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Iran schools feed pupils "war curriculum" - report

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By Mark John

BRUSSELS, Jan 30 (Reuters) - Iran's schools are nurturing a siege mentality in children with textbooks showing preparations for war and depicting Israel and the West as the enemy, an Israel-based think tank said on Tuesday.

One textbook gave 13-year-olds a basic overview of light arms while one early reader book depicted the murder of a Palestinian toddler by an Israeli soldier, a survey by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) found.

"Iran's war curriculum is a danger to the world's peace and security. This is the way the books develop a siege mentality in the minds of the students," CMIP director of research Arnon Groiss told a news conference in Brussels.

CMIP has produced surveys of school material in Pakistan and the Palestinian Authority and said its survey of 115 textbooks published in Iran in 2004 was the first of its kind.

Groiss said all the textbooks were underpinned by the belief that Iran was a world power preparing for global "jihad", or holy struggle, with the aim of world dominance of Islam.

"This has been a structural component of the Iranian regime since (the Islamic Revolution in) 1979. It is not a product of (Mahmoud) Ahmadinejad," he said of Iran's firebrand president who has called for the destruction of Israel.

Stories and poems aimed at primary school-age children hailed martyrs killed in defence of their country and faith, such as those who died in the 1980 to 1988 war with Iraq, with one illustrated with a rainbow dripping with martyr's blood.

Akbar Nabavi, an Iranian war veteran and now documentary maker, said the report was intended to misrepresent Iran.

"The American nation respects its soldiers and their cause though they are being killed in a foreign land (Iraq), thousands of miles from home," he said. "Why shouldn't we commemorate the sacrifice of our martyrs killed defending their country and their faith?"

MILITARY TACTICS

Groiss highlighted one passage in a reading book for eight-year-olds:

"At that time the Israeli officer pounded (three-year-old) Mohammed's head with his rifle stock and his warm blood was sprinkled upon his (six-year-old) brother Khaled's hands."

Another picture book for 10-year-olds showed veiled girls carrying rifles while material for 13-year-olds provided a basic acquaintance with weaponry, explosives and military tactics.

Israel was consistently referred to as "the regime that occupies Jerusalem" and marked out on maps as "Occupied Palestine". The United States was the "Great Satan", the "World Devourer" or the "Arrogant One".

Despite official opposition to the U.S. government, many Iranians remain sympathetic to the American people and held spontaneous vigils to show support for them after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

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Groiss acknowledged he had no recent information on the influence the textbooks were having on Iranian children.

While the concept of martyrdom is central to the Shi'ite Islam which is predominant in Iran, no Iranians are thought to have directly executed suicide bombings in recent years.

However, one Iranian group, which insists it has no government affiliation, says it has signed up thousands of would-be martyrs to target U.S. or British interests if Iran was attacked over its nuclear programme.

(Additional reporting by Alireza Ronaghi and Edmund Blair)

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