

Pepsi, Or “Pay Every Pence To Save Israel”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



One of the most celebrated Turkish journalists, Burak Bekdil, wrote for the leading paper *Hürriyet* for 29 years, and then lost his job, as he put it, for “telling the truth about Turkey,” in an Erdogan-prompted purge of the media. He continues to write for online Western outlets about Erdogan, Turkey, and Islam. Several weeks ago, [he described](#) one more Muslim conspiracy theory, one that is decades old, and according to which the soft drink Pepsi-Cola turns out to be linked to support for the hated Zionists.

Pro-Palestinian Muslims have refused to drop their decades-long conspiracy theory that Pepsi Cola is essentially the code name for a Zionist plot – “Pay Every Pence to Save Israel.”

This columnist first heard of the theory when he was a teenager in early 1980s. "Don't buy Pepsi Cola. Buy Coca Cola," warned the always pious grocery store owner in the neighbourhood, then explaining why I should not buy Pepsi Cola. "It's a sin. Good Muslims never drink Pepsi Cola." I asked him: "So why do you sell Pepsi Cola?"

Ironically, members of the radical left, too, would hate Pepsi Cola, and for the same reason. Neighborhood kids belonging to the "Turkish revolutionary left" looked like street campaigners for Pepsi Cola's American rival, sporting their Coca Cola bottles and arguing: "If you buy Pepsi you help the Zionists and American capitalism."

In the early 1990s when your columnist was an MSc student in Britain Arab and other (most notably a Malaysian) Muslim friends would vigorously warn him not to buy Pepsi or otherwise "you could be viewed as a Zionist and face the consequences." "What consequences?" I once asked the 'Malay Prince.' "Your guess," he answered, smiling.

Folly is a persistent thing. Even in recent years a member of Hamas, the darling of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his fellow Islamists, (Hamas member of parliament) Salem Salamah, told Hamas's television station Al-Aqsa TV: "There are companies established by the colonialists and occupiers – large companies with branches all over the world, like Pepsi, Pepsi Cola. This is a well-known company. Pepsi is an acronym. P-E-P-S-I – Pay Every Pence to Save Israel. Pay every pence – pence is one-hundredth of a dollar – to save Israel. Pay every pence to save Israel..."

Egyptian cleric Hazem Abu Ismail called for a Muslim boycott of Pepsi because it stands for "Pay Every Penny Saving Israel." He explained: "They took the first letter of each word – 'Pay Every Penny Saving Israel' – and they formed the word Pepsi. When you pay [to buy Pepsi], you are saving Israel ... My little son knows more about the boycott than me.

When we go shopping, he says to me: 'Buy this, don't buy that.' He knows them by heart."

I recalled all that man-made nonsense when a newspaper headline heralded that Mr Erdoğan inaugurated a \$150 million Pepsi factory in western Turkey. Since Mr Erdoğan cannot be a crypto Zionist his fellow Islamist conspiracy theorists should rethink their "Pay Every Penny Saving Israel" acronym.

How amusing that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is a dab hand at finding "conspiracies" himself, such as those pertaining to his arch-enemy Fethulleh Gulen, is now in the position of dedicating a Pepsi-Cola factory in Turkey. Apparently the benefit to the Turkish economy of this 150-million-dollar factory was too great to let any conspiracy theory get in the way; Erdoğan now finds himself effectively denying one absurd conspiracy theory, while continuing to harbor many others, some even crazier, about the diabolical Israelis and their conspiracies.

Did, really, the Turkish Islamists have to wait for decades to shyly ignore one of their millions of conspiracy theories? Did they have to wait so long until one of them merrily inaugurated a \$\$\$\$ plant owned by a Zionist soft drinks producer? Is drinking Pepsi halal now that Mr Erdoğan himself attended the ceremony?

Now, dear Islamists, enjoy your soft drinks and get lost."

One might explain to those Muslim conspiracy theorists – and there are so many of them, wallowing in so many of these theories, dozens or hundreds of them, each more absurd than the last – that the soft drink Pepsi-Cola was first concocted in New Bern, North Carolina in 1893 by a pharmacist, Caleb Bradham, under the name "Brad's Drink," that it was renamed "Pepsi-Cola" in 1898, with "Pepsi" taken from the word "dyspepsia" (indigestion, which the drink would supposedly

cure) – and thus Pepsi-Cola came into existence half a century before Israel was even founded. Both etymology and chronology point up the absurdity of the belief that “Pepsi” means “Pay Every Pence Saving Israel.”

But facts do not matter to Muslims in thrall to conspiracy theories. They come in so many different forms. Turks who opposed Ataturk’s reforms were convinced that he must have been Jewish, and still today, there are endless videos and posts online denouncing Ataturk as “a nasty kaffir” and “a Jew who hated Islam.” No evidence is presented for this claim, for none exists. Other Muslim conspiracy theories about Israel and Jews include the claims that the Zionist Jews spread poisons, spread AIDS, engage in blood rituals, lead an international conspiracy against Islam, and have created the “myth” of the Holocaust. These theories have been taken seriously not in some minor outlet, but in Egypt’s Al-Ahram, the most important newspaper in the most important Arab state.

Still other conspiracy theories circulating in the Muslim Arab lands hold the Jews responsible for killing American Presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, and causing the French and Russian revolutions. Zionists are seen as a threat to the world. A widespread conspiracy theory after the September 11 attacks blamed Israel and Mossad for the attacks.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an infamous forgery purporting to be a Jewish plan for world domination, is commonly read, promoted, and believed, in the Muslim world.

Conspiracy theorists in the Arab world have claimed that ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is in fact an Israeli Mossad agent and actor called Simon Elliot. The rumors claim that NSA documents leaked by Edward Snowden reveal this connection. Snowden’s lawyer has called the story “a hoax.”

What should we make of this bizarre “Pepsi” tale? It’s one more illustration of the fantasy world that so many Muslims,

especially Arabs, succumb to. They can't allow themselves to believe that the Israelis alone could have successfully withstood the armed assaults of so many Arab states. They must therefore have had, and still have, all kinds of secret help, a cabal of rich and powerful Jews, whose support explains Israel's otherwise inexplicable victories. And if something makes Muslims look bad, then it must really have been a plot by Jews. 9/11 was surely a Mossad plot, diabolically conceived so that innocent Muslims would be blamed. No Jew went to work on 9/11 at the Twin Towers. It's a fact. They called in sick, every last one of them. But the Jews own the media and didn't let this get out. As for the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, he makes Arabs and Muslims look bad, so of course he must be a Jew, a Mossad agent. Don't be naive – what else could he be? And Anwar Sadat made peace with Israel, so Sadat must have been a Jew. That's taken for granted in Egyptian Islamist circles. Who else would conclude a peace treaty with Israel?

The "Pepsi conspiracy" is one of the many ludicrous examples of these conspiracy theories which can be found all over the Arab and Muslim lands. A brand name that is clearly meant to allude to the drink's soothing efficacy in curing "dyspepsia" has nothing to do with gathering "pence" – money – for Israel. But even now, somewhere in the Middle East a group of Muslim Arabs who don't care for Erdogan's neo-Ottomanism are meeting, and having just learned about his dedicating the Pepsi-Cola plant, will solemnly take this as a sure sign that he is, despite his seeming antisemitism, one more Mossad agent doing the work of the Zionists. For if Erdogan weren't a Mossad agent, why else would he be so exaggeratedly anti-Israel?

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