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NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2005

**Observations by CMIP on the Recommendations by IPCRI for Palestinian
Textbook Reform**

In November 2004 the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI) published a policy paper entitled “Recommendations for Palestinian Text Books Reform”¹ as a follow-up to two reports on Palestinian textbooks submitted by them to the Public Affairs Office of the US Consulate General in Jerusalem. CMIP issued detailed comparisons of these two reports with its own findings², in which it has severely criticized the IPCRI reports on a number of grounds, not the least of which being what it regards as their flawed methodology. The following are some observations on the recommendations.

IPCRI’s recommendations are expressly stated (pp. 3, 4) to be based on the conclusions and recommendations of the first two reports. In mentioning, without naming them, international and Israeli reports on Palestinian textbooks (including presumably those issued by CMIP) IPCRI expresses the view (p. 4) that even though some of them, and the motivation for writing them, were part of a campaign of anti-Palestinian propaganda, nevertheless, there are in them substantive critiques with quotations and hard evidence that should not be ignored by the Palestinian Authority and dismissed as mere propaganda.

IPCRI stresses that their Recommendations are based on two main assumptions, namely that the Palestinians have made a strategic decision to make peace with the State of Israel and that the message sought to be conveyed by the textbooks is not one that Israel should not exist. IPCRI has not demonstrated that the above assumptions made by it flow from IPCRI I and II and, in the opinion of CMIP, they in fact inform those reports. Recommendations based on assumptions that are misplaced are irrelevant and most unlikely to engage in debate. Additionally, the statement (p. 6) that “IPCRI’s first two reports on Palestinian text books did not seek to demonize the Palestinians or the Palestinian educational system” is curious and out of place in serious research. No reputable researcher approaches the subject matter of his research with a preconceived agenda. The books should be allowed to speak for themselves to the researcher striving to be as neutral and open as he possibly can. To approach the textbooks seeking to demonize or not seeking to demonize bespeaks just such an agenda.

¹ <http://www.ipcri.org/files/paltextrecs.pdf>

² See Response to 1st IPCRI Report on PA Textbooks and Response to 2nd IPCRI Report on PA Textbooks in Reactions Section →Institutes →IPCRI at www.edume.org

One symptom of an agenda is the inappropriate use of language, a combination of understatements and euphemisms, until it becomes a misuse. CMIP has already found need to criticize this in its responses to IPCRI I and II. Unfortunately such use of language is not entirely absent from the Recommendations. In particular the terms “confusion” or “confused messages”, which logically imply two or more conflicting messages, are used to describe a situation in which there is only one message.

IPCRI suggests, as the best solution, that the State of Israel within the 1967 borders should be clearly marked, including the indication of “Arab” towns such as Jaffa and Acre as being within Israel. There are alternative suggestions, but all of them relate to maps.

Clearly corresponding alterations would have to be made to texts as well, although IPCRI does not specifically spell this out. In particular circumlocutions for Israeli territory and the appropriation of towns and villages, and areas, such as the Negev, inside Israel would have to cease. More than this, however, the texts would have to contain indications that the recognition of Israel, implied by following the suggestion, is more than the de facto recognition of an ineluctable reality that cannot at present be changed. This would mean that partition too be treated as accepted, an unchangeable reality in which part of historical Palestine is irretrievably lost, and not merely mentioned, as at present, as a stage on the way to “The End of the Tragedy”³.

IPCRI recommends that Israeli points of view be included in textbooks, even if not as part of the main text. IPCRI also recommends (p. 14): “references should be made regarding historical Israelite and Jewish presence in the land as well as documenting that the Jews were exiled from the Land by the Romans.

In the view of CMIP, IPCRI is repeating the same mistake that it made in IPCRI I and II, namely, substituting its perspective for that of the Palestinian pupil and his educators. For it, the omission of the Jewish narrative is just that, a failure to mention that it is relatively easy to correct. Even assuming that the pupil is capable of grasping the concept of conflicting historical narratives, the function of history teaching, within the context of nation building, is not to leave him to flounder in a bog of relativism, but to present to him an account that he can, and does, believe is true. If the Palestinian narrative excludes the existence of the Jews as a people, entitled to self-determination in its historic homeland, the return to which is regarded as invasion or infiltration⁴, at the best, and the long arm of colonialism and Western imperialism, at the worst, then the “peak” into the narrative of the other side is a peak into lies and falsehood. It is a reinforcement of the denial of legitimacy, not its grudging acceptance. It is the Palestinian narrative, or more particularly its exclusivist character, that has to undergo reform. Without it Israel’s existence will always be illegitimate and peace only ever provisional.

³ Atlas of Palestine, the Arab Homeland and the World (2003/4), p. 5 (PA3, p. 23, PA4, p. 24).

⁴ Cf. an Egyptian school text, recognizing the link of the Jews to Palestine and their desire to return to it; History for Public High School, Grade 11 (2002), p. 266 in Jews, Christians, War and Peace in Egyptian School Textbooks, CMIP March 2004, pp. 72-73.

In addition to the Palestinian narrative having to contract so as to leave some room in Palestine for the “other”, its perception of its history has to free itself, to some degree, from the stultifying grasp of victim-hood, which is hardly a sound foundation for nation building. Some recognition, no matter how dim, of the contribution of the Palestinians themselves to their own misfortune is essential. Without it the “other” can only ever be demonized while they afflict themselves with a heightened sense of impotence and desperation. Textbook writing has to be informed by an awareness of the psychological dynamics involved.

IPCRI recommends (p. 14): “Palestinian students should be given the opportunity to understand their neighbors. It considers that learning about the holocaust could be an act of reaching out to understand the other side. Likewise an acquaintance with the Israeli Declaration of Independence and the exposure to some modern Israeli literature would provide students with an insight into Israeli society, without in any way weakening Palestinian National identity or solidarity.

This presupposes an initial openness to Jews and Israel, which IPCRI doubtless see as implied in the assumptions guiding it in making its recommendations, but which is by no means its necessary condition. It all depends on the definition of peace. There is some evidence⁵ that peace with Israel, as conceived by the Palestinians, may not be quite what IPCRI has in mind. It may be more of a conditional and provisional cessation of the armed struggle rather than the acceptance of the sovereign “other” in the Palestinian homeland. It is fair to assume that no amount of knowledge of the genocidal persecution of members of the Romany People during World War II, and no amount of insight into the traumas suffered by the survivors, will convince the Palestinians to compensate them for the evils inflicted on them by Europeans, by sharing their homeland with them. What is to make Israel and the Jews any different?

The difference can only be in the modification of the exclusivist character of the Palestinian narrative. Then the peace can be a just peace, that is, a peace that recognizes some justice in the position of the “other”.

IPCRI recommends that the concepts of Jihad and martyrdom be placed in their historical religious context and not be placed in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

True to its predilection for understatement and euphemism, IPCRI describes as ambiguous the message that any objective reading of the texts would find singularly lacking in ambiguity, but the question that arises is how realistic is its recommendation to remove these concepts from what the Palestinians must surely regard as an existential conflict. Palestinian nationalism is suffused with Islam, and Jihad and martyrdom are key concepts in Islam. Can the religious dimension be removed?

⁵ Islamic Education, Grade 9, Part 1 (2003), pp. 56-57, 90 (PA4, p. 79); Modern and Contemporary Arab History, Grade 9 (2003), p. 81 (PA4 p. 81).

Furthermore is this recommendation not a case, in Wittgenstein's phrase, of being "bewitched by language"? If the concepts of Jihad and martyrdom were to be removed from the current context would the phenomena they name, self-sacrifice in a cause, disappear?

IPCRI recommends that Jewish presence and affinity for Jerusalem, or that it is the capital of the State of Israel, should not be ignored, as they are at present. Doing so, it says, puts into question the political intentions behind it. It also recommends the omission of unhistorical claims that Arabize the city since time immemorial.

Two points that IPCRI does not mention are that there has been a Jewish majority in Jerusalem for the past 150 years and that the Old City as a whole, rather than just the Jewish quarter, has religious significance for the Jews.

Clearly the presuppositions underlying these recommendations remain moot and there is no evidence in the textbooks published so far that they are realistic.

Conclusions

- The assumptions underlying the Recommendations are not sufficiently explicated. In particular the concept of peace is unclear. In those relating to 'Dealing with the Other', for example, it would appear, in certain respects, to be a fully-fledged peace, in which the "other" is accepted and is to be understood and yet at the same time this is not "normalization". Is peace to be anything more than a provisional cessation of the armed struggle?
- In the same way, the recommendation that the Palestinian pupil be granted a "peak" into the narrative of the other side, without, of course, being convinced of its justification. What difference is there for him, in these circumstances, between the narrative of the other side and the propaganda of the other side? What point is there in learning the propaganda of the other side other than to refute it?
- IPCRI assumes that the Palestinian Authority has come to terms with the existence of the State of Israel and on this basis recommends that it be shown on maps. It is, however, one thing to come to terms with a reality that one cannot change, for the present, and quite something else to grant it legitimacy. Likewise, the mention of Jewish affinity with the land and Jerusalem would implicitly breach the dyke of illegitimacy.
- In the view of CMIP there are two alternatives to the continuation of hostilities. One is their suspension, or management of the conflict, and the other is real peace, one of the conditions for which is the acceptance, no matter how grudging, of the legitimacy of the other side. The Recommendations have, to a certain extent, fallen between these two stools.