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Expulsion of the Muslim Brotherhood's Leadership from Qatar as reflected in SNS

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Qatar's declaration on September 12, 2014 that it would expel leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood from its territory, after links were discovered not only between the Brotherhood and Hamas but also, apparently, to Islamist forces in Syria and Iraq as well, was met with mixed feelings on social networking sites (SNS). The decision was made following intense pressure from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Egypt, each of whom considers the Muslim Brotherhood a threat to their respective national security, and expresses the desire of Qatar to placate its neighbors. Pressure from opposition elements within the Amir's family, who do not approve of his defiant political line, also contributed to this decision. However, it should be noted that the leadership of Hamas in Qatar was not deported.

The ties between Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood were established in the 1950s thanks to Qatar's readiness, as in other Gulf states, to provide the movement shelter from the terror of Gamal Abdel Nasser's regime. In the early 1980s, another wave of activists settled in Qatar after they were persecuted by the Syrian regime, and a third wave arrived in 2001, after being expelled from Saudi Arabia. The arrival of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1970s, as well as his proximity to Qatar's ruling circles, strengthened the country's relationships with the movement's activists.

The Qatari regime's romance with the Brotherhood peaked with the outbreak of the Arab Spring in late 2010 and early 2011, and in light of its rise to power in Tunisia and Egypt. Another major contribution was made by the activist foreign policy of Qatar's young ruler, Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, who seeks to leverage the influence of his tiny country and make it a leading force in the region. Al-Jazeera, the well-known Qatari satellite channel, serves as a megaphone for the Muslim Brotherhood (including Sheikh al-Qaradawi, who makes regular appearances), and is but one example of the good relationship that existed between the Brotherhood and Qatar.

Many liberal activists from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt expressed support for the expulsion of the Brotherhood's leadership from Qatar on SNS, and consider it an important step towards the eradication of terrorism in the region. For example, a Saudi user tweeted in response to the Brotherhood's expulsion,



Expelled leaders leaving Qatar

“The Kaaba of terrorists has crashed.” Another user from the UAE expressed hope that Turkey and Sudan would follow suit and expel Brotherhood activists from their nations. Many welcomed the rapprochement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, claiming that Qatar is a vital link in strengthening the unity and strength of the Gulf.¹ However, SNS also reveal doubts about Qatar's move, adding viewpoints to the discourse that were not heard on official channels. Users from Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE raised the possibility that Qatar is playing “double game.” Although it expelled of the Brotherhood from its territory to please its neighbors, in practice it continues to provide them financial and rhetorical support in other Muslim countries.²

Other Saudi users claimed that Qatar's actions are inadequate as long as it avoids expelling Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Saudi columnist Khaled Al-Zaatar, for example, said that severing the link between Qatar and Islamic political groups should be reflected primarily by the expulsion of al-Qaradawi, not just the Brotherhood's leadership. “As long as Doha sponsors al-Qaradawi, distancing the leaders of Muslim Brotherhood from Qatar is not an expulsion, but rather a transaction designed to calm the crisis in the Gulf states.”³ On the other hand, some users disagreed with this demand on the grounds that Sheikh al-Qaradawi cannot be expelled because he is a Qatari citizen.

Many users from the Gulf and Egypt expressed anger at Turkey's willingness to host the expelled leaders of the Brotherhood, and explained it as Turkish agitation against Arab regimes. A Kuwaiti user argued that this move represents Erdoğan's agreement to have Turkey become the Brotherhood's base of operations against the Egyptian regime, similar to its operations against the Syrian regime.⁴ A Kuwaiti publicist added, "Turkey is considered to be the largest supporter of Sunni Arabs and Gulf states. However, it is unfortunate that all of the Gulf countries, except Kuwait and Qatar, abhor the warming of their relations with Turkey because [it adopted] the ideology of the Brotherhood."⁵

Other users took advantage of American pop singer Lady Gaga's visit to Turkey to mock the alliance between the Erdoğan's regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. One noted derisively that the singer went to Turkey "to participate in the joyous festivities honoring the arrival of the Brotherhood in the capital of Erdoğan's caliphate after being expelled from Qatar..."⁶ Another Saudi publicist noted the Brotherhood's silence about the singer's arrival in Turkey and described it as hypocritical, since they recently lashed out at the UAE when she visited there.⁷

In contrast to these voices, the Brotherhood's supporters on SNS protested the decision to expel them and pointed an accusatory finger at Saudi Arabia. Dr. Kasib Al-'Utaybi stressed that, indeed, Qatar had made a wrong decision, but explained that it had done so under tremendous pressure.⁸ Other users noted, "The history of the Gulf will never forget the major role of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in eradicating the Muslim Brotherhood from the Gulf," and Qatar will never be forgiven for it.⁹ Yasser al-Za'atra, a publicist who supports the Brotherhood noted, "Saudi Arabia accepted the Muslim Brotherhood after it was expelled by Nasser's regime, but it is now acting to expel them even from other countries, because its top priority is fighting revolutions and Sunni political Islam."¹⁰ Sheikh Yousef al-Qaradawi himself expressed his disapproval of Qatar on his Twitter account: "Disappointed that a man turns against his friend and befriends the enemy!"¹¹

Discourse on SNS indicates a complex attitude towards Qatar. On the one hand, it is evident that neighboring countries want to embrace it and return the "Rebellious Sister" to the bloc of Gulf states in order, *inter alia*, to strengthen it in the face of immediate security concerns, particularly the Iranian threat. On the other hand, suspicions and doubts about the sincerity

of Qatar's intentions are also easily discernable: does Qatar intend to coordinate its policy with its neighbors and make peace with them, or does Qatar want to maintain its defiant, isolationist foreign policy that is detrimental to the security and interests of its neighbors. The discourse reveals a most profound aversion to the Erdoğan's regime in Turkey due to its willingness to back the Muslim Brotherhood. Turkey is seen as a partner in the Brotherhood's aspirations, first and foremost, to overthrow the current regime in Egypt.

Welcome to the "New Turkey"

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was elected to the presidency on August 10, after defeating the heterogeneous alliance that had rallied around the candidacy of Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. Erdoğan won a majority of 51.79% of the vote, and thus managed to avoid a second round of elections. Interestingly, SNS played a crucial role in both the election campaign and the in aftermath of the elections. Many Turkish analysts predicted Erdoğan's victory, in light of the broad support that he received on social networking sites, while his supporters celebrated his victory there as well. In the spirit of the constitutional role of the Turkish President as the "supreme commander of the Turkish state," analysts bequeathed the title, "Commander-in-Chief Recep Tayyip Erdoğan."¹²

In accordance with state protocol, immediately after the victory celebrations in the capital, Erdoğan visited the grave of the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In the spirit of tradition, Erdoğan was asked to write in the memorial book at the mausoleum. "The relationship between the people and its President was truncated after your death," Erdoğan wrote. He added that, "Today, with my election to the presidency by the people, the break is ended. Today a 'new Turkey' was born ..."¹³

Erdoğan's words are very important for a number of reasons. First, they indicate that, even at such a key moment, he refrained from attacking Atatürk, who is highly respected in Turkey's collective memory. Instead, Erdoğan preferred to criticize Atatürk's successors. Second, the slogan "New Turkey," though used during Erdoğan's previous campaign for prime minister, was now reinforced by his overwhelming victory in the presidential election. Furthermore, the location itself was especially weighted with symbolism. After all, Atatürk's

tomb represents the very heart of the “old Turkey.” In these circumstances, the slogan also echoed on SNS. His supporters called him “the founder of the new Turkey” and “our leader R. T. Erdoğan,”¹⁴ while his Kemalist opponents angrily retorted that “the Turkish Republic has only one founder, Atatürk.”¹⁵

Erdoğan’s somewhat pretentious claim to be the founder of the “New Turkey,” and the resultant SNS controversy, both point to the importance of charismatic leadership in Turkish culture. If during the First Republic an entire nation united around Atatürk, who was cloaked with the image of an invincible leader on the battlefield, it is today gathered around Erdoğan, who is emerging as an invincible leader in the political arena. In recent years, Erdoğan managed to successfully extricate himself from a series of challenges, including the Ergenekon affair (2007-2013), the riots in Gezi Park (2013), and a number of embarrassing corruption scandals at the highest levels (2013). Erdoğan, together with his supporters, were able to frame these as an attempted coup planned by the collusion of the reactionary military, secularists with international backing, and lastly his old ally Fethullah Gülen. His sweeping victory in the presidential election is therefore proof that the Turkish people choose to believe their leader, so that he could continue to lead.

Further evidence of the institutionalization of Erdoğan’s power in Turkey is the imminent dedication of a new presidential residence, called the White Palace (*Ak Saray*). The old presidential residence, Çankaya Köşkü, has served as the residence of Atatürk and all subsequent presidents of Turkey. Therefore the new palace represents an additional marginalization of the Kemalist legacy and ‘old Turkey’; it is tangible evidence of this shift.



Another important political development that occupied the SNS is the selection of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu as prime minister, probably at the expense of the incumbent, President Abdullah Gül. This does not surprise commentators, who have noted a deep rift between Erdoğan and Gül since the Gezi Park riots. Erdoğan’s harsh behavior during the riots and his ongoing conflict with Fethullah Gülen collided with the conciliatory line taken by Gül. On the other hand, Erdoğan’s actions had the implicit support of Davutoğlu, who spoke strongly against any phenomenon that would destabilize Erdoğan’s rule. Moreover,

Davutoğlu is an academic, with significant influence on the educated young people in AKP, who are considered the party's future. He is popular because of his support for the lower classes and is esteemed by the public for his tough foreign policy vis-à-vis Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem. All these factors played a role in Davutoğlu's selection. Meanwhile, Erdoğan's supporters were quick to embrace and praise the new prime minister, and hailed him as "the teacher" (Hoca).¹⁶

Erdogan's victory in his campaign for the presidency is both significant and symbolic, and the appointment of Davutoğlu without significant opposition within the party or other public arenas is proof that most Turks are united around their apparently invincible leader. Rallying around a strong leader is an expression of contemporary Turkish political culture; this reflects disgust and perhaps even trauma caused by the prevailing political and economic instability of the 1990s. That instability has produced a longing for a strong leader and more centralized power. Indeed, most of the parties that participated in the coalition prior to the ascent of AKP in 2002, have been punished for voters at the ballot box. The mood of the Turkish street shows, therefore, that Turkey is in the midst of a centralization process with ramifications at once for the political, social, media and economic arenas.

Responses to the Deteriorating Health of the Chairman of the Council of Experts, as an Expression of the Eroding Status of Clerics in Iran

Dr. Raz Zimmt

In early June, the chairman of the Council of Experts, Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani suffered a massive heart attack followed by a coma. The Council of Experts consists of 86 clerics and, under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, is responsible for monitoring the activity of the Supreme Leader, appointing his successor, and removing him from office if he is found no longer fit to continue in his role. Since the deterioration in Mahdavi-Kani's health, Iranian media reported some improvement in his condition but he is still in a coma, and there is considerable doubt concerning his prospects for recovery.

Shortly after the initial reports regarding Mahdavi-Kani's heart attack, thousands of Iranian users uploaded happy responses to SNS, in which they expressed the hope for his death and

ridiculed his serious condition. Many of them criticized the efforts made to improve his condition on the grounds that it is a waste of public funds. A few days after he lapsed into a coma, Iranian media reported that a senior Iranian-German surgeon Professor Majid Sami'i had come to Tehran to help treat the cleric. In response, an Iranian living in Germany wrote that poor young Iranians sell their kidneys to survive, while the Iranian people's money is spent on religious figures who benefit from the most expensive medical equipment and best-trained doctors in the world.¹⁷

The Facebook page of Mehdi Parpanchi, a writer for the BBC in Persian, was flooded with hundreds of angry responses from Iranian users, after he published that President Rouhani had visited Mahdavi-Kani in the hospital and called on the people of Iran to pray for his welfare. One user wished for his speedy demise, so that the cleric “does not occupy a bed in the hospital,” and another



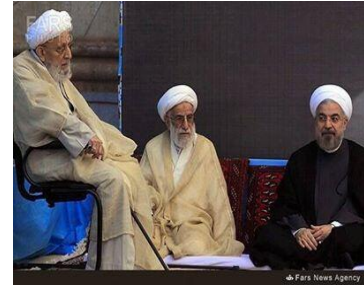
President Rouhani visiting Mahdavi Kani in the hospital

said that the people of Iran have no time to pray for him, since they need to pray for an improvement in the country's condition.¹⁸ Journalist and dissident blogger Mehdi Khazali received many supportive, online reactions after he posted strong words denouncing Mahdavi-Kani, describing him as an opportunist who used his position for personal profit, accumulating money and property while committing crimes against the people of Iran.¹⁹

Many users mocked the senior cleric's medical condition. A report published on the reformist website Kaleme on the severe brain damage suffered after the heart attack, provoked ridicule, like, “Is this fossil brain dead?” “He lived ninety years with a brain but didn't use it, so what's the difference?”²⁰ One user even proposed mummifying Mahdavi-Kani after his death and displaying him in the “Museum of Clerics,” to prevent his grave from becoming another place of pilgrimage.²¹

Moreover, many users were not satisfied with wishing for the death of Mahdavi-Kani alone, and wished for the death of other senior clerics, as well. One user wrote that the Iranians are praying that their country could be quickly be rid of all detrimental clerics, and another wondered when the turn of the Supreme Leader Khamenei would come.²² Responses also included many death wishes for the Secretary of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Ahmad

Jannati, a senior radical cleric who has become a subject of mockery because of his advanced age, 87. Hours before Mahdavi-Kani's heart attack, he participated alongside Jannati in a national ceremony commemorating the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Their joint appearance in similar attire provoked reactions from citizens who sarcastically claimed that Jannati had once again fooled Gabriel, the angel of death. One Twitter user tweeted the picture of Jannati and Mahdavi-Kani at the ceremony along with the caption: "Jannati cleverly succeeded in dressing like Mahdavi-Kani, defraud [the angel] Gabriel again and survive."²³



Mahdavi Kani and Jannati at the ceremony

Responses to the deteriorating health of Mahdavi-Kani can be considered as further evidence for the continuing erosion of the public status of Iranian clergy, and especially those actively involved in state affairs. Blogger Reza Taran, a religion student at the religious seminary in Qom, has been addressing the issue of the growing gap between Iranian public and the Islamic clerics in the personal blog he has been publishing in recent years. One of the trends the blog is following is the increasing alienation between citizens and the clergy since the Islamic revolution. Taran attributes this phenomenon to the fact that clerics are now identified with the regime and enjoy a relatively good economic status rather than living a modest lifestyle as they did previously, which distances them from ordinary citizens. Many of them are satisfied, he said, with giving Friday sermons in the mosques, have almost no regular contact with citizens and are more interested in inconsequential religious matters than the citizen's distress. This conduct causes many citizens to see them as government officials rather than representatives of religion.²⁴

In this spirit, and in response to the joy that the deteriorating health of Mahdavi-Kani caused Iranians, one user wrote: "Look at where society had gone where most people are happy with the death of clerics."²⁵ Another user explained the burning hatred of clerics by pointing out helplessness felt by Iranians citizens, who consider clerics' death the only way to get rid of them.²⁶ It can be assumed that the growing alienation between the people of Iran and the clerics will continue to be reflected in the future discourse on SNS. This alienation may further reduce the circle of supporters on which the Iranian regime is based

upon and threaten its stability, especially in the case of a major crisis, such as the death of Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.

¹ #ترحيل_الاخوان_من_قطر##قطر_ترحل_قيادات_الإخوان, #قطر_تطرد_قادة_الإخوان_من_أراضيها

² Ibid.

³ <https://twitter.com/khzaatar/status/510568298455371778>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/raedalfulaij/status/513248948359032834>;
<https://twitter.com/raedalfulaij/status/513249042118086656>

⁵ https://twitter.com/nasser_duwaitah/status/513318068282327042

⁶ https://twitter.com/Bahaa_Mohamed/status/512982241283420161
<https://twitter.com/twaqee3/status/512907588858425345>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/khzaatar/status/512994089839517697>

#ليدي_غاغا_في_تركيا

⁸ https://twitter.com/Dr_Kassab/status/510811494658101248

⁹ #قطر_تطرد_قادة_الإخوان_من_أراضيها

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/YZaatreh/status/510684322060189696>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/alqaradawy/status/510838385720561664>

¹² BaşKomutan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

¹³ Erdoğan'dan Anıtkabir'de önemli mesaj, Sabah, August 28, 2014,
<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2014/08/28/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-anitkabirde>

[Accessed on: September 11, 2014.]

¹⁴ Yeni Türkiye'nin kurucusu Önderimiz...RTErdoğan

¹⁵ Tek Reisi Cumhur vardır! O'da: "Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

¹⁶ Biz sana inanıyoruz Davutoğlu

¹⁷ <http://on.fb.me/1qXL5E9>

¹⁸ <http://on.fb.me/1yg6vyO>

¹⁹ <http://on.fb.me/1m9R1Uy>

²⁰ <http://on.fb.me/1qzjvev>

²¹ <http://on.fb.me/1yg6vyO>

²² <http://on.fb.me/1yg6vyO> <http://bit.ly/1nx02vY>

²³ <http://bit.ly/1nx02vY>

²⁴ <http://rezataran.ir/>. For additional analysis of the erosion in the status of clerics in Iran, see Raz Zimmt, "Is the status of clerics in Iran eroding? *Zman Iran*, No. 8 (11 September 2008) in Hebrew, at <http://bit.ly/1ygKHmD>. Also see Raz Zimmt, "The Return of the Eulogists to the Political Arena in Iran," *Iran Pulse* No. 64 (January 5, 2014); <http://bit.ly/1zBl3Lc>

²⁵ <http://on.fb.me/1m9MYrn>

²⁶ <http://bit.ly/1oVrhQI>