

# The school books of the Palestinian Authority

A long-term study shows how students learn that a peaceful resolution of the conflict is not an option **By David Bedein**

**THE THINK** tank that I run, the Center for Near East Policy Research, has completed a four-year research activity, in which all 364 school books for grades 1-12 that were published by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the years 2013-2018 were examined.

We have presented our findings at the US Congress, Canadian Parliament, the Swedish Parliament, the British Parliament and, most recently, at the UN.

The chief researcher whom we hired to examine the texts used by Palestinian Authority and UNRWA schools was Dr. Arnon Groiss, scholar of Middle Eastern studies holding a PhD in this field from Princeton University, as well as an MPA degree from Harvard University. In 2017, Dr. Groiss retired as senior reporter for Israel's Arabic Radio where, for over 40 years, he followed Middle Eastern and Arab affairs daily.

The goal of this research project was to check the attitude to the Israeli-Jewish "other" and the possibility of solving the war with the "other" in a peaceful manner, in the spirit of the peace agreements, known as the Oslo Accords that were signed by the PLO and Israel in 1993-1995.

The project yielded three studies, all of which are posted at: [www.IsraelBehindTheNews.com](http://www.IsraelBehindTheNews.com)

The first study was issued in September 2017, having covered 201 books of various school subjects.

An additional 118 books mostly published in 2017 were examined during 2018 in a separate study.

The final study covers 45 books published in 2017-2018 for grades 11 and 12 in the various streams.

The picture revealed throughout this project is that Palestinian students learn that a peaceful resolution of the war with Israel is not an option.

Instead, the theme that runs through the PA curriculum is that Palestine must be liberated

from the "Zionist occupation" by way of an armed struggle titled "Revolution" [*Thawrah*], which involves terrorist action-styled "self-sacrificing operations" [*amaliyyat Fidaiyyah*].

You can see this in the context in a PA school book reference to the "1972 Munich operation" where 11 members of the Israeli team to the Olympic Games were massacred (History Studies, Grade 11, Part 2 (2017) p. 54). Those who carry out such actions are called "self-sacrificing ones" [*Fidais*] and those among the liberation struggle are called on to liberate the Muslim holy place, Al-Aqsa Mosque, in Jerusalem, and remove it from the Jews' sway.

Palestinian pupils are taught that the "struggle for liberation" is not limited to the areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Rather, the whole country from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea is meant by this, as Zionist occupation is said to have started in 1948, in what is termed "the Catastrophe" [*Nakbah*], and not in 1967. Israel's pre-1967 territory is termed "the Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1948" (Management and Economics, Grade 11, Part 2 [Entrepreneurship and Business] (2017) p. 55). Pre-1967 Israel is never presented as a legitimate sovereign state nor does it appear on the map where it is replaced in its entirety by "Palestine."

Israel's very name is replaced in PA texts by "the Zionist Occupation" or "the Zionist Entity," which should be extirpated from the Middle East (History Studies, Grade 12, (2018, p. 145).

Cities inside pre-1967 Israel, such as Nazareth, Jaffa, Haifa, Acre, Tiberias, Beersheba and Ashkelon are transformed by PA school books into Palestinian cities.

Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war and their five million or so descendants are mandated by PA education to return to liberated Palestine and thus the 70-year old "Catastrophe" will end.



الشكل رقم (١): خريطة فلسطين الطبيعية

This map used in new PA school books, titled 'Physical Map of Palestine,' does not show Israeli cities, except for a dot representing Tel Aviv, but with no name (Geography Studies, Grade 11, Part 1, 2017, p. 100)

## Middle East

PA school books present all of the six million Jewish citizens, as colonizing settlers motivated by racist sentiments (History Studies, Grade 12 [Humanities] (2018) p. 5) who occupied Palestine, massacred and expelled many of its original inhabitants and have held the rest “under occupation” to this very day. The illegitimate status of the Jews in the country in the eyes of Palestinian educators is well expressed by the noted absence from the map of cities established by Jews in modern times, or showing them under Arabic names. Tel Aviv’s name is presented as Tal al-Rabi. Eilat appears as Umm al-Rashrash.

Not only is the current Jewish presence in Palestine delegitimized, PA education denies past Jewish history in the country, as well as the holy places that are presented as exclusively Islamic, including the Western Wall in Jerusalem and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. The Jews’ notions of historical ties to Jerusalem, in particular, are described in PA texts as “baseless claims,” “superstitions,” “legends,” “illusions” and “distorted narratives” (Arabic Language 1: Reading, Grammar, Prosody and Expression – Academic Path, Grade 12 (2018) p. 38-39) and the Jews are presented as “usurpers” and “invaders” (ibid., p. 46).

As if this heavy delegitimization of both Israel’s existence and the Jews’ very presence in the country is not enough, the PA school books also contain numerous pieces demonizing all Jews, within two Islamic contexts: As a people disobedient to, even blasphemous of, God, according to Koranic verses, and as a group hostile to the Prophet of Islam and the early Muslims in Arabia.

The impact of these accusations on the minds of young Palestinians, who are relatively religious, portrays all Jews in Israel in a negative light even more than their demonization in the context of the ongoing Arab Israeli war, which was launched by the Arab League in 1948.

Israel, referred to in the PA texts by the epithet “the Zionist Entity,” is demonized in the context of the “primary sin” of its very establishment:

Meanwhile, PA textbooks accuse the Zionist entity of perpetrating numerous massacres against Palestinians, assassinating Palestinian leaders, destroying Palestinian villages, causing Palestinian children’s suffering, being aggressive, violating international laws and conventions, maltreating Palestinian “prisoners of war, confiscating Palestinian land, uprooting trees, causing Palestinian unemployment, lim-



The map of the country without the Jewish cities of modern times appears again in another book, this time with the Jewish city of Eilat renamed Umm al-Rashrash (Physics, Grade 11, Part 1, 2017, p. 5)

iting Palestinians’ free movement, detaining students, damaging the Palestinian economy, polluting the Palestinian environment, and even endangering Palestinian nutritive security and causing the desertification of Palestine.

PA texts ignore any Palestinian terror actions that may have contributed to the creation of this situation.

The feminization effort of the PA school books is augmented by the absence of any objective information about Israel and the Jews that would counterbalance it. Nor do the PA school books refer to the Jewish-Israeli individual as an ordinary human being. They are referred to as a hated ethnic group, with all the accompanying connotations of alienation and threat, which makes them a legitimate target for violence. Indeed, using violence against Israel and the Jews is considered by PA school books as legitimate – in defense of Islam and its holy places in the country, moral – in light of their perceived inherent evil, and legal – because they are presented as foreign occupiers, who act in contradiction to international law and are said to constitute an existential threat to the Palestinian people.

Peace and coexistence cannot be an option, given the indoctrination of PA school books.

Thus, the new PA school books contribute



In this map, in addition to the unnamed city of Tel Aviv, the Jewish cities of Netanya and Eilat appear under the Arabic name of the desolate places where they were later built – Umm Khaled and Umm al-Rashrash, respectively (Mathematics, Grade 11, 2017, p. 5)

to the perpetuation of war. Indeed, one of the findings of the present study is that this kind of indoctrination has spread to all school subjects, especially mathematics, and it appears as well in purely professional textbooks such as “Small Businesses” and “Management and Economics” of the entrepreneurship and business stream and “Entrepreneurship in Business” of the technology stream.

People who support peace in the Middle East should raise their voices and demand that the PA change their war-oriented curriculum as a precondition to any move toward peace, in accordance with its commitments by virtue of the Oslo Peace Accords, which form the basis of the very establishment and operation of the nascent Palestinian Authority. A peace accord without peace education seems futile. ■

*David Bedein is a community organization social worker and journalist, who launched the Israel Resource News Agency in 1987 and who became the director of the Center for Near East Policy Research in 2005. Both entities work with the media and diplomatic corps in Israel to provide in-depth news and research coverage of The Middle East*