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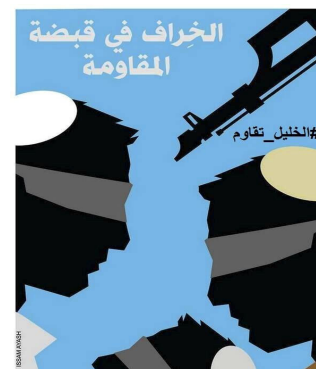
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Traitors and Terrorists: Abduction of the Teens and Operation Protective Edge as Reflected in Arab SNS

Michael Barak

Since the June 12 abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers, Gilad Shaar, Eyal Yifrach and Naftali Fraenkel, a gloomy, anti-Israeli wave, permeated with anti-Semitic motifs, has been washing over Arab social networking sites (SNS). It originated with Palestinian activists, particularly in the Gaza Strip, but also the West Bank. A major radicalization became evident on SNS after a Palestinian teen, Mohammad Abu-Khdeir, was murdered by three Jews. Then, it intensified further when Operation Protective Edge began. The fact that Arab states ignored the conflict between Hamas and Israel became 'a thorn in the side' of Hamas supporters on SNS, who interpreted this disregard as a Zionist-Arab plot. In light of recent events, Hamas has been subjected to ample, hateful criticism from users in various Arab countries. Users described Hamas as suffering from ideological blindness, as it is willing to risk war with Israel, and cause the destruction of the Palestinian people.

Palestinian surfers responded to the kidnapping of the three Israeli teens with expressions of joy on SNS. They launched a Twitter campaign titled "the Shalit trio," showing pictures of Palestinians defiantly wielding three fingers as a symbol of approval over the boys' abduction. Some users from Hebron, a city identified with Hamas, expressed pride that the kidnapers came from their city. These users called for capitalizing on the momentum in order to incite a general protest against Israel in other West Bank cities.



"Lambs" captured by the resistance

Mahmoud Abbas’ statement condemning the abduction: “The hostages are human beings, like us, they should be returned to Israel” provoked opposition on SNS. Hamas activists in the West Bank furiously asked how Abbas would dare to describe Israelis and Palestinians as equal human beings, especially when referring to the “occupying colonialist force.” Other Hamas-affiliated surfers claimed that this statement betrayed the Palestinian people, and that Abbas represents only himself.¹



The murder of Abu-Khdeir led to even greater extremism in online Palestinian discourse, including calls for retaliatory murders of settlers, and uploading pictures including anti-Semitic motifs (pictured).² A blatant attempt by Hamas to leverage the murder of the Palestinian youth for instigating unrest in the West Bank³ is also evident on social networks.

Adham Abu Salmiya, a Hamas activist from Gaza and spokesman for the National Committee to Break the Siege on Gaza, tweeted, “Residents of the West Bank are invited to join the revolution of anger against the occupier.”⁴ When Operation Protective Edge began and against the backdrop of IDF air strikes, surfers, mostly from Hamas, demanded an immediate halt to security coordination between the PA and Israel (pictured), and cancelation of the Oslo Accords. Hamas activists and supporters tried to stoke the flames and called on the masses to demonstrate in all West Bank cities— once the war was over – in order to oust Fatah and Abbas, who are collaborating with the enemy. Thus, this campaign exposes the desire of Hamas activists to exploit Operation Protective Edge as a means to regenerate the spirit of uprising in the West Bank cities. They hope to blacken the faces of the Palestinians involved in security coordination and lead to its complete collapse.⁵



Hamas' response to the ceasefire proposal

Concurrently, discourse on SNS reveals Hamas supporters' frustration with the feeble response of Arab states in the recent conflict. Throughout Operation Protective Edge, Arab states preferred not to take a clear stand in support of the Palestinians. For example, one surfer from Gaza noted that Israel's power in the current war is intensified by the Palestinian Arab leadership's blatant disregard for their people. This surfer believes it should



[Security] coordination – treason

be seen as a betrayal. In this spirit, the head of the Hamas propaganda ministry, Ehab Al-Ghussain declared the “death of the living Arab conscience, and the birth of a faded Arab conscience.” Other activists described the Arab leadership as courting Zionists. They expressed an especially profound distaste for the regime of Egyptian President Sisi and its support of Israel’s actions. Tamim Al-Barghouti, an Egyptian-born

Palestinian poet, called on the Egyptian people to get a grip on themselves: “Your government formed a military alliance with Israel and declared war on the Palestinian people as it did in 2008 [i.e., Operation Cast Lead].”⁶ The prevailing discourse claims that the ceasefire agreement proposed by Egypt should be considered as a plot involving the Israeli government, rather than an initiative meant to end the crisis. Therefore, it must be rejected outright.⁷

There are expressions of support for Hamas reflected in the creation of hashtags such as “Gaza under fire” and “The Eaten Chaff “(the name Hamas has given to the current conflict).⁸ However, Arab publicists and surfers, especially in Egypt, have directed harsh criticism at the Hamas leadership. They are charging Hamas with using and sacrificing their people for narrow interests. An Egyptian surfer wrote, “Hamas is wasting the aid given to the Palestinian people who suffer from hunger and lack of a roof.”⁹ A Saudi columnist, Salah Alhamoud, tweeted, “With the consent of its leadership, Hamas uses innocent infants and children as human shields. Has anyone heard that family members of a Hamas leader have been injured or killed?”¹⁰ A Saudi commentator, Muhammad Al-Sheikh, tweeted, “Hamas knew well that rejecting the Egyptian initiative meant that more Palestinians would die, but since when have those who claim to be Muslims consider human [life] more valuable than ideology?”¹¹ Other Egyptian activists noted that because the “gang of terrorists” is responsible for a series of attacks against Egyptian security personnel in Sinai and Egypt, there is no place to express solidarity with Hamas. Others stressed, “Egypt greatly aids the Palestinian people, providing humanitarian assistance in the form of medicine and food, but it is not prepared to respond to any dubious requests from Hamas’ terrorist leadership.”¹²

In conclusion, social networks serve Hamas as an important arena for public relations in the Arab, Muslim and Western worlds. Hamas identified the dramatic events in Israel and the territories, which began in mid-June, as an opportunity to incite the West Bank to destroy the security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The discourse in this period shows a significant deterioration in the status of Abbas and the Fatah leadership in the West Bank, especially in Hebron. It also exposes the tension between supporters of Hamas and supporters of the Egyptian leadership. The former consider Sisi and his colleagues as leaders who act on behalf of Israel, out of a desire to weaken Hamas. Conversely, there are voices in the Arab world, especially Egypt, who consider Hamas a terrorist movement motivated by the personal whims of its leadership. It attempts to promote narrow interests while immorally ignoring the good of its own people.

Turkish Politics in the Shadow of the Presidential Campaign and Operation Protective Edge

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak

The presidential elections in Turkey, scheduled for August 10, and the conflict between Israel and Hamas are the two main topics occupying Turkish social networks (SNS). The bylaws of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) do not permit Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to run for a fourth consecutive term as prime minister. Therefore, many in Turkey assumed he would act to ensure his continued control of the political arena. They thought he would do so by running for president, even though the office is currently, purely symbolic and lacks real political responsibility. These predictions were confirmed when Erdoğan publicly declared his candidacy for president on July 1.

Predictably, Erdoğan's race for president was preceded by intense activity that endeavored to create public discourse. It called for a change in Turkey's current parliamentary system to a presidential system. For this purpose, he encouraged many academics, journalists and political leaders to discuss the need for changing the system of governance in both print media and on television.¹³ The events of the last year, particularly the riots in Gezi Park (June 2013) and the corruption cases in government circles (December 2013), prevented Erdoğan from completing this reform, despite his efforts. However, his failure to change the system of governance did not prevent him from declaring that he has no intention of being a purely symbolic president. Rather, he aspires to be one with authority similar to the president of the United States. This concept is expressed, *inter alia*, by the fact that his campaign adopted a logo, which is not the general practice in Turkey but is in the US (pictured). From the moment Erdoğan's election logo was published, it became the focal point of Internet debate. His opponents claim that the logo copies that of Malibu Rum. While supporters not only reject this contention but also claim a religious aura for it, by noting that the Prophet Mohammed's name appears in the image behind Erdoğan's name.



As could be expected, supporters of Erdoğan provided momentum for his presidential candidacy, and many expressed their happiness on SNS. Some have already referred to Erdoğan by the title "Başkan," which is used for president in a presidential regime. Rather than using "Cumhurbaşkanı" which currently denotes the Turkish president, who only has a symbolic role. This title was a way of expressing their support for Erdoğan's ambition to continue having direct influence on decision-making in the country.¹⁴ Another way SNS were expressing support for Erdoğan was the adoption of a neo-Ottoman slogan: "He's not a candidate for the presidency but rather for the people's sultanate."¹⁵ Among the opponents of Erdoğan, this slogan is the subject of harsh criticism because it reflects his ambition to establish an autocracy in Turkey. This is evident in the steps he took during his current term

of office, and the fact that he was never questioned regarding the suspicions of corruption against him in the cases revealed during the last year.¹⁶

Another significant development in the Turkish presidential race is the merger of the two parties competing against AKP, the Kemalist CHP and the nationalist MHP. These parties, which represent opposite poles of the Turkish political spectrum, joined together to defeat Erdoğan and announced a joint candidate for the presidency. This candidate is Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the former chairman of the Organization of Islamic Conference and a graduate of Al-Azhar University in Egypt. İhsanoğlu's prestigious record makes him seem like a candidate capable of challenging Erdoğan and winning some of his potential voters. However, his religious background and the fact that he is not a well-known figure in Turkish society, makes it difficult for secular voters to identify with him. Indeed, despite support from some surfers,¹⁷ his candidacy never achieved significant resonance.

Also running is the chairman of the Kurdish HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş. Although the main battle is between Erdoğan and İhsanoğlu, the candidacy of Demirtaş is precedent-setting, as this is the first time a Kurdish politician, emphasizing his Kurdish identity, is running for the post. Surveys expect that Demirtaş will be defeated in the first round of balloting. Then, in the second round, it is likely that many Kurds will vote for Erdoğan, due to the peace process developing between the Kurds and the current Erdoğan government.¹⁸ This gives Erdoğan a clear advantage over İhsanoğlu.

Unsurprisingly, Operation Protective Edge is also influencing the presidential race in Turkey. After Erdoğan angrily left the 2009 Davos Summit, due to his first diplomatic confrontation with Israel, foreign policy has become a major source of leverage in the Turkish domestic arena. Erdoğan strode to enhance Turkey's image as a strong country that stands on its principles in the realm of international politics. This effort has bolstered his support in the electorate. Considering the current conflict between Israel and Hamas, Erdoğan recently declared that he is not interested in normalizing relations with Jerusalem, as long as Israel continues its current policy in Gaza. He strongly criticized MK Ayelet Shaked and compared her to Hitler, following her alleged comments on Facebook where she seemingly called for killing the mothers of Islamic martyrs and destroying their homes. Shaked stridently denied the claims. As part of the current presidential campaign, Erdoğan is continuing to use his strong stance against Israel to batter his opponents. For example, he attacked İhsanoğlu for his declaration that Turkey needs to maintain a neutral position in the Middle East, and serve as a fair arbitrator.

Erdoğan's statements and one-sided reporting in the Turkish media on Operation Protective Edge have caused many people on SNS to call for mass prayers on behalf of Gazans, and accuse Israel of war crimes. Moreover, İhsanoğlu was criticized on SNS for his neutrality.¹⁹ Surfers even designed a logo similar to that of Erdoğan but with a Star of David in the background.



Right: İhsanoğlu's original logo

Left: Logo designed by Erdoğan's supporters



The tense situation surrounding Operation Protective Edge exploded on SNS following tweets by the famous Turkish singer Yıldız Tilbe. In her tweets, she praised Hitler and justified it by the loss of Palestinian life caused by Israel. In another tweet, Tilbe said that ultimately “the Muslims will eliminate the Jews.”²⁰ Many Turkish surfers protested against Tilbe’s comments, but others expressed their support,

using the slogan “Good for you, Yıldız Tilbe.” These included the mayor of Ankara who re-tweeted some of her remarks.²¹

In conclusion, SNS are also playing an important role in the presidential race. However, unlike storms that characterized the last few months, a certain calm is now reflected on the networks. This could be because of the obvious advantage Erdoğan has over his rival İhsanoğlu. In addition, it is clear that Erdoğan seeks to continue exploiting Israeli-Palestinian violence for his own political needs. Finally, the increasing interest in Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Turkey is breeding expressions of anti-Semitism that find their way from SNS to the streets.

Internal Debate in Iran over International Jerusalem Day Processions

Dr. Raz Zimmt

On July 25, Iran marked International Jerusalem (Quds) Day with dozens of processions and rallies around the country. Since the Islamic Revolution (1979), International Jerusalem Day has annually been observed on the last Friday of Ramadan. Events are intended to express Iranian and Muslim support for Palestinians and their struggle to “liberate Jerusalem.” This year, on the eve of Jerusalem Day, occurring in the shadow of Operation Protective Edge, Iranian leaders called on citizens to join the processions *en masse* to show their support for the Palestinians in their fight against Israel. Joining the call this year is former president Mohammad Khatami, the Islamic Participation Front (one of the main reformist parties outlawed following the 2009 riots) and other organizations and leaders of the opposition.²²

Participation in Jerusalem Day processions presented a serious dilemma for reformists. On one hand, they wanted to express their support for Palestinians, especially considering the current events in Gaza. On the other hand, they had a deep concern that their participation in processions initiated by the authorities would be interpreted as support for the regime. Their participation might later be used by the regime to demonstrate its power and for other propaganda needs. In the background of top reformists’ call for participation, it should be noted that they were strongly criticized by the Iranian extreme right for their positions on Gaza. In recent weeks, conservative news sources have accused government and

reformist media outlets for inadequate coverage of the events in Gaza. For example, the conservative daily newspaper *Javan* published an editorial claiming that although the international media has placed Gaza at the top of its agenda, reformist papers have continued to deal with politics and sports, proving that they have abandoned Islamic and human values.²³

In the debate on SNS concerning the reformists' participation in Jerusalem Day processions, various arguments were raised regarding Iranian support for the Palestinians. Proponents of participation argued that the processions should not be considered an expression of support for the regime. Rather they are a basic human duty, especially when innocent Palestinians are being killed in Gaza. Mohammad Ali-Abtahi, former Vice President during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, used his Facebook page to call for broad participation in the processions. Abtahi noted that opposition to the crimes committed by Israel in Gaza is a human duty that should not be affected by attitudes towards the policies of the Iranian regime.²⁴ In the same spirit and following President Rouhani's call for citizens to participate in the processions, one user wrote on the president's Facebook page that he does not understand how Iranians fighting for their own freedom could refuse to demonstrate on behalf of the Palestinians who are dying for their freedom. Some users stated that they intend to participate in the Jerusalem Day processions for the first time this year because of the innocent Palestinian civilians who have been killed.²⁵



Conversely, opponents of participation claimed that there is no justification for participating in an event organized by the regime and exploited for political and propaganda purposes. Some users claimed that there is no connection between Jerusalem Day and support for the Palestinians. In support of this claim, they noted the authorities' refusal to allow non-governmental organizations and the reformist opposition to hold independent rallies supporting the Palestinians. "I'm ready to defend the oppressed Palestinian people every day except on Jerusalem Day. I wish this show was really intended to support the Palestinian people," wrote another. A different user said that he would be willing to participate in the processions, provided that the national media did not attribute the public's participation to its support for the Supreme Leader. In other words, many users stressed that they do not oppose the processions, only how the regime uses them for its own needs. One user wrote, "if they told me: Go to Gaza to die alongside its citizens, I would be more ready to do that than join these flamboyant processions."²⁶

Discourse around Jerusalem Day also led to reserved comments concerning Iranian support for the Palestinians. Many of them included the slogan, "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, I will sacrifice my life for Iran", A slogan adopted by opponents of the regime during the Reformist movement's protest. Users have expressed their opinion that Iran should not help

the Palestinians while its own citizens suffer from political repression and economic distress. Another user wrote that before the Iranians worry about Gaza they ought to give thought to their children who are forced to work from morning to evening, their wives selling their bodies, citizens' homes in southern Iran destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war that are not yet restored, the young people of Balouchi origin who suffer from poverty and oppression, and the political prisoners executed in prisons.²⁷

Many reactions on SNS included hostility toward Hamas, Palestinians and Arabs in general. Some users accused Hamas of using Gaza civilians as human shields. While others emphasize that even though they consider Hamas a terrorist organization, it does not justify Israel's crimes, such as killing four children on a Gaza beach.²⁸ Many users justified their opposition to helping the Palestinians with historical arguments. For example, the Palestinians' support of Iraq in its war against Iran in the 1980s, and their failure to support Iranian citizens during the bloody riots that erupted in summer 2009. One user said he hates Israel, but assumes that a Palestinian state, if established, would take a hostile stance towards Iran, similar to Saudi Arabia, because the Arabs do not care about Iran.²⁹ A few users even expressed reservations about the extremist slogans displayed at Jerusalem Day processions every year, wishing for the death of Israel and the United States. They argued that this incitement serves the extremists in Israel who want to attack Iran and does nothing to help the Palestinian struggle.³⁰

SNS public discourse on Jerusalem Day shows the complexity of the Iranian public's opposition to Israel. Hostility to Israel is one issue which Iran's revolutionary policy remains consistent and uncompromising. Even so, in recent years nascent change in Iranians' attitude to Israel is evident, especially given the perception that the Iranian people have more urgent and important concerns than the Palestinian problem and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general. Indeed, the reformist position expressed criticism and hostility toward Israel and its policies towards the Palestinians. However, it also reflected criticism and even disapproval of exploiting the Palestinian issue for the regime's propaganda and political needs. They expressed the opinion that Iranian authorities should give preference to its own citizens, rather than supporting the Palestinians.

¹ #مي_وملح, #ثلاث_شاليليط

² #فتى_القدس, #DontBurnOurBoys

³ For more on this see, Harel Horev, "On Edge of Time: Hamas' Strategic Move," Tzomet, July 9, 2014 [Hebrew]. http://www.dayan.org/sites/default/files/Tzomet_Chorev_Hamas_Strategic.pdf

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/adham1987/posts/33411223407610>

<https://twitter.com/adham922>

⁵ #التنسيق_خيانة, #عباس_لا_يمثلني, #الضفة_تتنقض, #الضفة_تقاوم, #الخليل_تقاوم

⁶ <https://twitter.com/TamimBarghouti>

⁷ #مبادرة_العروضات, <http://goo.gl/7j4gQS>

⁸ #العصف_المأكول#غزة_تحت_القصف

⁹ <https://twitter.com/RoroDivel/status/487763644105891841>

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- ¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/BinHomoud/status/487861943038795776>
- ¹¹ <https://twitter.com/alshaihmhmd/status/491513935456382976>
- ¹² <http://goo.gl/io858d> , # العدو_اسمه_حماس , # اقفلوا_حدود_رفح_المصرية , # حماس_تركت_غزة_تحت_القصف
- ¹³ “Bu ülkede başkanlık sistemi tartışılmalı”
<http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/bu-ulkede-baskanlik-sistemi-tartisilmali/35719#1> Accessed on July 16, 2014
- ¹⁴ #YeniTürkiyeninBaşkanı, #YeniTürkiyeninBaşkanı, #ÇankayayaYakışan RecepTayyipErdoğan, #CumhurBaskanıRTEHayırlıOlsun, #AdayımızErdoğan, #RTEDiyeYazılır ReisiCumhurDiyeOkunur, ReisiCumhur Tayyip Erdogan#
- ¹⁵ Cumhurun Başkanlığına değil Cumhurun Padişahlığına aday, ÇankayayaYakışan RecepTayyipErdoğan, ONA BAKANLAR OSMANLIYI GORUYOR
- ¹⁶ #RecepTayyipErdoğan, #KanunVarHukukYok
- ¹⁷ #EkmekicinEkmeleddin
- ¹⁸ See, Hay Eytan Cohen Yanaracak, “Rallying around the Flag: Ups and Downs in the Peace Process between Ankara and the Kurds,” *Beehive*, Volume 2, No. 6 (June 2014).
<http://www.dayan.org/sites/default/files/%20%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%99%20-%20%D7%97%D7%99%20%D7%A8%D7%96%20%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%90%D7%9C.pdf> Accessed last on July 22, 2014.
- ¹⁹ #SesVerÜmmetGazzeYanıyor #GazgedeKatliamVar #Gazze #GazaUnderTheAttack #GazzeİçinDuaVakti #GazaUnderFire #İsrailGazzedenDefol
- ²⁰ “Yıldız Tilbe’nin Yahudi Tweetleri tepki çekti”, *Sözcü* July 11, 2014
<http://sozcu.com.tr/2014/magazin/yildiz-tilbenin-yahudi-tweetleri-tepki-cekti-553589> (Accessed in: July 18,2014)
- ²¹ #HelalOlsunSana #YıldızTilbe
- ²² <http://bit.ly/1nXpR3R> ;<http://bit.ly/1kXP2U3>.
- ²³ <http://bit.ly/1nkt961>.
- ²⁴ <http://on.fb.me/1kY2tn0>.
- ²⁵ <http://on.fb.me/UvilG9>.
- ²⁶ <http://on.fb.me/1kY2tn0>.
- ²⁷ <http://on.fb.me/UvilG9> .
- ²⁸ <http://on.fb.me/1nXBpUK>
- ²⁹ <http://on.fb.me/1nXBpUK> ;<http://on.fb.me/1kY2tn0> ;<http://on.fb.me/UvilG9>.
- ³⁰ <http://on.fb.me/1pLHs1v> ;<http://on.fb.me/1kY2tn0> ;<http://on.fb.me/UvilG9>.