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We are happy to present the June issue of Beehive. The current issue opens with a review of the elections in Turkey as seen on social networking sites (SNS). The next two articles examine the responses on SNS to the recent defeat of the Iraqi army by ISIS, and Iranian responses to the repatriation of the bodies of 175 divers killed in the Iran-Iraq war.

The Turkish People Have Spoken

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

It comes as no surprise that social networking sites (SNS) in Turkey have spent the last month largely occupied with June 7's parliamentary elections and their surprising results. After 13 years of rule, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) received only 40.86% of the votes, meaning that it does not have a parliamentary majority and will be forced to form a coalition government. These results show that the Turkish people oppose the concentration of power in the hands of a single authority; effectively, they said "no" to the presidential regime that President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been striving to create, which would concentrate extensive authority in his hands, on a historically unprecedented level in Turkey.

The achievement of the largely Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which won 13.12% of the vote, played a key role in the failure of the AKP. For the first time in its history, the HDP succeeded in passing the electoral threshold (the highest in the world, 10%), because it campaigned as a political party rather than a list of independent candidates, as it had in the past. However, it is presumptuous to attribute the failure of AKP solely to the Kurdish party; another critical factor in the Turkish political system is the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) which recorded an astonishing jump from 52 mandates to 80 mandates (16.29%). Conversely,

the largest opposition party, the secular Republican People's Party (CHP), was unable to increase its power and even lost 1% of its parliamentary seats, apparently to the Kurds.

Echoes of the election campaigns and elections themselves were very evident on Turkish SNS. The tension in the public and the bitter competition between various players led to the creation of diverse hashtags intended to influence public opinion. Alongside calls reminding people to vote: "I love my country, I'm going to the polls,"[1] and tweets explaining how the voting process works,[2] there were also attempts to defraud and deceive. One example was the poster distributed by CHP supporters that called on AKP voters to express their disapproval of the secular party by marking their ballot with an "X" under its symbol, in addition to the standard stamp ("evet," yes) indicating their vote for AKP (pictured). The supporters of CHP had hoped that this would cause ballots cast for AKP to be disqualified. This deception is indicative of the disdain that the "enlightened secular" people have for AKP voters, who they consider to be gullible and dim-witted. This patronizing attitude has only served to strengthen the ruling party over the years, and this recent effort shows that the CHP has not learned the lessons of previous elections but rather continues using a divisive discourse.[3]



The extreme tension surrounding these elections, in part a result of the forgeries at some polling stations during the municipal elections in March 2014, caused the Turkish public to be particularly alert on the morning of Election Day. Many users reported on SNS that they had observed vehicles without license plates parked in schools that were serving as polling stations. These users called on voters to puncture the cars' tires so they could not be used to smuggle ballot boxes from the polling places. This phenomenon is further testimony to the lack of confidence prevailing among the Turkish public and the deep divisions in its ranks.[4]



Although the campaign period officially ends a day before the elections, SNS continued to serve as a stormy platform for electioneering even on Election Day itself, as attested by the many new hashtags created over the course of the day.[5] Particularly conspicuous was the negative campaign mounted by supporters of the MHP and the ruling AKP against the Kurdish HDP. The former called on voters to ensure the Kurdish party remains outside of Parliament and contended that voting for it was the equivalent of treason, while supporters of the AKP criticized the HDP's chairman Selahattin Demirtaş for the campaign he waged against the Directorate of Religious Affairs.[6]

Publication of the actual election results caused a commotion in Turkish society and on SNS as well. Voters for the various opposition parties joined together around victory slogans, especially “The people said ‘stop’” and “The people have spoken” which were used to emphasize opposition to the excessive centralization of power under President Erdoğan and the presidential system he has been promoting.[7] Conversely, supporters of the ruling party called on its leaders to “Stand strong and not bend,” a familiar slogan used previously when Erdoğan encountered opposition both domestically during the Gezi Park riots and corruption scandals of 2013, as well as in the international arena, particularly with regards to friction with Israel.

In the Israeli context, it should be noted that unlike the presidential elections in August 2014 (in the aftermath of Operation Protective Edge), Israel was not a central issue in this election campaign. Despite this, when the results were published, supporters of AKP uploaded Israeli responses to SNS. Most of the attention was devoted to the comments of former President Shimon Peres and his expression of happiness with the results, and to the caricature by Shlomo Cohen in *Israel Hayom*, which showed a Turkish flotilla running aground on the Kurdish party. As if to demonstrate to the Turkish public the “mistake” it had made by voting as it did, supporters of AKP uploaded a mistranslation of the headline “Turkey said ‘No’ to Erdoğan” that ran in *Israel Hayom* as “Cries of joy in Israel, We are returning to Istanbul!” (pictured). Users expressed their anger over the election results and made it clear that an outcome received happily in Israel is bad for Turkey.



The Turkish election campaigns and its aftermath created a distinct tension in the country, as reflected by SNS. It should be stated, though, that the manner in which discourse was conducted and the high level of political awareness demonstrated by the public proves that Turkey remains a functioning democracy in which the Turkish people make the rules of the game, despite the criticism leveled by the Western world. Similarly, the election results show that in order to maintain the parliamentary system and the current character of the state, people were willing to come out and vote and say “no” to the excessive centralization that Erdoğan has been championing in recent years, despite the potential risk to the Turkish economy that may be posed by the instability of the coalition government which will soon take shape.

He’s a Traitor: Minister of Defense Go Home!

Carl Yonker

In late April, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took control of a region of strategic importance west of Ramadi, in the Anbar province of Iraq, where the al-Tharthar dam is also located. During the campaign, ISIS forces overran the army base adjacent to the dam and executed 120 Iraqi soldiers, including Brigadier General Hassan Abbas Toufan, the commander of the Iraqi Army's 1st Division.[8] This failure is a further demonstration of the Iraqi security forces' inability to mount a suitable strategic response in the fight against ISIS and forestall its offensives, certainly not without the assistance of the Iraqi Popular Forces known as *al-Hashd al-Shaabi* and other Shiite militias operating in Iraq under Iranian sponsorship. In the Iraqi political arena, this loss provided another opportunity for the Shiite opponents of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and Minister of Defense Khaled al-Obeidi to attack their management of the fight against ISIS. The fall of Ramadi in mid-May also contributed to the escalating campaign against the two, for which social networking sites (SNS) are the main platform.



In October 2014, against the backdrop of the humiliating defeats of the Iraqi army by ISIS the preceding summer, Khaled al-Obeidi, a Sunni Muslim from Mosul, was appointed minister of defense in the government of Haider al-Abadi. His appointment was a message to Iraqis that al-Abadi was looking for a new way to fight the Islamic State, as well as an effort to ameliorate the fears of Iraq's Sunni citizens who considered the Iraqi military a sectarian force. This step was received with anger by the Shiite opposition to al-Abadi. The massacre at al-Tharthar provided the opposition with additional ammunition for attacking both the defense minister and the prime minister.



Shortly after news of the massacre was published in the media, a Facebook page entitled "Defense Minister Go Home" was launched. The page, which directed users' attention to the deaths of the Iraqi soldiers and called on the Defense Minister to resign, has now accumulated 6,000 likes.[9] Based on the content of the page, it appears to be managed by Shiite Iraqis who support the Shiite militias, particularly the Popular Forces. This is evident from the many posts calling for support of this militia, which one user called "the Shield of Iraq"[10] and the posts criticizing the inability of the Iraqi Army to achieve any victories over ISIS without the support of the Popular Forces.[11] A picture of the demonstration supporting the forces held in Baghdad was also published on this page and later shared via Twitter (pictured).[12]

An image published on this page shortly after its establishment claimed that al-Abadi and al-Obeidi were the reason for the massacre of Iraqi soldiers at al-Tharthar.[13] Another addressed

al-Obeidi accusingly: “If you heard them cry and did not come to their assistance, you must resign.” A response to the picture let users complete the sentence themselves: “If you knew of this tragedy...”[14] Users’ comments rejected any possibility other than the defense minister’s resignation, and stressed that they are not interested in an apology; only a change of leadership will do. Another image displayed on the Facebook page presented the defense minister and two other Sunni politicians, with the caption: “Politicians of ISIS.”[15] This tag, which was intended to delegitimize the minister of defense and his partners by deprecating their commitment to the Iraqi people, reveals the depth of the Shiite-Sunni rift in Iraqi society today, and the doubt that Shiites cast on Sunni politicians.

The campaign against al-Obeidi also took root on Twitter.[16] One user encouraged his followers: “Iraqis, expose the traitors and expel them, just as Khaled al-Obeidi of Mosul was exposed.”[17] Another user called him a “traitor” and an “unspeakable lowlife like Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.”[18] Yet another demanded that Al-Obeidi be executed[19] and this demand was repeated in other tweets, which accused him of supporting ISIS and leading a campaign of lies, in cooperation with the prime minister.[20] Similarly, users criticized the helplessness of al-Obeidi at al-Tharthar, particularly the fact that he did not send a response force to save the Iraqi soldiers.[21]



The people want Minister of Defense Al-Obeidi executed

The massacre of Iraqi soldiers by ISIS forces at al-Tharthar provided an ideal opportunity for the Shiite opposition to attack Sunni Minister of Defense Khaled al-Obeidi and cast doubt on his loyalty to Iraq. These attacks augmented the already wide-spread campaign to undermine the strategy of the Iraqi government against ISIS and reinforce the standing of the Shiite militias, both those supported by Iran and others. Currently, this campaign is mostly limited to SNS but it seems to be gaining momentum, particularly after ISIS took control of Ramadi in mid-May. In any case, the furor on SNS is very indicative of the internal political discourse in Iraq and reveals the deep rift between Sunnis and Shiites.

Bodies of 175 Divers Killed in the Iran-Iraq War Repatriated to Iran

Dr. Raz Zimmt

In mid-May, the bodies of 175 Iranian divers killed in Operation Karbala-4 in late December 1986 were repatriated to Iran. The operation, part of the Iran-Iraq War, was supposed to have led to the conquest of Basra but ended – after only one day of fighting – with bitter defeat for the Iranians. The Revolutionary Guard and Basij forces encountered a well-prepared Iraqi defense force that pushed them back past the Shatt-al-Arab waterway and exacted a heavy price. Thousands were killed, injured or missing, and the hands of some divers whose bodies were returned had been tied. At the repatriation ceremony on May 18, Gen. Seyyed Mohammad Bagherzadeh, commander of the committee to find missing veterans of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic, said that some divers' bodies showed signs of having been buried alive.[22]

The repatriation led to an unprecedentedly emotional response on Iranian social networking sites (SNS). Many users shared pictures of the divers, published essays and songs in their memory, and expressed their pain and identification with the wartime casualties. Hashtags “175,” “175 casualties” or “hands tied” were created and used when uploading reports of and responses to the repatriation. One of the most frequently shared posts on Facebook was uploaded by Somayeh Shadkam, whose uncle Massoud was killed in the operation. She uploaded his picture, accompanied by a eulogy in which she parted with him with emotional words. The post was shared more than 1,200 times and received more than 11,000 likes.[23] A drawing by artist Seyyed Abbas Emad Haghy, showing a single diver with the number 175 on his chest, was also widely shared. Of his illustration, Haghy said, “When I first drew it, his hands were tied, but it was frightening. If even tying someone’s hands in a drawing is terrifying, how much the more so in real life.”[24]



Massoud Shadkam

Iranians of all ages and all political views, both at home and abroad, expressed empathy with the casualties and their families. One exiled Iranian in the United States wrote that, if he were in Iran, he certainly would have attended the burial ceremonies of the divers who sacrificed their lives to defend their homeland.[25] BBC Persian journalist Nima Akbarpour tweeted, “When I started the first grade, the war began. When I graduated from junior high, it ended, but it feels like it still has not ended; it is still in the news.”[26]

In addition to expressing appreciation for the sacrifice of the casualties and grief over their deaths, the responses to the repatriation of the bodies included criticism of Iran’s national leadership during the war and hostility towards Iraq. Some users accused the country’s political and military leadership during the war of responsibility for the failed management of the campaign that led to the miserable defeat in Operation Karbala-4.[27] Behind these accusations is a public debate, which has been raging for several years, between senior Iranian leaders led

by Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and former leaders of the Revolutionary Guards, over the responsibility of the regime's leaders for the length of the war and the many casualties that resulted.



For some users, the reports about the repatriation served as a reminder of the heavy price exacted by the bloody war. "This human tragedy again proves how evil war is," wrote one user.[28] Others emphasized the futility of the war, especially considering the difficult situation of citizens in the Islamic Republic today. "175 divers went to war so that we can wear a hijab and be prevented from having sex," tweeted one user mockingly.[29] Others expressed great hostility towards Iraq, particularly in light of the fact that some of the divers had been buried alive, and criticized the assistance that the Iranian authorities are currently giving Iraq. "These handcuffed casualties fell on behalf of the motherland and now we are supporting their murderers. This anti-nationalist government should be embarrassed," read one tweet.[30]

The critical responses on SNS were not ignored by senior officials of the administration and media outlets identified with the conservative right wing. Revolutionary Guards spokesman Ramazan Sharif criticized the use of SNS to denounce the military leadership during the war and create enmity between Iran and the Arabs. Sharif said that in these current conditions, in which Iran is facing off against ISIS, cooperation with the Shiite regime in Iraq is essential and care must be taken not to play into the hands of the enemy, who might use coverage of the repatriation for its own purposes.[31] The conservative Fars News Agency also warned against attempts by "anti-revolutionary and monarchist" users to take advantage of the situation in order to foment strife and racist emotions within Iranian society.[32]

Responses to the repatriation of the divers' bodies to Iran is additional evidence of the centrality of the Iran-Iraq War in the Iranian collective memory, as well as how SNS have become the main arena where the public can express its identity. Although 27 years have passed since the war has ended, it can still arouse strong nationalistic emotions and plays a central role in Iranian public discourse, even among many young people who were born after it ended.

¹ #ÜlkemiSeviyorumSandığaGidiyorum

² #secim2015 #TurkeyElections

³ #cehapeyiboykotet

⁴ #lastikleripatlat #plakasızaraclar #SandığınaSahipÇık

⁵ #OyumAkPartiye #CHPGeliyor #MHPGeliyor #BugünGünlerdenHDP #OyVerinGitsinler #YenidenAKPARTİ #OyumAKYolumHAK

⁶ HDPyeOyVerenHaindir #HDPDemekPKKDemekİşte #HDPyiMeclisteİSTEMİYORUZ

⁷ #halkdediki #MilletDurDedi

⁸ <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2015/4/25/>

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- ⁹ It is important to note that the page is not the only one launched to transmit this and similar messages. However, this does seem to be the most prominent. For another example see, https://m.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1007559915935912&hc_location=ufi.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/1007559915935912/photos/pb.1007559915935912.-2207520000.1434093448./1013653011993269/?type=1&theater>
- ¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/468241253326125/photos/a.468249213325329.1073741827.468241253326125/477126545770929/?type=1&theate>
- ¹² https://twitter.com/gadeer_alyasery/status/592712592642170881.
- ¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/468241253326125/photos/pb.468241253326125.-2207520000.1434092733./468241509992766/?type=3&theater>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/468241253326125/photos/pb.468241253326125.-2207520000.1434092733./468251596658424/?type=3&theater>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/468241253326125/photos/pb.468241253326125.-2207520000.1434092728./468573226626261/?type=3&theater>
- ¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/moondr2013/status/592238426105061376>
- ¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/KAMINDOZ/status/592405722773622784>
- ¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/morningsun17/status/593439695939436545>
- ¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/ROOTNETWORKORG/status/592603957119328256>
- ²⁰ <https://twitter.com/KAMINDOZ/status/593127293159022592>
- ²¹ <https://twitter.com/KAMINDOZ/status/594456811538776064>
- ²² "Discovery of 175 "Holy Defense" (Iran-Iraq War) Martyr Divers' Bodies with Tied Hands", Tasnim News, May 18, 2015, <http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/743763>
- ²³ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152928036890698&set=a.339222625697.152593.745470697&type=1&pnref=story>
- ²⁴ "Social Media's Users' Mourning for 175 Martyr Divers with Tied Hands", Etemaad Newspaper, May 23, 2015, http://etamadnewspaper.ir/Default.aspx?News_Id=15802
- ²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/rashidi.amir/posts/10205533647475080>
- ²⁶ <https://twitter.com/nima/status/601292373033877504>.
- ²⁷ https://www.facebook.com/Iranwire/photos/a.242344662578609.1073741828.214009095412166/691367484342989/?type=1&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D ; https://www.facebook.com/radio.farda/posts/10153330752333841?comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D
- ²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/KamyRMusic/posts/993409424016694>
- ²⁹ <https://twitter.com/PatriColaZero/status/601322669678710784>.
- ³⁰ <https://twitter.com/777sabz/status/601114307703648256>
- ³¹ "Media's Mischief over the Issue of 175 Martyr Divers", Fars News Agency, May 29, 2015, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940308000168>.
- ³² "Know the Real Killers of "those 175 people", Coalition of Iranian People & Iraq in Fighting American Baathists", Fars News Agency, May 23, 2015, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940302000882>