

Overview

War Curriculum

The Iranian school system prepares its students for war – World War III, to be precise – in the name of Islam against American world hegemony. This is the main observation CMIP arrived at following research it conducted on 115 Iranian school textbooks and teacher's guides of all grades. Although all the books and the vast majority of the teacher's guides were published under the apparently moderate former president Mohammad Khatami, they all reflect the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of Revolutionary Iran.

According to Khomeini's conviction, the Muslims, and the oppressed nations of the world in general, should wage a life-or-death global war against the infidel oppressors, America in particular. As vividly envisioned by Khomeini himself:

"O Muslims of all countries of the world! Since under the foreigners' dominance gradual death has been inflicted on you, you should overcome the fear of death and make use of the existence of the passionate and the martyrdom-seeking youths, who are ready to smash the borders of unbelief. Do not think of keeping the status quo. Rather, think of escape from captivity, of deliverance from slavery, and of attack against the enemies of Islam. Glory and life are in fighting, and the first step of fighting is [the existence of] will. After that, there is the decision that you forbid yourselves to [submit to] the supremacy of world unbelief and polytheism, especially America.

"I am decisively announcing to the whole world that, if the World Devourers [i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union] wish to stand against our religion, we will stand against their whole world and will not cease until the annihilation of all of them. Either we all become free, or we will go to the greater liberty which is martyrdom... Either we shake one another's hand in joy at the victory of Islam in the world, or all of us will turn to eternal life and martyrdom. In both cases, victory and success are ours.

"We are the permanently oppressed in history, deprived and barefoot. Other than God we have no one. Even if we are cut to pieces a thousand times, we shall not stop fighting the oppressors."

Imam Khomeini, **Islamic Viewpoint, Grade 11 (2004) p. 29**

In Khomeini's vision, Iran is destined to lead the global struggle against the oppressors in the name of Islam. This role is part and parcel of the Islamic Revolution, and the victory over the oppressors will also be Islam's victory in this world. From this premise, it follows that Iranian education should aim at preparing the students for participation in that war, as stated in the introduction of one of the books:

[This book's] goal is to build from today's children worthy, committed, honest, benevolent, kind, high aspiring, learned and God-loving men and women of the future, so that they will rise with a heart full of faith, spread the life-bestowing religion of Islam and the Islamic Revolution in the world, build the great country of Islam, hurry to help the oppressed, fight the Arrogant Ones [an epithet usually

denoting the United States], and set in motion the deprived and oppressed peoples of the world...

Introduction, Religious Instruction, Grade 5 (2004) page not numbered

One example of the fruit of such an education is the 36,000 school boy martyrs in the Iraqi episode of this perceived global war:

During the eight years of Holy Defense [the war with Iraq, 1980-88] more than 500,000 school students were sent to the fronts. 36,000 martyrs, thousands of missing-in-action, invalids, and liberated [prisoners of war] of this sacrificing sector were offered to the Islamic Revolution.¹

Defense Readiness, Grade 10 (2004) pp. 9-10

The Attitude to America and the West

The research conducted by CMIP on Iranian textbooks has focused on two fundamental issues: the attitude to 'the other' and the attitude to peace.

Numerous 'others' are referred to in Iranian school textbooks – religious and ethnic, inside and outside Iran, in historical and contemporary contexts. However, two specific 'others' – the United States and the West in general, and the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli 'other' – attract special attention.

America is the 'Great Satan', the 'World Devourer', the 'Arrogant One', in short – a target for indoctrination to hatred: "The students should have a heart overflowing with hatred towards Arrogance" (Defense Readiness 1 – Teacher's Guide, High School Grades (2002) p. 3). America is the arch-oppressor worldwide, leader and partner of other oppressive powers such as Britain and the former Soviet Union. A passage in one of the books presents America very unfavorably and ends with a guiding question:

...America is known as an Imperialist country, which embarks on military intervention wherever it sees that its interests are in danger. It does not refrain from massacring people, burying alive the soldiers of the opposite side and using weapons of mass destruction (as it did with Iraq). It makes use of atomic bombs (the bombardment of Japan). It uses the weapon of human rights in order to suppress the justice seekers (as it does in its abuses against Islamic Iran). It creates the greatest dictatorships and the most violent and torturing security-oriented regimes, and defends them. Nor does it feel uncomfortable at all while human rights are violated (Iran at the time of the Shah after 1953). Its security system runs the largest smuggling networks, but it makes use of the pretext of drug smuggling in order to arrest those who oppose its policies in other countries (the case of Panama).

Such being the case, what would, and should, be your reaction to America?

Sociology [Humanities], Grade 11 (2004) p. 20

¹ *According to testimonies from the battlefield which could not be substantiated, the children were given plastic keys symbolizing the keys to Paradise and sent to charge enemy positions through minefields in order to clear the way for the regular forces.*

The West, including Czarist Russia and the former Soviet Union, is responsible for much suffering: colonialism, exploitation and the impoverishment of Third World nations, encroachment on the world of Islam – including Iran – historically and at present, a cultural attack against Muslims and others, world hegemony, environmental abuse, and so on.

The Attitude to Israel and the Jews

The material dealing with Israel, Zionism and the Jews is less bulky than that dealing with the West, which occupies about forty percent of the entire material quoted within the full report. Still, it is about the same size as the material dealing with the rest of the ethnic 'others' combined – in and around Iran, at present and in the past. In other words, Israel attracts the attention of Iranian educators, and consequently, of Iranian school students, even more than Saddam's Iraq.

The Jews are mostly referred to in the context of their relations with the Prophet of Islam in Arabia, where they are portrayed negatively: "After some time, the Jews' pretext-seeking, hostility and treachery were exposed" (History of Iran and the World, Grade 10 (2004) p. 109). Zionism is described as an idea "that is based on the establishment of the Jews' greater homeland and on this ethnic group's dominance over the world" (Social Studies [Humanities], Grade 12 (2004) p. 41). This reminds one of such anti-Semitic texts as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Israel, which is not recognized in any way and whose name does not appear on any of the maps, is portrayed as a danger to the whole world of Islam and as a tool in the hands of its enemy – America:

Another problem [faced by the Muslim countries] is the regime occupying Jerusalem (Israel), which has been created in this area as a base for America and other aggressive powers, with the aim of taking over Muslim lands.

Geography [Humanities], Grade 11 (2004) p. 25

Beyond demonizing Israel as a usurper, occupier of Muslim holy places, oppressor of the Palestinians and killer of Palestinian children – "At that time the Israeli officer pounded [three-year old] Muhammad's head with his rifle's stock and his warm blood was sprinkled upon [his six-year old brother] Khaled's hands." (Persian: Let's Read, Grade 3 (2004) p. 113) – Israel has always been presented by Ayatollah Khomeini as a direct enemy of Iran itself, as it is in one of his speeches in 1963, following the massacre of students in the Feyziyyeh religious college in Qom by the Shah's security forces, which Khomeini tries to falsely portray as part of Israel's schemes in Iran:

"Israel does not want the Koran to be in this state [Iran]. Israel does not want the Muslim clergymen to be in this state. Israel does not want Islamic law to be in this state. Israel does not want scholars to be in this state. Israel pounded the Feyziyyeh [religious] college with the hand of its black agents. It pounds us. It pounds you, the nation. It wants to take possession of your economy. It wants to eliminate your commerce and agriculture. It wants to take possession of your wealth. Israel wants these things that are an obstacle to it – these things that are a barrier on its way – to be removed out of the way by the hand of its agents."

History, Grade 8 (2004) p. 76

The Attitude to the War

The rivalry with the West is not necessarily religious or even cultural. The attitude to other religions in the Iranian school textbooks is not hostile (except for texts presenting Bahaism as a sect created by Western Colonialism with a view to destroying Islam's unity). Western culture is not rejected in principle – only its perceived attack on the world of Islam is. The conflict is chiefly political. But, within this political rivalry with the West, radical Islam as interpreted by Ayatollah Khomeini provides the ideological basis, with an alarming notion of eschatological Armageddon attached to it. Within this context, the traditional Islamic concepts of Jihad and martyrdom are adapted to Khomeini's vision of the war against 'the Arrogant Ones'. In the case of Jihad, it is given a social meaning, namely, defending the deprived ones against their oppressors:

Initiative Jihad

Islam never gives the order for Jihad and battle with the aim of conquering countries, taking lands, exploiting people and imposing faiths and cultures. But, if the situation is that people are ignorant, live in poverty and deprivation, and the oppressors and the Arrogant Ones plunder the product of their labor, the army of Islam knows its duty, which is to help the deprived and save them from the claws of the Arrogant...

If the Arrogant Ones close the way to preaching and reason and prevent guidance and preaching, the order of Jihad is issued according to the discretion of the Prophet, or the Imam, or the Muslim leader, so that the army of Islam would make the Arrogant Ones fall in a holy Jihad and heavy attack, and pave the way for free preaching and for the people's awakening and their redemption.

Initiative Jihad is, then, a kind of defense as well, defense of the deprived people's rights, defense of the people's honor, and defense of the rights of the oppressed.

Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 8 (2004) pp. 69-70

As for martyrdom, a new ideal is brought to light: collective martyrdom. The war is unavoidable and is part of the Islamic Revolution itself – "Now, in order to continue the Islamic Revolution, it is our duty to continue with all [our] power our revolt against the Arrogant Ones and the oppressors..." (Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 7 (2004) p. 29) But victory is not guaranteed. One may even find in Khomeini's vision of the global war a suicidal mood:

"Today... I am saying to you, O faithful brethren, that, if we are wiped out of the world's surface by the criminal hands of America and the Soviet Union, and meet our God honorably and with [our] red blood, it would be better than living a nobleman's comfortable life under the flag of the Red Army of the East and the black [flag] of the West."

Imam Khomeini's political will, **Islamic Viewpoint, Grade 11 (2004) p. 26**, and see also the first quotation above.

In the case of Israel and the Jewish population in Palestine, the war assumes a sense of purification and garbage removal. In a picture story for grade 3 students, the inhabitants of a clean and tidy town chase away a repugnant creature that spreads garbage along his way. In one of the pictures, the Jewish symbol of the Star of David

is seen as part of the garbage. In two other pictures, the Star of David is drawn on the creature's right arm (Gifts of Heaven – Work Book, Grade 3 (2004) pp. 13-15).

Concluding Note

The Iranian school textbooks provide an example of a hate curriculum and reveal an educational system which prepares school children for war and martyrdom against the West and particularly against the United States and Israel. The continuation of this way of thinking and indoctrination in this system – which seems to be almost certain under the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinezhad – should alarm all individuals and governments which cherish the principles of peace and international cooperation. Such education is bound to lead to disaster on an unperceived scale.