2017/2/3/فاعليات-السيبي-فقرنا-تندد-بتردي-الأوضاع-المعيشية-في-مصر>, 3 Feb. 2017.

<sup>14</sup> #السيبي\_فقرنا ; ياسيسي\_ياز\_عيم\_العرب