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'Israel absent or only negative presence in PA textbooks'

By JOSHUA HAMERMAN
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In examples, Jews demonized, martyrdom praised, Jewish Quarter removed from Old City map, Hebrew erased from Mandate-era stamp.

The Palestinian Authority still has a long way to go before textbooks in its schools begin to teach true coexistence with Israeli Jews, according to findings from a study released Tuesday.

The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE), which reviews textbooks from Israel, the Arab world and Iran, unveiled its 2011 report on PA school textbooks in a briefing with journalists at the headquarters of MediaCentral, in Jerusalem.

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The organization reviewed 118 textbooks currently used in Palestinian schools – 71 of which are for students in grades one through 12, and 25 that are taught in religious schools in the West Bank and issued by the PA Ministry of Wakf and Religious Affairs.

IMPACT-SE also examined 22 teacher guides distributed by the PA Ministry of Education and Higher Education. While all of the reviewed textbooks were approved by the PA, they are also taught in schools in Gaza.

While respect for the environment and sustainable energy resources are taught to Palestinian students, IMPACT-SE found that textbooks blame Israel for all environmental problems.

“There is generally a total denial of the existence of Israel – and if there is an Israeli presence it is usually extremely negative,” said Eldad Pardo, an IMPACT-SE board member, and head of the organization’s Palestinian textbook research group. “For the next generation, there is no education at all about collaboration and no information about the many collaborations that already exist between Israelis and Palestinians in environmental and other areas.”

In geography textbooks, Israel usually does not appear in maps of the Middle East, instead “Palestine” is shown to encompass Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Jaffa is also shown on maps of Palestine,

but Tel Aviv and other predominantly Jewish cities, such as Ramat Gan, kibbutzim and moshavim, are not displayed.

One of the Palestinian textbooks reviewed by IMPACT-SE, *History of Ancient Civilization*, published in 2009 and used to teach fifth-graders, states that the Levant consists of the states of Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Israel is not mentioned.

Other textbooks read for the study asked students to “color the Negev Desert on the map of Palestine,” and to solve the following mathematical word problem: “An independent Palestinian state was declared in 1988. How many years have passed since the declaration of independence?”

Another textbook included a map of the Old City of Jerusalem – which did not contain the Jewish Quarter. Meanwhile, in an additional example, a textbook printed a British Mandate postage stamp, but erased the Hebrew inscription “Palestine: The Land of Israel” that appeared on the original.

In addition, some textbooks described the Canaanites as an Arabic-speaking people whose land was stolen by Jews, and stated that Jews came from Europe to steal Palestine after the British conquered it in 1917.

Pardo, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, also said Palestinian textbooks have been erasing Jewish claims to holy sites, such as the Western Wall and Rachel’s Tomb. For example, National Education, a textbook for seventh-graders published in 2010, refers to the Western Wall as the “Al-Buraq Wall,” and to Rachel’s Tomb as “Al-Bilal Mosque.”

IMPACT-SE also found that Palestinian textbooks include many references to martyrdom, death, jihad and refugees returning to cities and towns in Israel – and frequently demonize Israelis and Jews. A photo from the funeral of a shahid (martyr) was included in the 2008 edition of a seventh-grade textbook, but excluded from the 2010 edition, perhaps because of foreign pressure on the PA, said Pardo.

Other textbooks told students that “the rank of shahid stands above all ranks,” and included a Muslim hadith about the destruction of Jews by Muslims on the day of the resurrection, which also appears in the Hamas charter.

IMPACT-SE noted many Palestinian textbooks included references to a ribat, an outpost on the borders of Muslim territories where wars against infidels occur. A 12thgrade Islamic education textbook, published in 2010, tells students that “the people of the Levant in general, and in Palestine in particular,” are in a state of ribat until the day of resurrection.

Pardo said that while there are some positive developments in the Palestinian educational system, such as emphases on democratic values and respect for women, elders and authority – no Israeli is depicted as a friend or partner. Furthermore, the Oslo Accords are rarely mentioned, and political agreements in general are presented as resulting from Arab and Muslim weakness.

“A textbook is the result of a policy – something created by a committee and a formal product of an entity – and this policy is creating public opinion and the public mind of the coming generation,” said Shelley Shandor Elkayam, CEO of IMPACT-SE. “The whole Talmud is based on the Jewish philosophy that the other is more interesting than yourself. You have to care about what others say. The Tunisians accept this and they teach it to their students. The PA definitely should reach that point one day, and it is up to us to bring them to this realization.”

According to IMPACT-SE, which will release a report on Israeli textbooks in July, the bulk of funding for PA textbooks and other initiatives comes from the EU. Most US aid for Middle Eastern education goes to Egypt, but some also goes to the PA.

Yohanan Manor, IMPACT-SE's chairman, noted that one of the PA's recent history textbooks printed two maps that referenced Israel, although the name of Israel was in tiny print. Some Palestinian educators have admitted that the Arabs rejected the 1947 UN partition resolution, which is also an important development, he said.

Manor said IMPACT-SE will send its findings to Lamis al-Alami, the PA's education minister.

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