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# ARAB PEOPLE'S APPROACH TO ISRAELI POLICIES TOWARD PALESTINIANS: A TWITTER ANALYSIS STUDY ON SHEIKH JARRAH CRISIS

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## ARAB PEOPLE'S APPROACH TO ISRAELI POLICIES TOWARD PALESTINIANS: A TWITTER ANALYSIS STUDY ON SHEIKH JARRAH CRISIS

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## INTRODUCTION

**I**sraeli politics has been undergoing significant difficulties for more than two years. The Israelis went to the polls on March 23, 2021 for the fourth early elections in the last two years. The previous elections were postponed due to the problems experienced in forming a government under the leadership of Netanyahu and were held on 9 April 2019, 17 September 2019 and 2 March 2020. This situation is related to the structure of the Israeli electoral system and its electorate profile, as well as to the policies implemented by the Netanyahu government.

### ISRAELI PALESTINIAN POLITICS UNDER NETANYAHU SINCE 2009

The election of Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu as the country's prime minister in

2009 was one of the important turning points in the Israeli-Palestinian issue. He has been elected as the Prime Minister of Israel many times, remaining in office for the past twelve years. This situation caused Netanyahu to consolidate his power in the political structure of the country. Netanyahu is the second most supported political leader in Israel after David Ben-Gurion, which was the primary national founder of Israel and the first prime minister of country.<sup>1</sup> His supporters considered Netanyahu as the only leader, among the current candidates in Israeli politics, with the ability to ensure Israel's security and to best defend the country in a hostile neighborhood. This support has meant increasingly difficult conditions for Palestinians to survive during Netanyahu's terms.

<sup>1</sup> Scheindlin, Dahlia, Ten Years with Netanyahu Maintaining Israel, the Conflict – and Himself, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, International Policy Analysis, January 2017, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/13126.pdf>.



## MAINTAINING OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT/ OCCUPATION



Protest against Israel in Jerusalem.

Netanyahu has in fact adopted very clear yet contentious ideological positions on security affairs aimed at feeding into the perspective that Israel is fighting for its survival, which are shared by many Israeli voters. After the conflicts between Arab countries and Israel during the Cold War (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973) Israel relatively guaranteed its borders on many fronts, which subsequently led it to concentrate on its domestic policies, especially the settlements policy regarding Palestinian land. While this situation irreversibly damaged the two-state solution, it also worsened the living conditions of Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank, and the way in which they are treated by the Netanyahu administration. Due to Iran's nuclear efforts and especially to the rise of Iran and Iran-affiliated groups in Syria after the start of Syrian crisis, Iran came to the fore in Israeli policies and the Palestinian issue was pushed into the background.<sup>2</sup> In this context, Netanyahu's actions emerged as a

tactical and short-term response to the conflict, rather than attempts to resolve the main issues at the core. Theoretical support for a two-state solution based on the pre-1967 borders is interrupted by Israel's actions in the West Bank and in Gaza, which have eroded the potential for a two-state solution.

Netanyahu's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is actually a manifestation of an existential threat. Thus, in Netanyahu's view, Palestinians' approach to Israel is not related with Israel's policies, but rather guided by a hatred toward the State of Israel and the Israelis. During his terms, Netanyahu half-heartedly engaged in ineffective negotiations with the Palestinians. Meanwhile, Israeli settlements in the occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank emerged as one of the most fundamental problems regarding the Palestinian issue. His coalitions also usually included parties who are even further to the right and openly

<sup>2</sup> International Crises Group, Israel, Hizbollah and Iran: Preventing Another War in Syria, Middle East Report, No: 18, 8 February 2018, [https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/182-israel-hizbollah-and-iran-preventing-another-war-in-syria\\_0.pdf](https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/182-israel-hizbollah-and-iran-preventing-another-war-in-syria_0.pdf).

oppose a Palestinian state, as well as centrist parties who support it only in theory rather than in practice. As a result, the diplomatic process has failed or stalled.

According to the Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention<sup>3</sup>, in terms of international law, Israel should not resettle its own civilian population in the Palestinian territory. Thus, all Jewish settlements in the region are considered illegal. However, it is known that as a result of the settlement policies implemented by Israel, the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank is increasing, which is around 500 thousand today.<sup>4</sup> The settlers living in these places, whose electricity, water and other services are provided by Israeli companies, continue their lives in the region with their economic, religious and nationalist motives intact. This situation causes tensions between the legal owners of the area—the Palestinians, and the Israeli settlers; and these tensions range from verbal threats, theft or destruction of private property, blocking of access to these properties, to attacks on agricultural lands, mosques and the Palestinians living in the area. This situation had two major consequences for the Israelis. One is the declining prospects of the Israelis for a two-state solution due to the deepening separation between Gaza and the West Bank, in the face of the increasing occupation of Palestinian land in the West Bank. Advocators for a two-state solution based on the pre-1967 borders are a minority in Israel today. The second major consequence is the

fact that violence on a daily basis has become the usual method employed by the Israeli security forces against Palestinians, especially in Gaza. Operation Cast Lead (from late 2008 to early 2009), Operation Pillar of Defense (2012)<sup>5</sup>, Operation Protective Edge (2014)<sup>6</sup> and Operation Guardian of the Walls (2021)<sup>7</sup>: all of these operations reflect the above-mentioned violence by the Israeli security forces against the Palestinians.

It can be pointed out that Israel, under the leadership of Netanyahu, has been acting more nationalistic, hostile, and with more ethnocentric and uncompromising tendencies, both at the administrative and public level. Netanyahu has increasingly provoked the already-existing anti-Palestinian front in the country by imposing his approaches on the Israeli society at every opportunity. He believes that this method will also suppress criticism from the civil society and aims to act more comfortably in the political arena by assuming a special position within a political structure that has lost its ability to criticize. The picture that emerged from the elections in Israel on 23 March 2021, once again sheds light on the deadlock and fragmentation experienced by the conflict-worn Israeli people. In this context, it is seen that no political power has been able to pose a political challenge to Netanyahu during the election process in the last two years. For this reason, despite four early elections in the last two years, the task of forming a government, which was given primarily to

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of War of 12 august 1949, [https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.33\\_GC-IV-EN.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Al Jazeera, Israeli settler attacks surge against Palestinians, 18 March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> B'Tselem The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Human Rights Violations during Operation Pillar of Defense, 14-21 November 2012.

<sup>6</sup> B'Tselem The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 4.5 years after Israel destroyed thousands of homes in Operation Protective Edge: 13,000 Gazans still homeless, 03 March 2019.

<sup>7</sup> B'Tselem The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Killing blockaded civilians and destroying infrastructure on a massive scale: Israel is committing war crimes in the Gaza Strip, 15 May 2021.



Likud leader Netanyahu, could not be carried out successfully and the political crisis in the country continued for a while.

Following Netanyahu's inability to form a government, the task of forming a government was given by Israeli President Rivlin to Yair Lapid, the leader of the Yesh Atid Party.<sup>8</sup> The Israeli operation launched in Gaza after Lapid took on the task of forming a government was interpreted by some circles as the disruption of Lapid's ongoing efforts to form a new government. During this process, Lapid pointed out the necessity of establishing a government that includes members from the right, the left, and the center. To overcome this deadlock in Israeli politics, Israeli opposition parties reached a coalition agreement to form a government and oust Benjamin Netanyahu, the longest-serving prime minister in Israeli history and a dominant figure who has pushed his nation's politics to the right. Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid informed Israeli President Rivlin on 2 June that he was able to form a government. In this government he and Naf-tali Bennett, the leader of Yamina Party, would serve in a rotating premiership. Although the process may entail some difficulties given that there are eight parties coming together to build the coalition and that an Arab party is first time in the country's history in the formation of a government, all this was done to replace Israel's longest-serving leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Even though Netanyahu convinced the majority of the Israelis during his term that his policies were indispensable for Israel's security, it is obvious that some Israelis understand that the country is far from the environment of peace it actually needs.

## Arab-Israeli Normalization Process

In the last months, the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region has witnessed a normalization process in Arab-Israeli relations, which involved Arab countries whose lands had never been threatened by the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt, as one of the most-involved country to the Arab-Israeli conflict, signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, followed by Jordan, who established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1994. The recent normalization process began when the UAE and Israel signed the *Abraham Accords* in August 2020. Soon after, the UAE was followed by Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.<sup>9</sup> Iran's strong presence in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen increased Gulf states' need for American support and protection. This led the US to put more pressure on these countries and to normalize its relations with Israel to fight together against the Iranian presence on the region. In addition to the similar attitudes of the countries who signed normalization agreements with Israel against Iran, there are also national reasons at play. In terms of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, it can be said that this agreement is an effort to gain legitimacy after the painful processes of state-building by these countries. Considering the top-down policy implementation in these countries and the gap between the peoples and governments at the administrative level, it is obvious how much these countries need the political support of the international actors. As a matter of fact, Sudan, which took steps toward normalization with Israel, was rewarded by the US embassy in Khartoum with the removal thereof from the terrorism list after decades. On the other hand, Morocco was experiencing sovereignty issues over the entire West-

<sup>8</sup> BBC News, Israel: Netanyahu rival Lapid asked to form new government, 5 May 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Anadolu Agency, How US bribed Arab states to normalize ties with Israel, Mohammed al-Ragawi, Mohamed Amin, and Mohanad Abujehesha, 13 January 2021.

ern Sahara territory. The US administration declared that it would recognize Morocco's sovereignty in Western Sahara in return for its normalization with Israel. This has been an important factor in the normalization process of Morocco with Israel. Finally, the UAE does not consider itself as an engaging country in the international community and popular in the Arab countries. Therefore, decision-makers in the UAE believe that obtaining the protection of the Israeli lobby would strengthen the UAE's influence in the region. On the other hand, it can be concluded that these countries gained direct benefits through strengthening their relations with the US. Also, if these countries will acquire some security and military systems from Israel in the future, this amity will bring more concrete security gains for these countries in a fragile region.

Israeli violence against the Palestinians during Operation Guardian of the Walls and the subsequent reactions Israel received from the countries with which it had signed normalization agreements brought the question into mind whether the normalization process between Israel and these Arab countries would progress at a realistic level. It is impossible to claim that both the aforementioned Arab countries and Israel thought that the process would go smoothly during the agreement process given the Arab people's support to the Palestinian cause. We also see that the people of Arab countries, which have normalized their relations with Israel, are among the people of the region disturbed the most by the recent escalation of tension between Israeli forces and the Palestinians.

# ARABS STANCES TOWARD THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT DURING SHEIKH JARRAH CRISIS: A TWITTER ANALYSIS STUDY



## 1. The Context:

The Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of the three holiest sites in Islam, has long been a symbol of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Since the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan (April 13<sup>th</sup>) and for several weeks thereafter, the situation had been tense in Jerusalem due to Israel's restrictions on Palestinian access to parts of the Old City.

There are some reasons behind the tensions experienced. One important reason was the actions taken by Israeli forces against Palestinian families living in the Sheikh Jarrah region of East Jerusalem. On the last Friday of Ramadan (May 7, 2021) which marks the International Jerusalem Day, tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians had mounted in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank as nightly clashes took place in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, where numerous Palestinian families were facing eviction in a long-running legal case to make way for Israeli settlers. While the aforementioned

Palestinian families have claimed that they bought these houses from the Jordanian authorities, these claims are tried to be refuted by the citizens of Israel over historical motives. The Israelis are arguing that Palestinians have unlawfully confiscated these houses after the 1948 War. Thus, in January 2021, the court decided that the houses already inhabited by dozens of Palestinians actually belonged to Jews and therefore had to be evacuated. However, after the families appealed to a higher court, the decision was repeated. In the last period, Palestinian families were expected to evacuate these houses after the decision, which coincided with the Quds Day in March. This situation led to some minor confrontations between the Palestinians and Israelis, further increasing the already existing tension in the region. The confrontations became more violent when the Israeli police used tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades against stone-throwing Palestinians, causing numerous injuries among the Palestinians. In response to the continuing violations by the Israeli security forces in the Tem-

While the aforementioned Palestinian families have claimed that they bought these houses from the Jordanian authorities, these claims are tried to be refuted by the citizens of Israel over historical motives. The Israelis are argumenting that Palestinians have unlawfully confiscated these houses after the 1948 War.

ple Mount complex and Sheikh Jarrah; Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad began firing rockets to Israel from the Gaza Strip, hitting multiple Israeli cities and settlements. Israel, in turn, launched a series of airstrikes against Gaza, where many civilian casualties occurred among the Palestinians, including children.

It is also possible to make sense of the latest developments in the context of delayed Palestinian elections, which were planned to be held on May 22, 2021. The presidential elections to be held by the Palestinian Authority in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem on May 22, 2021, were expected to be rescheduled to 31 July 2021. The last election, which was held in 2006, voting was conducted in all Palestinian regions including East Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority requested to hold legislative elections also in East Jerusalem similar to the last election. As Israel has hesitated to respond to the Palestinian request, the possibility of Palestinian citizens living in East Jerusalem to participate in the elections has disappeared. This development caused that the Palestinian administration had to announce that the elections were postponed. This situation, which created new problems for the national image of Israel in the international public opinion, also emerged as a new issue of

tension between the Palestinians and Israel. In conjunction with the intensified incidents on the ground, and despite the unfair restrictions imposed by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter on any content related to the Palestinian cause, Twitter was intensively used by the Arabs to report what was happening in Palestine, to spread information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to express the Arabs stance toward the Palestinian cause. In this study, we explore the Twitter platform during the period (May 7<sup>th</sup> - May 19<sup>th</sup>) to track, collect and classify the opinions of the Arabs toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the Sheikh Jarrah crisis and the recent exchange of missiles between military forces in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

## 2. Opinion Analysis Methodology:

As seeking to capture the first impressions of the Arabs toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestinian cause in general, we opted to investigate the Arabic tweets posted between May 7 and May 19, 2021 which was the last day of bombardments before the UN (United Nations) announced a ceasefire to be implemented on May 21. The tweets were scraped using Twitter API (Application Programming Interface) based on several hashtags listed in Table (1).

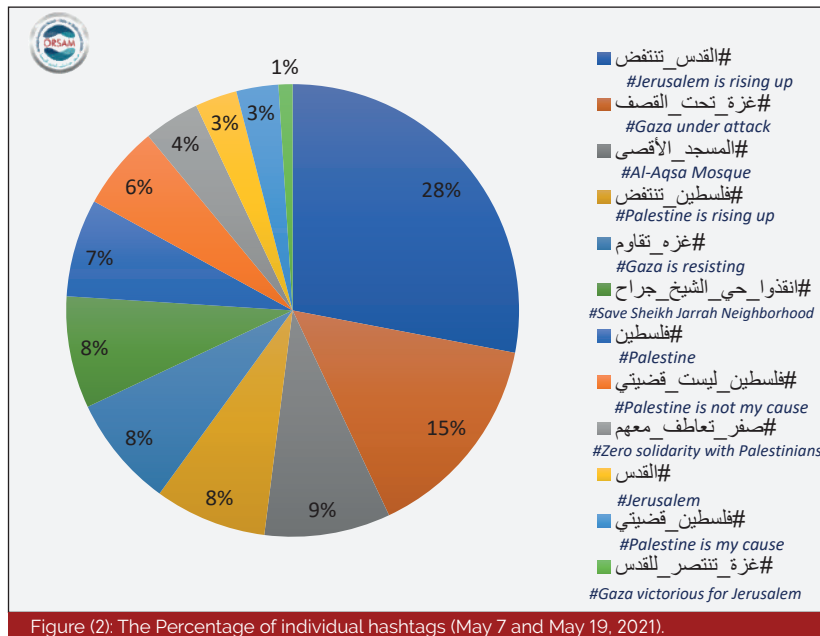
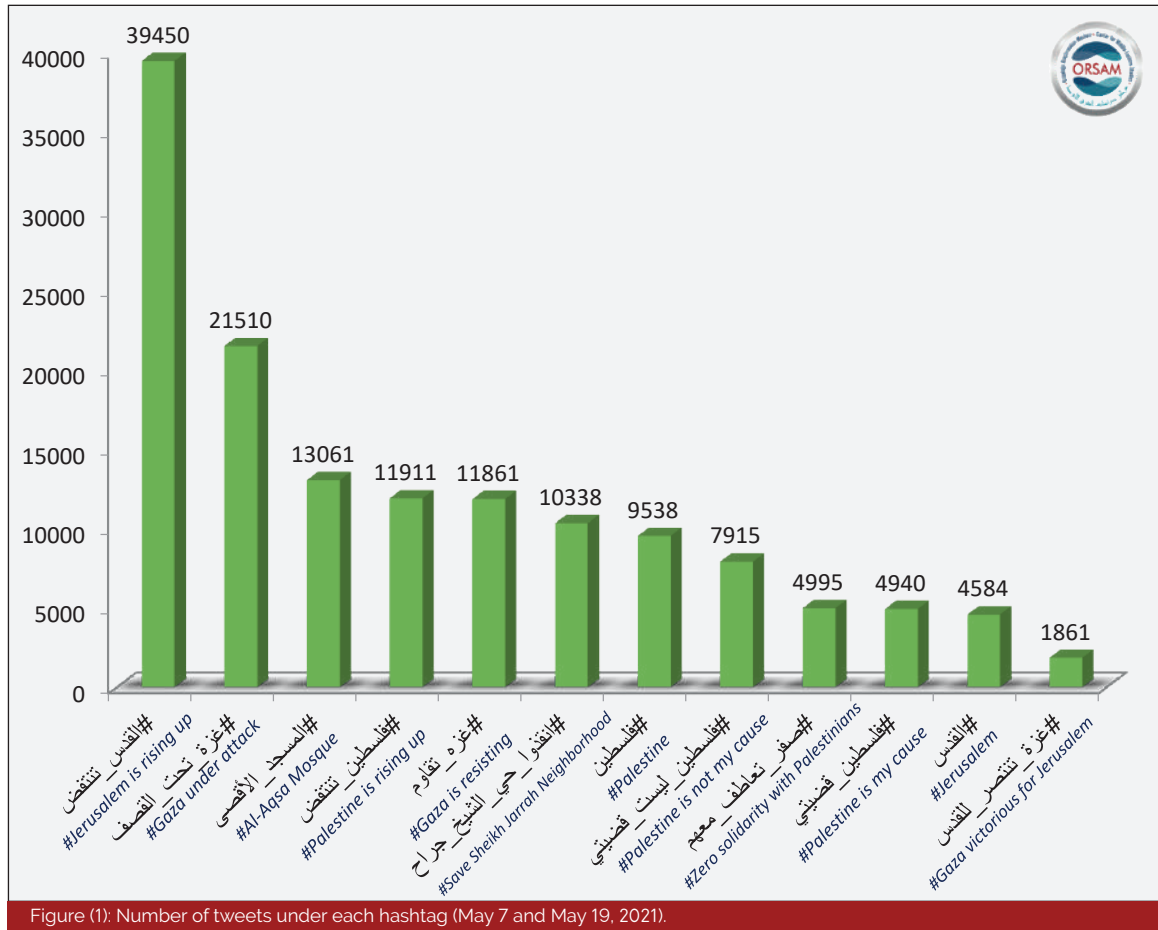


Table (1): List of the hashtags used to collect the data from Twitter

| Hashtags            | Hashtag/Keyword (English)          |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| #القدس_تنتفض        | #Jerusalem is rising up            |
| #غزة_تحت_القصف      | #Gaza under attack                 |
| #المسجد_الأقصى      | #Al-Aqsa Mosque                    |
| #فلسطين_تنتفض       | #Palestine is rising up            |
| #غزه_تقاوم          | #Gaza is resisting                 |
| #انقذوا_حي_الشيخ    | #Save Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood   |
| #فلسطين             | #Palestine                         |
| #فلسطين_ليست_قضيّتي | #Palestine is not my cause         |
| #صفر_تعاطف_معهم     | #Zero solidarity with Palestinians |
| #فلسطين_قضيّتي      | #Palestine is my Cause             |
| #القدس              | #Jerusalem                         |
| #غزة_تنتصر_للقدس    | #Gaza victorious for Jerusalem     |

The collected raw **Twitter** data contained 589,249 tweets; after applying the required normalization and reducing the irrelevant content, objective (opinion-free) tweets, and Ads, we ended up with a collection of **48,000**

**subjective tweets**. The previous hashtags were unevenly distributed among the normalized collection of tweets as can be seen in Figure (1) and Figure (2).

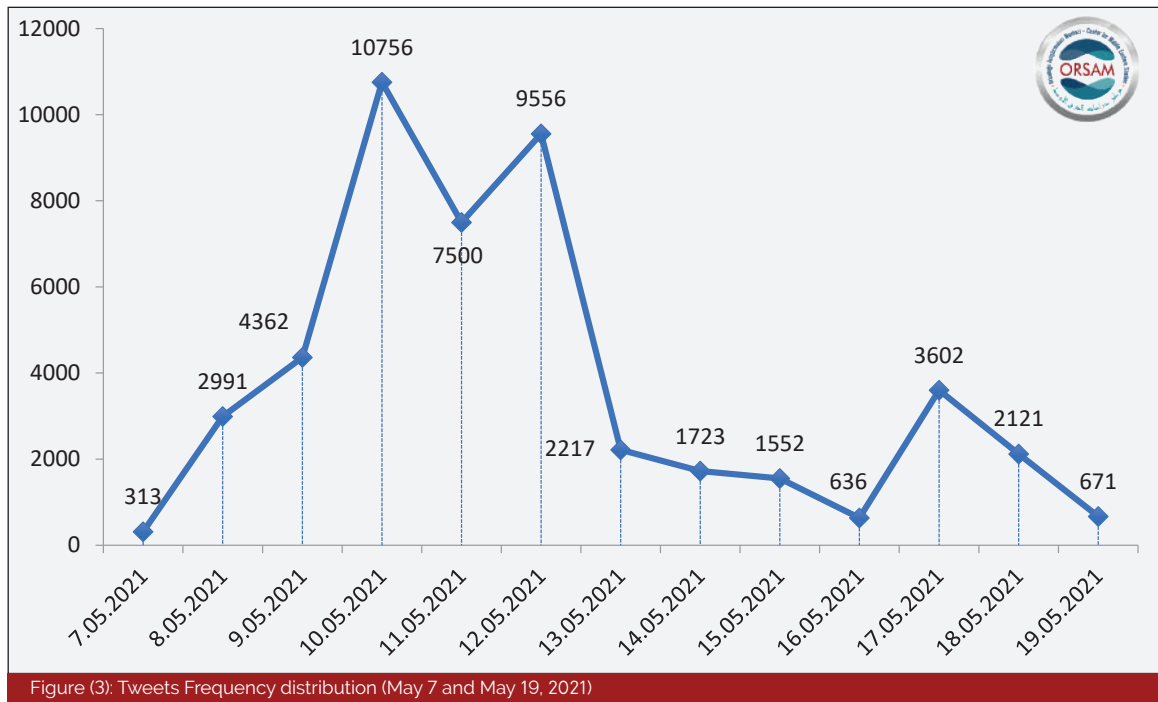


The opinion analysis or stance classification was then carried out using a machine learning-based model developed by the technical team at ORSAM to recognize the stance embedded in Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic/Dialectal) tweets.

### 3. Tweets Frequency Analysis:

Looking at the 48,000 tweets analyzed in this study, as seen in Figure (3), the interaction toward the recent Israeli-Palestinian clashes started right after the first violent confrontations on **May 7, 2021** (the last Friday of Ramadan) in which the Israeli security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades against stone-throwing Palestinians. In the next few days (**May 8 - May 10**), the interaction increased remarkably, achieving a climax on May 10 with more than 10,000 tweets (21% of the studied tweets). This was expected as **May 10, 2021** is the day when Hamas put into action its warning to Israel by bombing Israeli settlements and cities as a response to the non-stop acts of violence by the Israeli forces in the Al-Aqsa and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. While the situation on the ground significantly escalated with the intensification of exchange of missiles between Hamas/Ji-

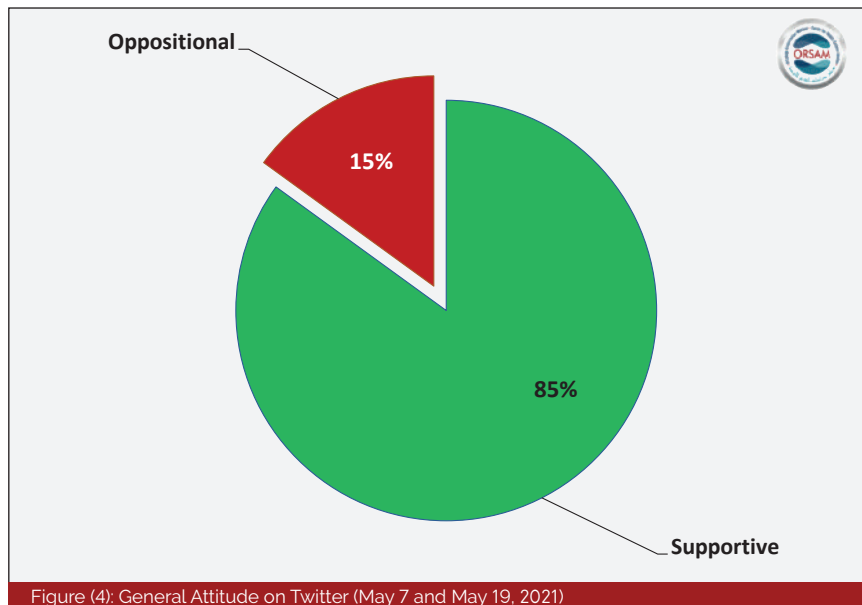
had and the Israeli forces, the tweeting frequency was volatile. As seen in Figure (3), the tweeting frequency decreased a little on **May 11** while it increased again on **May 12** then drastically decreased throughout the period (**May 13 - May 16**). This could be explained by the unfair banning and restriction policies of Twitter on any content related to Palestine, where some accounts tweeting about the incidents in Palestine or hosting discussions about Palestine were suspended. Later, on **May 17**, more interaction with nearly 3,000 tweets was spotted in conjunction with the declarations of the spokesman of the Israeli army, where he stated that the pace of operations in Gaza would be increased and new targets would be hit. Although the exchange of missiles between Hamas and Israel continued throughout May 18 - May 19, the tweeting frequency kept decreasing, reaching a minimum value on **May 19, 2021** because by the end of the day, Democrats in the US House of Representatives presented a bill to stop the arms sale to Israel and there were leaks about indirect negotiations under Egyptian mediation for a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel was implemented on **21 May 2021**, ending 11 days of fighting with both sides claiming victory.



#### 4. Tweets Opinion (Stance) Analysis:

Using the opinion analysis model, the stances embedded in the studied tweets toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestin-

ian cause could be classified as either **oppositional** or **supportive**. Figure (4) shows the general attitude toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Palestinian cause in terms of percentage values for both stance categories.

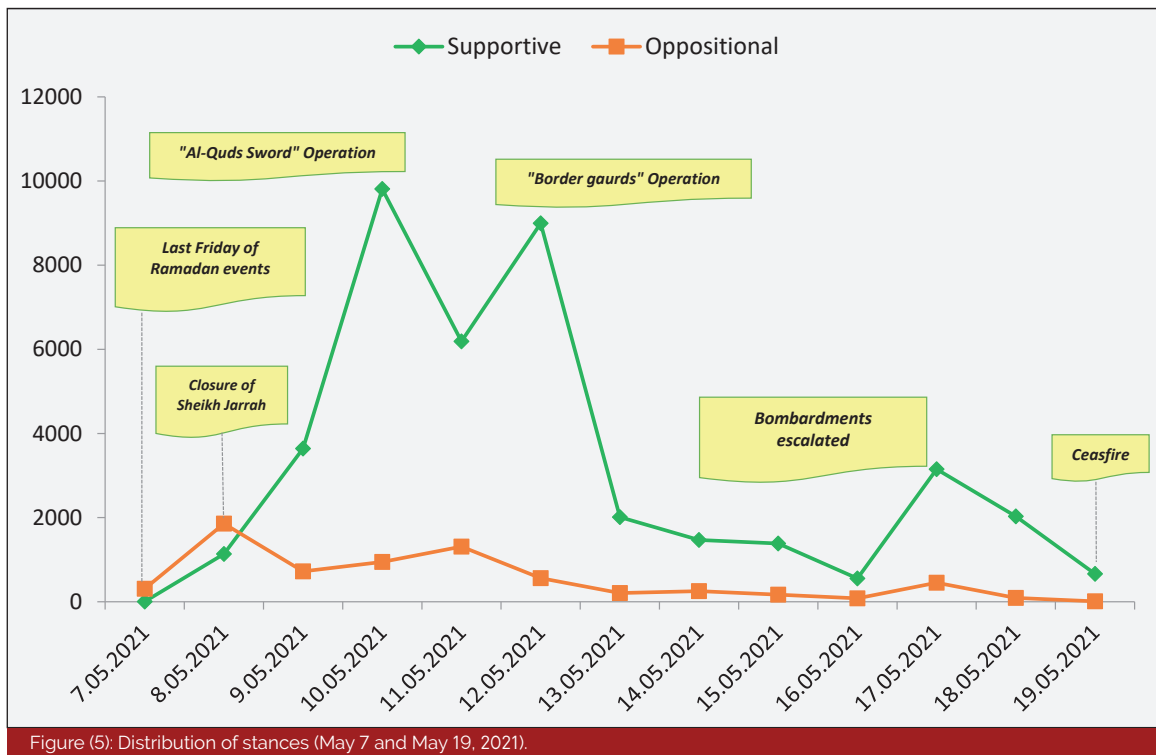


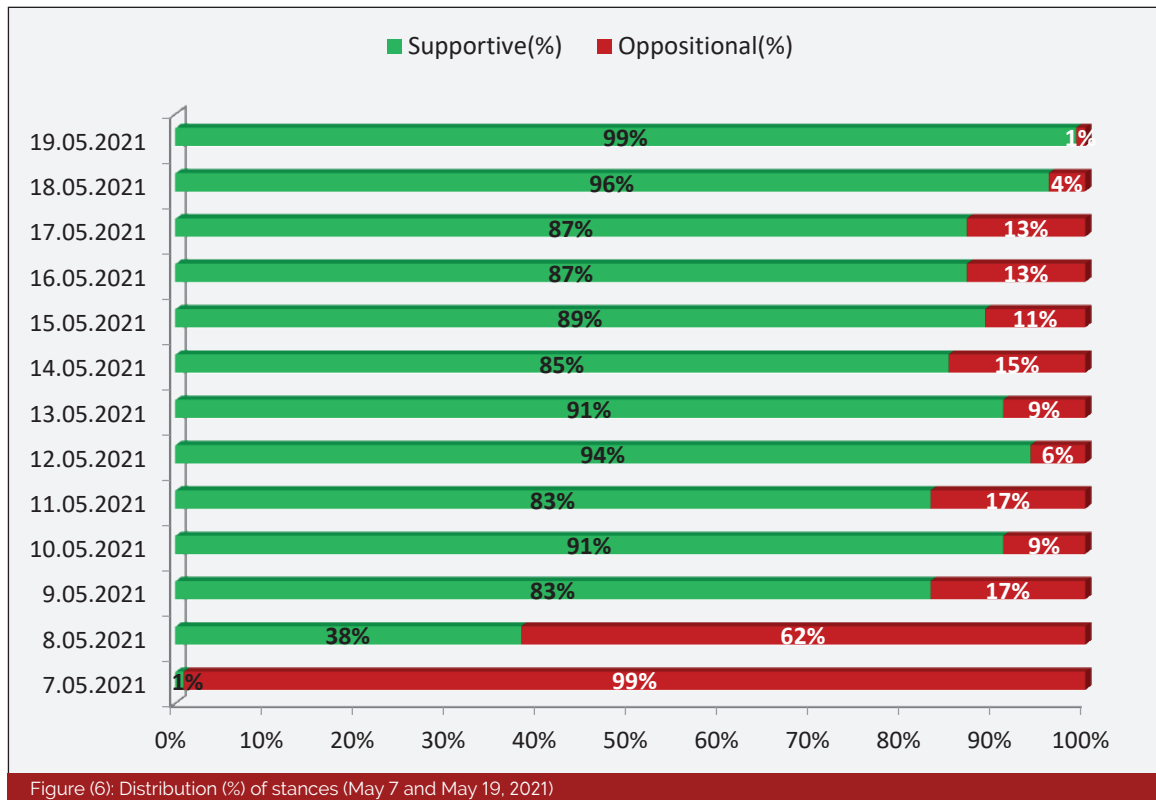


As seen in Figure (4), the Supportive stance was dominant among the collected tweets with a percentage value of 85%. This indicates that despite the recent normalization deals between Israel and some Arab countries (the UAE [United Arab Emirates], Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco), the majority of the Arab people are still considering the Palestinian cause as their main concern. They also support the Palestinian's right to pray in the Al-Aqsa and oppose the eviction policy by the Israelis, who are seizing Palestinians' homes in Sheikh Jar-

rah. On the other hand, although pro-UAE/ Saudi accounts supported by swarms of bots launched their anti-Palestinian hashtags and drowned them with tweets that accused Palestinians of being terrorists claiming that Israel seeks peace in the region, the oppositional stance barely represented 15% of the collected tweets.

On the other hand, Figure (5) and Figure (6) show the distribution of contradicting stances in the period (May 7- May 19, 2021).





As observed in Figure (5) and Figure (6), most of the relevant tweets posted during the period (**May 7 - May 19, 2021**) implied advocacy for the Palestinian cause during the recent clashes and Sheikh Jarrah incidents. The distribution of the contradicting stances, during the studied period, can be explained according to the course of events as follows:

#### May 7, 2021:

- **Oppositional Stance:** spotted in 99% of the tweets that were posted in conjunction with the earliest violent clashes between the Palestinians and Israeli security/police forces on the last Friday of Ramadan (May 7, 2021). The majority of tweets claimed that Palestinians had to respect the Israeli court decision and admit that they had no rights on the properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. Also, some tweets

indicated that Palestinians were faking the protests in the Al-Aqsa to collect financial donations from Gulf countries.

#### May 8, 2021:

- **Oppositional Stance:** formed more than half of the tweets (62%) posted on this day. In their oppositional tweets, the users expressed their anger toward the Palestinians who kept faking their commitment to the Palestinian cause while also maintaining good relations with the Israeli people, working for them and interacting with them normally. Moreover, the Palestinians and Hamas, in particular, were maintaining good relations with Iran, ignoring the fact that Iran is considered as an enemy of Gulf countries.
- **Supportive Stance:** spotted in 38% of the tweets where Arabs showed solidarity with

the fair demands of Sheikh Jarrah inhabitants, especially after the Israeli forces fully closed the neighborhood.

#### **May 10, 2021:**

- **Oppositional Stance:** few tweets (9%) were classified as bearing an oppositional stance. This could be attributed to the radical change in the course of events when Hamas put into action its warning by bombing Israeli cities and settlements.
- **Supportive Stance:** formed the majority (91%) of the tweets posted on this day. In most of the supportive tweets, the Arabs showed their support to Palestinians, expressing their pride with the important step taken by Hamas in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

#### **May 12, 2021:**

- **Oppositional Stance:** was spotted in 6% of the tweets posted on this day. Most of the oppositional tweets described Hamas as a terrorist organization and justified the Israeli military operation "Border Guards" and the Israeli airstrikes on civilian targets in the Gaza Strip.
- **Supportive Stance:** was recognized in 94% of the tweets. The majority of the Arabs tweeted positively about the fair and just demands of Palestinians to have sovereignty over their land while condemning the Israeli airstrikes that targeted civilians in Gaza.

#### **May 17, 2021:**

- **Oppositional Stance:** a slight increase was observed in the oppositional stance as it

formed 13% of the tweets posted on this day. In their oppositional tweets, the public blamed Hamas for the increased number of casualties caused by Israeli airstrikes, stressing that Israel was following the self-defense policy against the terrorism of Hamas.

- **Supportive Stance:** spotted in 87% of the tweets, most of which hailed the Palestinian resistance, which was represented either by the protests in 1948 cities or through the missiles launched by Hamas toward major Israeli cities and settlements.

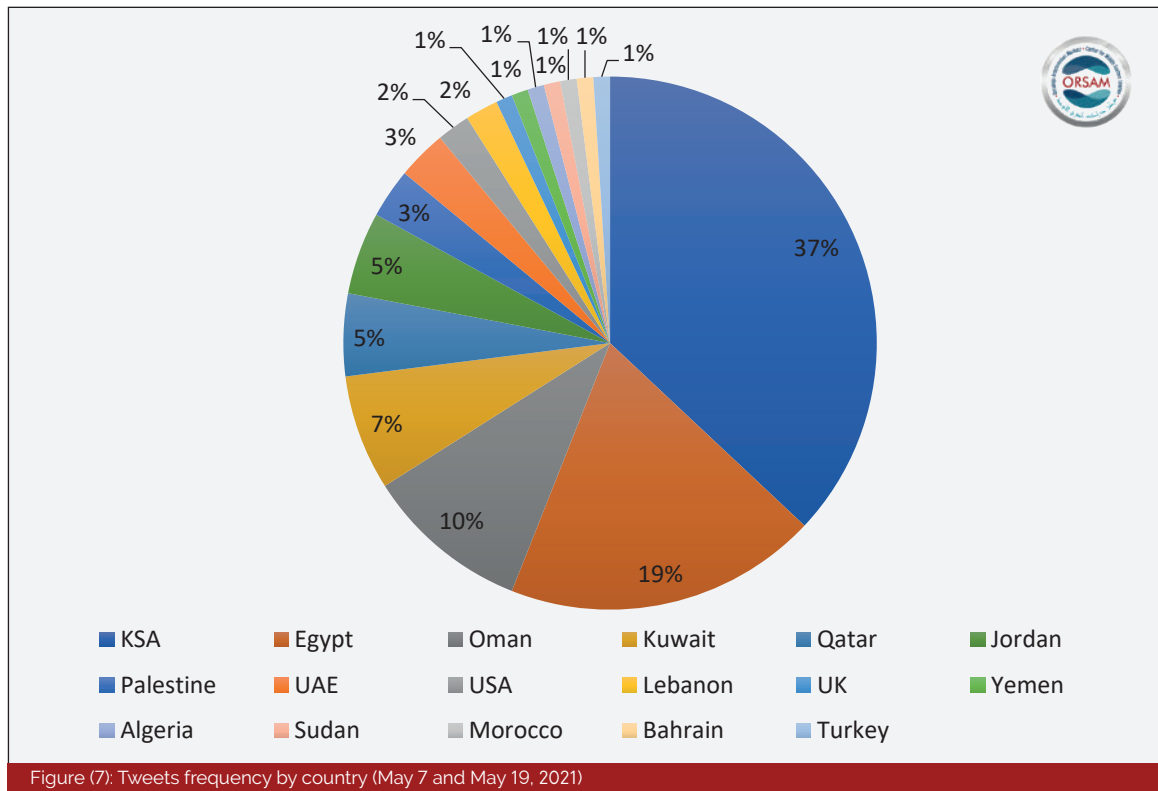
#### **May 19, 2021:**

- **Supportive Stance:** as the news were leaked about a ceasefire to be implemented the next day, nearly all of the tweets (99%) implied a supportive stance. Most of the supportive tweets celebrated the victory of the Palestinians against Israel, considering the recent confrontations an indication of the fact that the Palestinian cause is still the main concern not only for the Palestinian people but for the Arabs all over the Arab world.

### **5. Tweets Geolocation Analysis:**

In this section, we seek to explore the geographic locations of the tweets and link the detected polarity with locations. Out of 48,000 tweets, 19,865 tweets contained location information. Nevertheless, in 19,486 tweets, the users declared real locations (country/city) while the rest used fictional location names.

The percentage of tweets for each country is illustrated in Figure (7) where we opted to show the locations with tweets more than 150.



Looking at Figure (7), as the Palestinian cause has always been a historical Arabic issue that attracted attention since 1948, the tweets' resources were distributed among Levantine, North African, and Gulf Arabic countries. Saudi Arabia had the highest contribution to the tweets collection with a percentage value of 37%, followed by Egypt (19%). This is expected as Saudi tweeters form a considerable demographic power on Twitter while Egyptian accounts tend to participate intensively when it comes to Palestine-related incidents.

Surprisingly, despite its small population and number of users on Twitter, Oman ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, providing (10%) of the tweets. This indicates that the Arab people still consider Palestine as their main concern regardless of the demographic and geographic factors.

Aiming to link stances with geographic locations, we explored the attitudes toward the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict taking into account their international locations as shown in Figure (8).



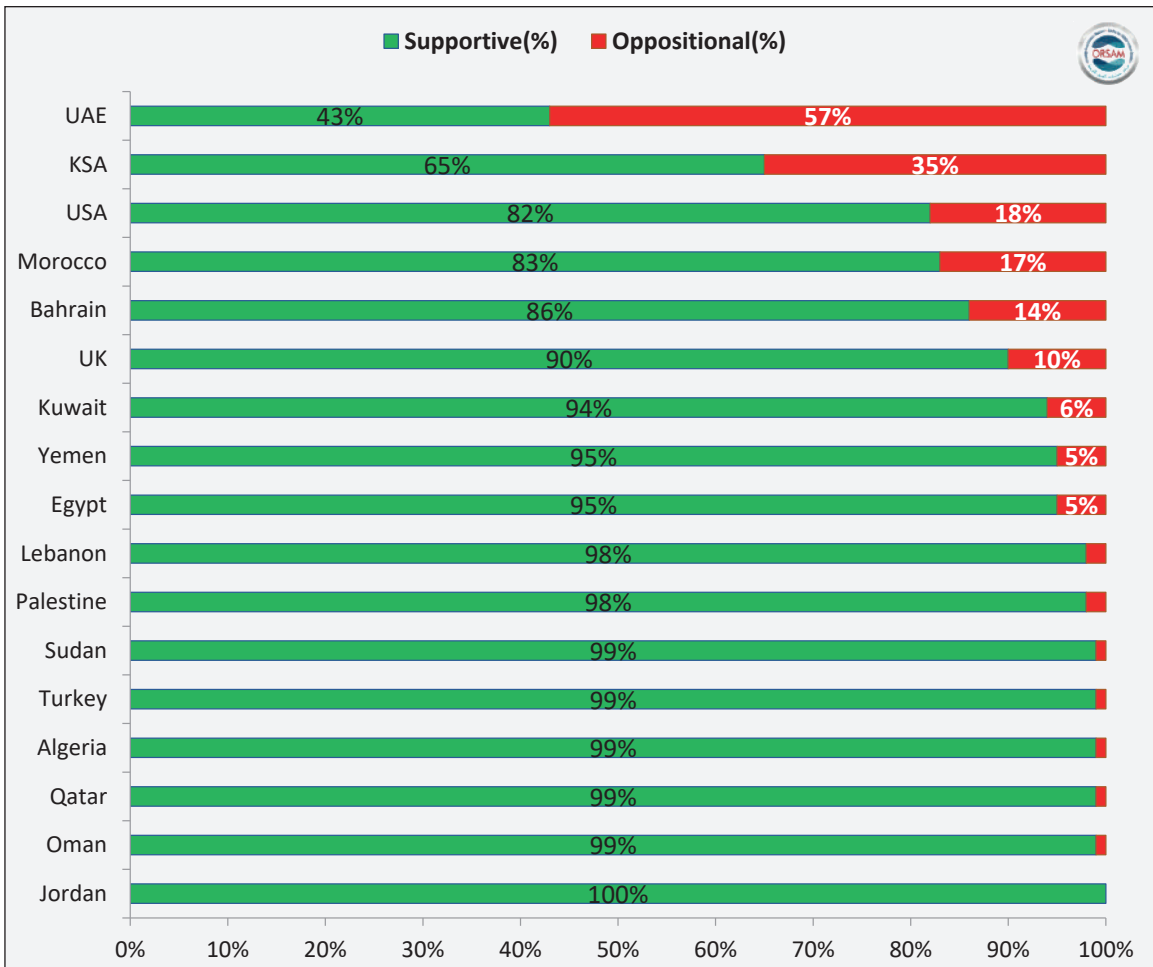


Figure (8): Advocacy Percentage by Country (May 7 and May 19, 2021).

In Figure (8), we noticed that the tweets posted from the **UAE** were dominated by the oppositional stance. This could be explained by the radical change of the UAE policies toward Israel since the Abraham Accord (August 2020). In addition, it could be observed that the majority of these tweets were posted by the UAE electronic army and swarms of bots. Also, several Saudi accounts posted oppositional tweets (35%) justifying their stance either by adopting the UAE policy supporting Israel or by criticizing the Palestinian leaders and describing them as traitors for having good relations with Iran (considered as the enemy of KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia]) and for being corrupt since they just wanted

to collect donations from **Saudi Arabia**. Additionally, while the oppositional stance (14%) recognized in the tweets written from **Bahrain** can be attributed to the fact that Bahrain is one of the countries that approved the normalization with Israel (August 2020), the percentage value of the oppositional tweets that were posted from **Morocco** was a bit odd, especially considering the fact that Moroccans have always supported the Palestinian cause. By exploring the oppositional tweets posted from Morocco, we noticed that most of them justified their hostility against the Palestinians by pointing out to the fact that the Palestinian authorities had supported the independence of Western Sahara. On the oth-

er hand, the tweets written from the UAE's loyal allies such as KSA, Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen implied a pre-dominantly supportive stance, where people condemned the Israeli policies against the Palestinians in Jerusalem and Gaza, as the supportive stance was spotted in more than 90% of the tweets posted from these countries. This indicates that the Arab people do not follow their governments' stance toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and can have a common view when it comes to historical causes like the Palestinian cause which has religious and national dimensions.

## 6. Interaction Analysis among Twitter Users:

As seeking to investigate the interaction activity within the collected Tweets, we opted

to track the retweets among users in each of supportive and oppositional tweets. Thus, we can recognize the influential users whose tweets were retweeted the most in each stance category.

### 6.1. Interaction Analysis for Supportive Tweets:

To construct the retweet interaction network, we mined the tweets to identify the handles (screen name) of original users and retweeting users. We then constructed the graph based on a specific script, normalized it using the graph algorithms, and visualized it using the Gephi application. Figure (9) shows the retweet interaction network with 33,827 nodes and 38,171 edges for the supportive tweets.

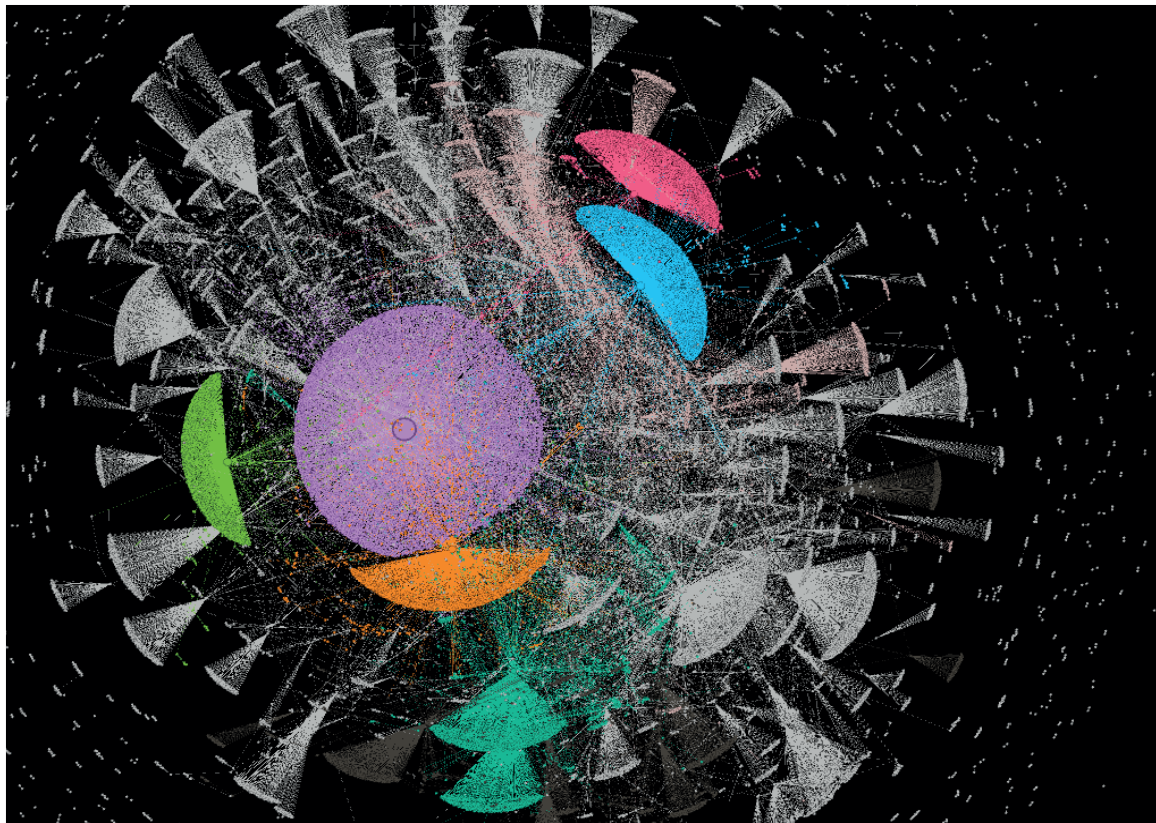


Figure (9): Retweet interaction network for supportive tweets.

<sup>35</sup> "Egypt sends food, medical aid to Palestine" *Africanews*, 18 May 2021.

As can be seen in Figure (9), the graph nodes represent the accounts involved in the tweet/retweet process while the edges indicate that two users are related to each other through the retweeting process (one retweeted a tweet of the other). The colored clusters, however, represent the communities of users where each community contains a central node that represents the most influential user whose

tweets are retweeted the most by other users (nodes surrounding the central node) in this community. To recognize the most influential users, we relied on the out-degree weight of nodes in the graph and assigned a bigger size for nodes having high values of out-degree. In the previous retweet network, we could identify the top 10 most influential users shown in Figure (10) and listed in Table (2).



Figure (10): Sample of most influential users in the supportive retweet interaction network.



Table (2): Top 10 most influential users in the supportive retweet interaction network

| Influencer users | User Name                       | Followers | #Retweets | Location |
|------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| @MyPalestine0    | #القدس_ينتفض                    | 259.1K    | 7,454     | -        |
| @sattam_al_saud  | سٹام بن خالد آل سعود            | 571.6K    | 2,142     | KSA      |
| @Mekkystyle      | Ahmed Mekky                     | 303.8K    | 2,013     | -        |
| @rdooan          | رضوان الأخرس                    | 290.6K    | 1,825     | -        |
| @abdulrahman     | عبدالرحمن بن مساعد بن عبدالعزيز | 8M        | 1,613     | -        |
| @Jaberalharmi    | جابر الحرمي                     | 779.7K    | 1,384     | Qatar    |
| @amansouraja     | A Mansour                       | 1M        | 1,087     | Qatar    |
| @mo7ammadalyahya | محمد اليحيا                     | 22.9K     | 815       | KSA      |
| @mshinqiti       | محمد المختار الشنقيطي           | 726.3K    | 729       | -        |

## 6.2. Interaction Analysis for Oppositional Tweets:

Similarly, we constructed the retweet interaction network for oppositional tweets 4,629 nodes and 6,153 edges as illustrated in Figure (11) where we can see that the graph nodes representing the accounts involved in the tweet/retweet process while the edges indi-

cate that two users are related to each other through the retweeting process (one retweeted a tweet of the other). The colored clusters, however, represent the communities of users where each community contains a central node that represents the most influential user whose tweets are retweeted the most by other users (nodes surrounding the central node) in this community.





Figure (11): Retweet interaction network for oppositional tweets.

In the previous retweet network, we could identify the top 10 most influential users shown in Figure (12) and listed in Table (3).



Figure (12): Sample of most influential users in the oppositional retweet interaction network.

Table (3): Top 10 most influential users in the oppositional retweet interaction network

| Influencer users | User Name                   | Followers | #Retweets | Location |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| @faljubairi      | فهد الجبيري                 | 49.6K     | 983       | -        |
| @drmoahamadaldla | DR.Mohamad ALHdla           | 53.4K     | 537       | -        |
| @HammediAD       | ALI ALHAMMADI               | 70.8K     | 405       | UAE      |
| @medoesmaeil     | الصقر المصري (سارد الحقائق) | 46.4K     | 297       | -        |
| @SufianSamarrai  | سفيان السامرائي             | 89.5K     | 271       | UK       |
| @SFOUK_AL_SHIKH  | صفوك الشيخ - SFOUK ALSHI-KH | 4,517     | 229       | Germany  |
| @Ahmedats_       | أحمد                        | 8,461     | 188       | -        |
| @SalehJoraibi    | صالح جريبيع الزهراني        | 32.2K     | 149       | KSA      |
| @hanidesert      | بن صنيّة                    | 11.4K     | 146       | KSA      |
| @mohayaalhomran  | محيا آل عمران               | 16.3K     | 141       | -        |

As seeking to highlight the most common words/clauses mentioned in the studied tweets/comments, we relied on mathematical calculations of word associations to infer

This was visually represented using word clouds. Figure (13) and Figure (14) show respectively the word clouds based on supportive and oppositional tweets/comments.



Figure (13): Most frequent clauses in supportive tweets.

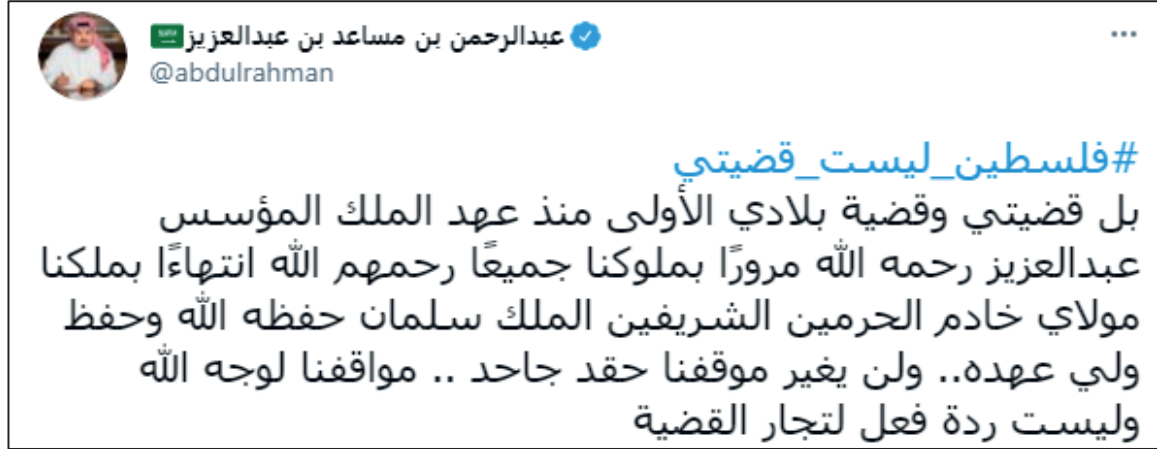


Figure (14): Most frequent clauses in oppositional tweet.



## 8. Tweet Examples:

### 8.1. Supportive Tweets:





سظام بن خالد آل سعود  
@sattam\_al\_saud

...


اللهم انصر أحبائنا وإخواننا المرابطين في [#المسجد\\_الأقصى](#)  
وفلسطين عامة أمام ما يتعرضون له من إجرام وانتهاك لكل  
معايير حقوق الإنسان من تنكيل وتهجير وتدمير وتعدي على  
الحرمة المقدسة الإسلامية والمسيحية على حد سواء  
[#المسجد\\_الأقصى](#)  
[#القدس\\_تنتفض](#)  
[#انقذوا\\_حي\\_الشيخ\\_الجراح](#)  
[#SaveSheikhJarrah](#)



رضوان الأخرس  
@rdoan


...

بالنسبة للمسلم، [#المسجد\\_الأقصى](#) عقيدة، ومن فضل الله  
علينا أن المرجفين والأراذل يفضحون أنفسهم بأنفسهم في مثل  
هذه الأوقات.  
إنما لا بأس، فكل ما يفعلونه لن يزيدهم إلا انكشافا وخزيا في  
الدنيا، وخسرانا في الآخرة.  
أمر الله غالب، ولا نامت أعين المحتلين والمتصهينين.  
[#القدس\\_تنتفض](#)

 **A Mansour** أحمد منصور ✓  
@amansouraja

انتفاضة مدن الداخل الفلسطيني المحتل منذ عام 1948 تؤكد علي حقيقة هامة هي أن إسرائيل التي نجحت في احتلال كثير من العواصم وقصور الحكم في الدول العربية عاجزة حتي الآن عن احتلال كامل فلسطين ويبدوا أنها ستظل كذلك حتي تزول

#القدس\_تنتفض #القدس\_عاصمة\_فلسطين\_الأبدية  
#غزة\_تنتصر\_للقدس

 **Ahmed Mekky** ✓  
@Mekkystyle

القدس عاصمه فلسطين ( الأبدية ) رغما عن أنوفهم..اللهم احفظ إخواننا في فلسطين وانصرهم على الإرهاب الصهيوني الغاشم.. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ( ولا تحسبن الله غافلاً عما يعمل الظالمون إنما يؤخرهم ليومٍ تشخصُ فيه الأبصارُ ) صدق الله العظيم

#FreePalestine  
#القدس\_تنتفض

 **amiraguettat**   
@amiraguettat02

-  
نشأنا على حب فلسطين وقضيتها كأنها وطن لنا رغم أننا لم نزرها يوماً .. القدس عربية وستبقى كذلك . 🇵🇸🇵🇸

  
#Palestine #حي\_الشيخ\_الجراح  
#الجزائر #اقتحام\_٢٨\_رمضان  
#القدس\_تنتفض  
#القدس\_عاصمة\_فلسطين\_الأبدية





soumaua\_Diif  
@soumaua\_

...

-  
الاقصى مش فلسطين ، الاقصى اسلام ، يا بتدافع عنه يا بتغير دينك .

#انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_الجراح #انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_جراح  
#المسجد\_الأقصى #القدس\_تنتفض #القدس\_تنتصر



عناأدالعتيبي #فلسطين\_قضيتي  
@x\_119

...

#سعوديون\_مع\_الاقصى #القدس\_تنتفض إن قضية  
فلسطين لن تموت، لأنها عقيدة في قلب كل مسلم، الناس  
يموتون في سبيل العقيدة، وما ماتت عقيدة من أجل حياة إنسان  
الله ينصركم ي ابطال



عبدالله محمد الزامل  
@abdullamz

...

#فلسطين\_قضيتنا\_الأولى لأنها عربية  
إسلامية  
إنسانية

لن نلتفت لصغائر الامور والخلافات لأن #القدس\_تنتفض



تغريد الوهيبية  
@T\_wahaibi96

شعب #عُمان الحر مع #القدس، مع #الأقصى، مع #غزة، مع كل شبر في #فلسطين العظيمة، نحن معكم وألسنتنا تلهج بالدعاء لكم، أنتم الأقوياء، أنتم الأبطال ونفاخر بكم، و #المسجد\_الأقصى مسجدنا كما هو مسجداكم، عُمان الحبيبة وفلسطين قلب واحد 🇵🇸❤️🇲🇪 #القدس\_تنتفض

#omanStandwithPalestine



أ. بيلسان ..  
@t\_3r0

#فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيتي فقط !  
بل فخري وعقيدي ومسرى نبيي



نشأنا على حب فلسطين وقضيتها  
كأنها وطن لنا رغم أننا لم نزرها يوماً  
عاشت فلسطين حرة أبية أبدية 🇵🇸  
#غزة\_تحت\_القصف  
#فلسطين\_قضيتي



Elie Merheb | إيلي مرعب  
@\_ElieMerheb

يوم بعد يوم عم يزيد احترامني للشعب الفلسطيني الشجاع والقبضاي 🇵🇸  
#انقذوا\_حي\_الشيخ\_الجراح #SaveSheikhJarrah  
#فلسطين\_تنتفض #القدس\_تنتفض

## 8.2. Oppositional Tweets:



ابو الموز  
@JmgIMFmBym3KG3u

Replying to @iiioi\_11

نعم فلسطين ليست قضيتنا  
فلسطين قضية اهلها  
ورونا مراجلكم وحرروها انتم واياهم ما حد ماسككم ولا مانعكم .  
فقط شعارات ومزايدات على الفاضي  
#صفر\_تعاطف\_معهم  
#صفر\_تعاطف\_مع\_غزة




فهد الجبيري  
@faljubairi

في نفوسهم المريضة حقد علينا ويوالون ايران الصفوية ويققدسون  
مجرميها ثم يقولون انصرونا في احداث تمثيلية مصطنعة  
#صفر\_تعاطف\_معهم




خالد الزعتر  
@khzaatar


حركة حماس الإرهابية توزع وجبات الإفطار الرمضانية تحمل صورة  
الإرهابي #قاسم\_سليمانى ، كيف أتعاطف مع قضية يؤمن  
أصحابها بالمرشد الإيراني و يققدسون عناصر إيران الإرهابية ،  
#صفر\_تعاطف\_معهم

 **Manal alsobhi** منال الصبحي  
@alsobhi\_manal

#مطار\_أبها اقسم بالله انك اعز عندي من ارضهم الي باعوها و  
ابغوا العالم فيها  
أبها قضيتي و #فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيتي  
عساهم يحرقوا بعضهم يعود وكنعانيين في  
#حي\_الشيخ\_الجراح

 **فهد ديباجي**  
@fahddeepaji1

#صفر\_تعاطف\_معهم بلادنا أشرف وأهم عندنا من مسرحيات  
فلسطين يا أخوان و يا أتباع إيران .

 **الصقر المصري** (سارد الحقائق)  
@medoesmaeil

اللي بيحصل في #فلسطين هدفه مصر....مخطط #الترانسفير  
اللي بيحاولوا ينقذوه من 1929م بمساعدة الإخوان  
الإرهابية...ملخص المخطط تهجير الفلسطينيين إلى أكثر من  
(1000) كم مربع في سيناء...وصلت ولا لسه؟؟ علشان كذا  
بقولها وهفضل اقولها تولع القضية الفلسطينية 😊  
#فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيتي

 **Morocco News** @MoroccoNews\_AR · May 9

المدخل الشمالي للقدس..  
ابحث عن علم المملكة المغربية !!!  
كمغربي #فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيتي والمغرب أولا ولا غالب إلا الله



**Amigo**  
@smobboms

...

Replying to @20MyAsh and @TurkiHALhamad1



محد باع القضية غير راعين القضية.

هذي قضية فلسطين وكل فلسطيني باع ارضه و استلم حقها  
سنين واحنا معاهم وندعمهم ومالقينا غير الجحود وقلة الاصل

ان شاء الله نطبع قريب 🙏 ما شغنا يهودي يسبنا او يدعي علينا  
او يحرق صور حكامنا

اليهودي علمه درس

نرجع ونقول #فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيتي



**المحقق الاستقرائي (زرافة بدوية)**  
@3b3b85

...

الفلسطينيين شعب ارهابي يهددون حياة الاسرائيليين ويرفضون  
التعايش

الفلسطينيين هم الخطر الأكبر على هذا الكوكب ويجب التعامل  
معهم بحزم لحماية الإنسانية


#ابوك\_لابو\_قضيتك  
#القدس\_تنتفض




**ALI ALHAMMADI**  
@HammadiAD

...

يعتصمون لنصرة قضيتهم الفاشلة ويسئون لحكام الإمارات  
والسعودية والبحرين.. وبين الحين والآخر يخرج لنا من يريد أن  
يفرض علينا التعاطف معهم ونصرة قضيتهم  
#فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيتي وليزعل من يزعل

 **SFOUK ALSHIKH\_الشيخ صفوك**  
@SFOUK\_AL\_SHIKH

#قاسم\_سليمانى قتل عائلتي وقتل جميع أحابي وقتل مليوني شهيد سوري ومليون شهيد عراقي ونصف مليون شهيد يمني ولبناني ، ودمر مدنا وقرانا ، ثم تأتي حركة حماس التي تهتف لهذا القاتل وتطلب منا ان نتعاطف معها ، لا وبل تتهمنا بكل سخافة بالخيانة ، أحب ان اقول لكم  
#فلسطين\_ليست\_قضيّتي  
افهموها.

 **محيا الـ حمران**  
@mohayaalhomran

فلسطين قضية احتيال ونصب كبرى تم استغلالها من أجل استنزاف جميع الخزائن.  
وكان أكبر الضحايا في قضية الاحتلال هم الشعب السعودي، صدقنا وتبرعنا وساعدنا ودعمنا، وعندما وجدنا الجحود والخدلان والتنكر، ووضحت لنا الأمور نقولها وبكل صدق  
#صفر\_تعاطف\_معهم  
وهذا دليل على دعمنا سابقاً.



| User name                       | #Followers | Location | Polarity   |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------|------------|
| عبدالرحمن بن مساعد بن عبدالعزيز | 8,077,577  | -        | Supportive |
| رياض الصالحين                   | 1,032,389  | -        | Supportive |
| A Mansour أحمد منصور            | 1,000,334  | Qatar    | Supportive |
| درر الكلام                      | 955,707    | -        | Supportive |
| جابر الحرمي                     | 779,820    | Qatar    | Supportive |
| محمد المختار الشنقيطي           | 726,609    | -        | Supportive |
| Mohammed Al arab محمد العرب...  | 688,830    | KSA      | Supportive |
| ناصر الدولة                     | 650,768    | Kuwait   | Supportive |
| أحمد بن راشد بن سعيد            | 636,376    | -        | Supportive |
| Muna AbuSulayman منى            | 583,795    | KSA      | Supportive |

## 9. Conclusion and Evaluation:

- In this analysis, we explored the tweets regarding the stances of Arabs on Twitter amid the renewed Israeli-Palestinian conflict; starting from the early clashes at Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem through the escalated armed conflict between Hamas and the Israeli forces up until the ceasefire. Based on the analysis outcomes, we concluded the following:
- Despite the unfair banning and restriction policies of Twitter on any content related to Palestine, many influential users across the Arab world kept tweeting/retweeting the incidents on the ground in Palestine, trying to raise awareness about what the Palestinians were going through while facing eviction from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and the consequences of shelling of vital institutions in the Gaza Strip.

- It was noticed that the Supportive stance was dominant among the collected tweets with a percentage value of 85%. This indicates that despite the recent normalization deals between Israel and some Arab countries (the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco), the majority of the Arab people are still considering the Palestinian cause as their main historical cause.
- At the beginning of the clashes between the civilian Palestinians and the Israeli police (April 13<sup>th</sup> - May 7<sup>th</sup>), there was insufficient information about the Sheikh Jarrah issue. Thus, the Arabic Twitter sphere at that period was dominated by Pro-UAE and Pro-KSA users and their bot followers which saved no effort to spread allegations about fake protests at the Al-Aqsa claiming that the Palestinians had to respect the Israeli court decision and admit

that they had no rights on the properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

- An odd oppositional stance (17%) was spotted in the tweets from Morocco; especially considering the fact that Moroccans have always supported the Palestinian cause. Such a change in the Moroccan stance toward the Palestinian issue was justified in the Moroccan oppositional tweets by pointing out to the fact that the Palestinian authorities had supported the independence of Western Sahara.
- Although the number of Omani users on Twitter is not as great as their peers from other Gulf countries such as the UAE and the KSA, Oman ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in its contribution to tweets (having locations) while the supportive stance in Omani tweets was 99%. This, on one hand, indicates that the people of Oman can freely express their support to the rights of the Palestinian people regardless of their government's policies toward Israel; and on the other hand, reflects the consensus of the Arabs over the Palestinian cause regardless of the demographic and geographic factors.
- Throughout two weeks of protests, clashes, and armed conflict in Palestine, online solidarity with the Palestinians grew significantly across the Arab world and also globally. Twitter along with other social media platforms constituted free stages for influential users and masses of the Arab public to report the events on the ground and raise awareness about the fair demands of the Palestinians and their right to stay at their properties in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. This confirms the important role of social media as a replacement for traditional protests and as an indicator of the commitment of the Arab youth to a

historical cause like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- It is impossible to claim that both the aforementioned Arab countries and Israel thought that the process would go smoothly during the agreement process. Because, as can be seen in the results of the analysis, it is quite obvious that the Arab people have a pro-Palestinian stance toward the Israeli-Palestinian issue. We also see that the people of Arab countries, which have normalized their relations with Israel, are among the people in the region which were disturbed the most by the recent escalation of tension between the Israeli forces and Palestinians. The attacks and bloodshed during the Ramadan were condemned by Israel's 'new Arab friends'. However, it is difficult to conclude whether these developments would slow down or completely halt the normalization process due to the strong sentiments of the aforementioned Arab countries. On the other hand, Netanyahu's belief that the Palestinians will be effectively excluded as Israel develops its ties with neighboring states with these agreements is an indication of the fact that the agreements may have a solid ground.
- Despite all the oppression and difficulties, the Arab people show strong solidarity with the Palestinians. In this respect, Israel's activities have been receiving criticism on Twitter by different users for a long time. The circulating images about the acts of violence and attacks against the Palestinians created serious indignation in the world's public opinion. Despite the unfair banning and restriction policies of Twitter and efforts of some social media platforms controlled by the Israeli lobbies, it is not always possible to cover up the facts.





[www.orsam.org.tr](http://www.orsam.org.tr)



[orsamorgtr](https://www.youtube.com/orsamorgtr)