

Iran bans WhatsApp, accuses Zuckerberg for being “Zionist”

In Iran it was reported today that the proprietary cross-platform messaging application WhatsApp has been formally banned. The reason? It was recently acquired by Mark Zuckerberg for the whopping amount of \$19 billion USD, who they claim is a supporter of Israel.

Head of the Iranian Committee on Internet Crimes Abdolsamad Khorramabadi justified the action by calling Zuckerberg “an American Zionist”. The source for the story is none other than IRNA, Iran’s own domestic news agency.

The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani however went on to tweet his opposition of filtering of WhatsApp, indicative of a possible conflict within the Iranian government as to the legality of the free application. Whether or not this is indicative of the ban being cancelled remains unclear.

Despite President Rouhani’s tweets, Twitter itself and Facebook were indeed blocked in the country in 2009 as retaliation for its use by protestors and civil rights activists throughout Iran. During the 2009 Iranian election protests, the massive civil unrest against former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was widely publicized through the Internet when conventional news reporting of the nation-wide protests was heavily restricted.

Iran’s long-standing conflict against Israel has been well-documented as the country remains firmly in support of the independence of Palestine and refuses to recognize the sovereignty of the Israeli government since the Iranian revolution of 1979 when the country was proclaimed an Islamic republic. Since then, the country retains a mixed political system of part parliamentary democracy, part religious theocracy led by Islamic clergy. A system which has caused conflict between some of the more moderate politicians of the country and the conservative Islamic church led by the Supreme Leader, who outranks the President as head of state.

WhatsApp is one of the leading free messaging applications around, and is available for Android phones, iOS, Blackberry OS, Windows, Symbian and selected Nokia phone platforms. A small company based in Mountain View, California, WhatsApp formerly employed only 55 people even though internal numbers of the popularity of the app are reportedly as high as 400 million users. The company was then purchased by Facebook in February 19 of this year, payment being divided between cash payments, Facebook shares and restricted stock units for all WhatsApp employees as well as founders Brian Acton and Jan Koum.

Zuckerberg himself was born in White Plains, New York in 1984 and raised with his three sisters in Dobbs Ferry, NY, by Jewish parents. Zuckerberg has however identified himself in interviews as an atheist following his bar mitzvah, a traditional Jewish coming of age ritual, when he turned 13, and is married to Dr. Priscilla Chan, an American raised physician born of a Chinese-Vietnamese refugee. Zuckerberg also frequently avoids discussing his own political views, let alone specific views on his views on Israel. It is widely believed that he identifies himself as a conservative capitalist, following controversy over ads on Facebook in support of oil drilling and in opposition of Obamacare.

He has however, been the target of an outspoken Zionist facebook page “Join us to tell Mark Zuckerberg of his moral duty to support Israel”, which has currently amassed 1820 likes. Zuckerberg was also formally invited to the Knesset of Israel in May last year, following Knesset Member and ultra-Orthodox Jew Moshe Gafni’s discovery that someone had opened a fake Facebook profile using his name. Gafni

reportedly was against the social network however, and there have been no reports of Zuckerberg taking him up on the offer.

Zuckerberg was famously depicted by actor Jesse Eisenberg in the Oscar-winning film *The Social Network*, depicting the start of Facebook. A film which also circumvents any mention of Zuckerberg's religious or political views.