IMPERIAL DREAMS: The Paradox of Iranian Education

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New Dreams of World Power: A map of ancient trade routes in Asia with Iran at the center.

Iranian children preparing for martyrdom.
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Executive Summary

For some, a reading of the Iranian curriculum might leave them with mixed feelings. From the perspective of nation-building, one cannot deny that Iran is attempting to create an alternative to the Western way of life. And the authors of the curriculum have provided Iranian students with a wide array of tools for their future lives. These include much of what is good in education everywhere in terms of encouraging students to develop various skills, good habits, self-confidence and cleanliness, along with a level of creative and analytical thinking. Of particular interest are efforts to develop a unique way of thinking, predicated upon the heritage of Persian culture and Shiite Islam, with much emphasis on poetry and mysticism.

More to the point, the Iranian education curriculum includes numerous troubling aspects: from a Manichean division of the world into good versus evil; the ambition to impose Iranian hegemony on the world; a culture of militarism and jihad; blind obedience and martyrdom; and hostility and paranoia toward foreigners. Those Iranian youth—at once seemingly so cared for—are at the same time being raised to follow in the footsteps of hundreds of thousands of children already martyred or made invalid during Iran's recent tumultuous history. Jihad war is unending. Creativity and critical thinking are directed toward such a limited dimension; for the rest, obedience and sacrifice are a requirement. The instilled trust in mystical (read, in this context, irrational) thinking and decision-making may be useful in some junctions of one's private life, but the assumption that the Supreme Leader and other religious personalities have paranormal powers and thus can make any decision because of their open channels to the angels, the Prophet, the Mahdi or the Divine—is troubling, to say the least. Of even more concern, is the frenzied rush toward the end-of-time's "horrifying battle," through the instrument of continuous jihad. All this reflects "a characteristic ambivalence toward human agency" by the revolution's founding fathers.

Jihad War and Child Martyrdom: Defense? The curriculum portrays Iran as committed to a total struggle for the creation of a just world order; it envisages constant aggression from all the "arrogant forces," led by the United States. Said another way, Iran is committed to meddling in the affairs of other countries so it must always be ready to defend itself against (predictable) reactions. Such a condition will remain until the coming of the Mahdi, the Shiite Messiah and the establishment of the "Just World Government." "By supporting the oppressed and downtrodden of the world, the enmity of the oppressors is expected to be unleashed, but this also leads to the strengthening of the 'front of truth' in the world as it brings us closer to the Just World Government."

For those who may be interested, some footnotes contain additional transliterated Persian, beyond what is found in the text.

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3 Religion and Life, Grade 12, 2014-15 (Iranian Calendar, 1393), p. 149.
While the curriculum differentiates between *Jihad Wars*—Defensive, Internal (against opposition at home) and Elementary (attacking other countries)—students learn that all three should be considered "Defensive." Due to the need for *such jihad wars*, child martyrdom and inevitable sacrifice are intensively and vividly inculcated into young minds in a myriad of ways, throughout the curriculum.

Led by their "infallible and trustworthy Leader," Iranian students are expected to propagate the message worldwide and defend themselves from foreign cultural invasions. They know now that a *jihad war*—requiring their possible martyrdom on a massive scale and for which they practice from the first grade—could be launched as part of an Iranian "attack on countries ruled by oppressive governments." Any such attack should, nevertheless, be considered a "defensive jihad" because any "defense of the oppressed and innocent is just like defending oneself." They are taught that the world is experiencing a major struggle between the powers of good and the powers of evil. And they are being prepared.

**The Mahdi and the Apocalyptic Battle:** The curriculum goes a long way toward clarifying whether the Iranian regime has millenarian-apocalyptic tendencies, or not. It undoubtedly has. Waiting and preparing for the Mahdi-savior, means constant training and participation in conflicts and wars between Iran and the "arrogant ones" (i.e. the West); so when the Mahdi arrives, all is in readiness, including weapons. According to the Shiite interpretation of Islam, as explained in the revolutionary curriculum, "waiting" (*entezar*) for the Mahdi includes fighting other regimes that are not Islamist-Khomeinist: "The 'waiting society' does not accept un-Godly, idolatrous governments but stands against them and creates 'resistance' against them." Yet this very "resistance" (fighting, really) also serves as an admission test to join the Mahdi savior. As "people of jihad and combat," only a few of the very best boys and girls will be chosen. "The waiting [student] treats the Occultation period as a [military] operational alert period for helping the Imam [Mahdi]. Each and every moment [the believer] is waiting for the resounding call of the Imam throughout the world, inviting people to join the truth." A frenzy of preparations, training and military actions is already under way. Everything is being prepared for the arrival of the Mahdi and the apocalyptic "horrifying battle of the Imam's army against the oppressors of the world."

Clearly, the apocalyptic future "horrifying battle" between Iran and the "world oppressors" has permeated backwards to the present. While the Mahdi has yet to show up, the battle already rages and will never stop. Thus, as the curriculum teaches, we are there, already.

**Mysticism and Blind Obedience:** According to the school textbooks, the Mahdi, or hidden Imam, is shown to be strolling in the streets, listening to people and helping the sick and helpless. He provides solutions to problems inside the minds of believers through inspiration—especially religious scholars. Most importantly, he protects Shiite followers from conspiracies against them. *4* Mahdi birthday parties are celebrated in classes.*5* The intensive presence of the hidden Mahdi and the frenzied military preparations for his reappearance to lead the war should be taken seriously in the

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5 *Heaven’s Presents*, Grade 2, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 88-91.
context of the mystical education in all grades (which includes communication with celestial figures).

Since ancient times, "divine" legitimacy for kings and leaders has been a fixture in Iranian political tradition. The 1979 Revolution—changing much as it did by replacing a kingship with an Islamic republic—did little to rectify this. Iran's children are educated to blindly obey their divine-instructed Leader. "All are submissive and obedient to the Guardian-Jurist [Supreme Leader]."

Mystical education begins in the first grade, emphasizing communication with God, and continuing through the upper grades by learning to sense the presence of the Mahdi. There is philosophical and gnostic education aimed at presenting the superiority of Islam's thinking, but no less to instill full trust in the Leader's mental powers. Thus, they learn that the leader of such a perfect Islamic polity should reach the spiritual degree that allows: "the very connection with the angel of revelation" (Farabi). Such a leader "is the Caliph and deputy of God . . . receives matters and truth directly from the source of Glory" (Sohravardi).

The Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei himself, writes to the children describing the founding father of the Safavid royal-mystic dynasty as, "religious scholar, mystic, exegete and seer (mohaddas)." The latter term typically relates to the Imams and denotes an ability to speak to the angels (such as Jibreel who communicated with the Prophet Mohammad). The assumption is clear: the Supreme Leader, elsewhere described as infallible (like the Prophet and the Holy Imams), insists that he is privy to celestial instructions and should be blindly obeyed. Religious scholars in power—who are experts in Islamic law, but also with paranormal abilities—have full authority in every field to innovate, including the "procurement and use of new weapons." This description rules out the possibility of an all-encompassing binding fatwa (religious edict) in matters of weapons. (This essentially means that depending on how the day went with any present or future leader's particular discussion with an angel, they might—or might not—put nuclear options on the table.)

In short, every graduate of the curriculum is supposed to be able to communicate with the spiritual world, either through prayer or mystical practices. They are taught that this ability is much stronger in those having the most merit, particularly the religious leaders who can easily communicate with the Prophet, angels, the Mahdi or the Divine. Such leaders should, therefore, be blindly obeyed. The Mahdi is alive and present; everyone prepares for helping him in the final war for the establishment of the world government.

**Dissimulation (taqiyyeh):** Understanding the intentions of the Iranian leadership is made more complicated by another trait featured in the curriculum. Iranian students study about "dissimulation" [taqiyyeh] and "misleading the enemy." They learn that in times of need, dissimulation and temporary pacts—even with "un-Godly, idolatrous
governments”—are proper (but only until such time as the balance of power should change). In fact, we know from Khamenei's own words, that the entire nuclear negotiations are predicated on such a historical treaty with an illegitimate government (which was concluded n 661 CE between Imam Hassan and Mu'awiyah and lead to the fateful battle of Karbala two decades later).

One-Sided World View: Further complicating any communication with the regime, are its one-sided historical narratives. Historical facts and processes are carelessly manipulated in order to present a lopsided, imagined reality, in which the clergy and Iranian people are always victimized; regardless of circumstances, the "other side" is always the "wrong side." Opposition is all too often considered sedition.

Regarding the role of foreigners, the lack of introspection about Iranian history tends to reinforce a warped perception of "the others"—seen principally as the Western powers and a constant evil force. Iran's culpability for its own plight over the centuries—most recently in the Iran-Iraq War—is a case in point. Another example is the obsessive hatred toward the Jewish state and the avoidance of embarrassing facts such as amicable, historical Jewish-Persian relations; the flight of harassed and persecuted Jewish communities from Muslim countries; and the Holocaust. All of these remain non-existent in Iranian textbooks.

Imperial Dreams and the Aryan Identity: Troubling, too, is the Aryan-Shiite basis of Iranian identity, which includes a fascination with imperialism—despite its hatred for foreign "colonialists." Iranian students look to the past and see the Aryan "Kingdom of Iran extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean." They are taught to be proud because the Iranian-Achaemenid government was "the first ever global empire." They learn that empires are exciting and, as they look to the present, they see fellow Iranians supporting "the oppressed peoples of Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan." Looking toward the future, they learn about Iran's "New Islamic Civilization (NIC)" and its "Full Life Program," which "humanity at large is now ready to receive."

In recent years this Shiite/pan-Islamic vision has been married to a renewed fascination with powerful Persian empires, created in the past by Aryan tribes. The primordial identity of Iran as Aryan in the textbooks is not especially associated with a racist worldview, but nonetheless has a supremacist coloring that goes beyond culture.8 With Iran's historic connection to powerful Persian empires, amid the suggestion that Azeri-Turkish Iranians remain Aryans, such identity can be seen to have an essentialist dimension to it. (Similarly, the Kurds come from the Aryan Race.)

The perception of shared Aryan roots likewise suggests a simpatico relationship with Germany.9 In 1935, following pressure from Iranian diplomats in Berlin, the name Persia

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9 According to Küntzel, the economic factor is marginal in explaining Germany's policy toward Iran and vice versa. Resentment for being defeated in WWII, Iran not seeing Germany as criminal, but as fellow Aryans, and a search for a multipolar world are also part of the explanation. Matthias Küntzel, Germany and Iran: From the Aryan Axis to the Nuclear Threshold, Candor NY: Telos, 2014.
was abandoned in favor of Iran. In the curriculum, this includes a historical narrative minimizing the responsibility of Germany for starting WWII, by shifting fault to "colonialist competitions and Fascist and racist thinking entertained by European politicians." Furthermore, the U.S. is seen as culpable for its use of nuclear bombs, while the Holocaust is avoided altogether within the curriculum. German, as a foreign language, has a prominent role in the curriculum, alongside Arabic, English and French (but not Azeri-Turkish or Kurdish).

**Imperial and Modular:** While retaining its Aryan-Shiite framework, the new global civilization appears to be modular—embracing Sunni Muslims, monotheists, Third Worldists and any oppressed people (barring some notable exceptions). The allure of empires—Aryan-Persian, Muslim and others—is accompanied by much learning of Persian poetry and heroic mythological stories from the past, strengthening the Iranian identity (iraniyat). Such an imperial modular religious ideology that accommodates Sunnis and all the "downtrodden," allows Iranian governments to garner support for a globalist pan-Islamic vision of world government, in which the Aryan-Persian-Shiite-Iranians will serve as future leaders.

**Discrimination:** Despite hatred against all sorts of enemies, this inventive Islamist model may accommodate more groups than previously assumed, allowing for a more rapid expansion of the Iranian Supreme Leader-centered sphere of influence. Yet, the curriculum describes an environment that inherently favors males who are Shiite-Persians and discriminates against all others: (women; Sunni, Muslims who are un-submissive to the Supreme Leader; non-Muslims; Baha'is; gays; Jews; Azerbaijanim; Kurds; Arabs; newborn Christians; liberals; atheists; and freedom seekers of all types).

The Iranian education curriculum includes a long list of troubling features. It speaks defense, but often means aggression and hate. It teaches love and intimate relations with God, but manipulates students’ deepest emotions—toward martyrdom, self-sacrifice, jihad war and blind obedience to the all-powerful Supreme Leader. While it boasts ancient tradition and refined culture, it nurtures Imperial Dreams based on a radical religious ideology and an essentialist-racial worldview predicated on Aryan-Persian superiority. The extremism of this ideology is not only religious and political, but also incorporates a belief in paranormal powers granted to the leadership. The Iranian curriculum justifies all manner of discrimination—from gender segregation to religious and ethnic classes—but confidently teaches a modular political culture that can transform all into an ever-expanding Islamic empire. It fans the flames of eternal victimhood among young Iranians, with its one-sided self-righteous historical narrative, but blocks the development of genuine historical understanding. Even worse, while proclaiming to lead the camp of "truth seekers against the arrogant ones," the curriculum teaches students to dissimulate.

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This is a curriculum that calls students to experiment in the laboratory, but warns that human life is too short for experimenting. It encourages creativity, but insists on an attitude of militarism. It fuses a totalitarian mentality with unsettling mystical paradigms that assume communication with celestial beings. And a jihad war continues endlessly, culminating in a Mahdi-led apocalyptic battle. And while jihad/"resistance" wars and frenzied preparations continue incessantly, the hidden Mahdi is understood to be everywhere—preparing followers before his reappearance to establish a utopian/dystopian world government led by Iranians.

Of utmost concern is not that each Iranian student takes every element of what they learn in school seriously. Some certainly don't. But the curriculum will no doubt raise enough radical leaders, committed military commanders, scientists, technicians and other elite groups, committed to this problematic perception of reality—and blindly loyal to the rulers of Iran.
Introduction

The end of the world is a serious matter—especially for those who are busy preparing for it.\textsuperscript{12}
—Jean Pierre Filiu

In 2006, IMPACT-SE conducted a major research project on Iran's school textbooks, distributed in 2004.\textsuperscript{13} An important finding was that Iran had created a war curriculum to prepare an entire generation for global war, based on Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's vision of collective martyrdom.

However, Iran’s uncompromising commitment to the original fervor and goals set by the Revolutionary Republic's founder was surprising to our researchers. After all, 2004 was the last of an eight-year term for reformist and perceived moderate, Iranian President Mohammad Khatami. But where we expected moderation and the long-awaited Thermidor, we found none. Thus, the research opened a window into radical political currents emerging within Iran today. Indeed, with the election of populist candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005, Iran catapulted into an open conflict with the West.

The IMPACT-SE research once again demonstrated the great potential offered in the study of school textbooks for strategic assessment. Unlike political and diplomatic declarations that are often propagated for diverse audiences and interests, education provides a clearer indicator as to where a country is heading. Schoolbooks are measures of a society—one educates children in one’s own language and shares with them a worldview and cultural and moral values.\textsuperscript{14}

In 2014-15 IMPACT-SE revisited Iranian school textbooks, covering the three academic years from 2012-15 and prepared this special interim report reflecting new developments in Iranian education.

\textsuperscript{14} In Iran, Persian or \textit{Farsi}, Iran's national language and the mother tongue of about half its population.
1. The New Civilization and its Enemies: Iran’s Cultural War

The Islamic Republic considers itself to be the perfect political system—based on what it believes to be the one true plan for humanity. Their program is essentially an Iranian-style Islam called the New Islamic Civilization (NIC), offered as the answer to all of the mistakes, shortcomings and evils of Western society. As such, the battle of the two civilizations is seen as one between good and evil and is being waged on a global scale.

Defending against Foreign Invasion

This "battle" is the responsibility of each Iranian citizen: It begins with defense. Students are indoctrinated to fear the internet, new media and the "Soft War," as tools used by their enemies to assault Iranian culture. According to Nima Adelkhah, the soft war paradigm and "the institutionalization of various Basi̇j (volunteer militia) centers in elementary schools," is reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution following the 1978 upheaval that overthrew the previous (Shah) government. The following quotation is taken from a Persian literature book for grade 8:

"Today the enemies of this people have launched, without fanfare, a soft war using these tools to create havoc (in Iran). If Internet and new-technology users will not adopt scientific ethics and human virtues, and will not abide by law and religion and comply with ethical values and cultural norms, the internet will turn into a destructive bomb in every family. Therefore, computer or technological ethics represent our commitment to personal morality, social values and respect for the rights of others."

Iranians should be careful not to be dependent on foreigners. In Khomeini’s words: "Dear ones, you should try to come out of this dependence . . . avoid relying on foreigners." A ninth grade book warns against the "deception and conspiracies of various global political and military powers." Chief among these global powers is the United States.

We have already mentioned the dangers that can possibly destroy our security. These dangers are called threats. So, threats are meant to be intimidating and frightening. For example, America threatens some countries for doing or not doing certain activities.

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15 "Soft War" (jang-e narm) is an Iranian expression, perhaps inspired by Joseph Nye's Soft Power, but having a larger meaning beyond the politically useful attraction of country. It denotes a planned attack on a targeted country using a variety of elements such as propaganda war, undermining the regime, and cultural inspiration. The following definition is provided in a Defense Readiness textbook: "The soft war seeks to change the identity and personality of the targeted society." In this war, fundamental beliefs, convictions and values of a given society are being attacked." The book quotes the Supreme Leader as saying that, "Soft War means to sow doubt in the hearts and minds of the people." This original term has been used by the Iranian regime to suppress a variety of dissenting voices within Iran, either politically or culturally. Defense Readiness, Grade 11, 2014-15 (Iranian Calendar,1393), pp. 41, 42.


17 Persian, Grade 8, 2012-13 (1391), p. 95.

18 Geography, Pre-University, Human Sciences, 2012-13 (1391), p. iii.

For instance, the American government threatens us with military strikes, sanctions etc., so that Iran will discontinue its peaceful nuclear activities.\textsuperscript{20}

Students are taught that the purpose of the Islamic Revolution is to "liberate Iran from the claws of God's enemies" and to gain "freedom from the bondage of American arrogance and economic dependence on the Western countries led by America"(numerals as they appear in the school textbook):

\textbf{3- Economic Dependence on Foreigners}:  
The Western countries, led by America's control of oil and other valuable resources of Iran through long-term contracts, export their own products and culture in return. This practice made our country heavily dependent on oil exports and led to stagnation, with respect to the domestic production of goods.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{2- Establishment of Independence and Freedom}:  
The celebration of Bahman 22, 1357 (The Victory of the Iranian Revolution, February 9, 1979), represented the liberation from the claws of God's enemies and freedom from the bondage of American arrogance. The people stood on their own feet. But the enemies of our independence and freedom, who lost great interests, did not stand by idly. Using various conspiracies and other methods, they intended to destroy the Islamic Revolution or to divert it from its course, but so far they have not attained anything other than defeat and contempt.\textsuperscript{22}

The struggle is seen to be ongoing and the text goes on to explain the dangers coming from abroad, which include threats encompassing every facet of life—political, economic, military, cultural, social and environmental.\textsuperscript{23} These threats are described as never-ending, because they are "gradual, long-term and limitless (\textit{na-mahdud})."

As the following translated table demonstrates, any kind of freedom of speech, political debate or appreciation of Iranian culture or values other than those espoused by the regime are intolerable, since they amount to a "cultural invasion," and "conquest of thought and brain." The outward appearance of said invasion seems charming and attractive; feigns friendship and love but leads to moral corruption and family breakdown— supported by malicious attacks through the media.\textsuperscript{24}

The school text then sums up the table by pointing to the four goals of the purported Cultural Invasion: "(1) Islam-hatred and averting Islamism; (2) unleashing moral crises and destroying the moral security of society, particularly among the youth; (3) destroying society's religious and national values; and (4) unleashing a spirit of despair and hopelessness among the people, especially among the future builders of the homeland."\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., p. 4.
\item Ibid., p. 15.
\item Ibid., p. 16.
\item Ibid., p. 5.
\item \textit{Defense Readiness}, Grade 9, 2012-13 (1391), p. 7.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Military Invasion</th>
<th>Cultural Invasion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Conquest of territory and land</td>
<td>Conquest of thought and brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack Duration</td>
<td>Typically short and limited</td>
<td>Gradual, long-term and limitless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward Appearance</td>
<td>Hateful and tumultuous</td>
<td>Charming and attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Presentation</td>
<td>Declaring enmity and hate</td>
<td>Showing friendship and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion Instruments</td>
<td>Canons, tanks, missiles</td>
<td>Satellite waves, movies and other media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion Results</td>
<td>Human loss, economic damage, etc.</td>
<td>Moral corruption, spread of drugs, family breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invasion Sites</td>
<td>Economic and military centers, etc.</td>
<td>Schools, universities, cultural centers etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The text tries to deal with widespread doubts among Iranian youth who aspire toward a democratic or post-Islamist Iran, as manifested in the 2009 Green Movement protest. What Iranian authorities portray as defense—“enemies of this (Iranian) people have launched . . . a Soft War”—in truth veils an effort by Iran’s leadership to indoctrinate students to accept “the rules of the game,” as dictated by the Iranian regime. Rather, it represents an offensive against large segments of Iranian society. And as we will see, it extends far beyond Iranian society.

Expanding the Cultural Revolution to the World

While textbooks teach Iranian youth to protect themselves from a foreign cultural invasion, efforts are also being made to mobilize them for Iran’s cultural invasion of the world.

With the globalization of the media and transformation of the world into one village, an opportunity has arisen for various ideas and beliefs to compete in the global arena. Which worldview (‘aqideh) and which lifestyle have merit and will naturally be adopted by the various nations? Thus, a worldview having the following features can become globalized:

A. It is compatible with human nature and its innate qualities
B. Based on reason (can be defended accordingly)
C. Has the power to meet the essential needs of the today's world, such as social justice
D. Benefits from Divine help and support
E. Its missionary (moballegh) is an infallible and trustworthy Leader (rahbar-e ma’sum va mored-e e’tamad)²⁷

Exporting the Iranian system is, of course, not considered an invasion but rather a "competition of ideas and beliefs." Yet, troubling, is the attitude toward the "Other" as both a cultural invader to be blocked and as one whose culture should be replaced through competition by an Iranian worldview. Even more troubling is the expression "Infallible Leader" [rahbar-e ma’sum]. Ma’sum is laden with meaning because in Islam only the Prophets and Holy Imams are considered to be infallible. We will return to the significance of this expression in the last section of this report. Noteworthy at this point is that Iran’s global ambition is being systematically inculcated into the minds of its youth, while being presented as a purely defensive measure [against those who object to this hegemonic undertaking]. Iran’s posture is always presented as defending itself,

never as the aggressor. The "defense" paradigm is the heritage of Ruhollah Khomeini, the founding father of the Islamic Republic, as stated in the opening motto of a Defense Readiness textbook.

We do not want war with any country, be it Islamic or non-Islamic; we seek peace and good will (solh va safā) for all. Until now, we have only risen in ['Defense,' [sic] which consists for each individual a religious obligation (farizah), a divine one, and a [human] right (haqq); we never have the intention to attack other countries.

This quotation refers to the Iran-Iraq war, often described within the text as the "Holy Defense" or the "Imposed War." In a sixth grade textbook, child martyrdom is revered, against the background of Iraq's supposed plan to reach Tehran within three days with the help of "[Western] bullying and oppressive governments." While Iraq, initially planning a limited campaign, invaded Iran in September 1980, the entire war cannot be seen as "defensive" by any objective measure. At best, it could be described as a "costly exercise in futility" or transformation of a "victim into an aggressor." It began with Iranian threats, interference in Iraqi affairs and Iran's commitment to topple the Iraqi Ba'th regime. Following the Iraqi attack, Iran rejected all proposals for cease fire—continuing the war for six to eight more years despite the return of all lost territories. Iran's role in initiating and perpetuating the bloodbath is a matter of historical fact. Yet, Iranian students are taught a one-sided narrative—that they are the victims and martyrs.

Similarly, when it comes to the Iranian regime's obsession with the so-called soft war and American aggression, the message is self-contradictory and one-sided.

America, is depicted as a country ruled by the rich and a dangerous cultural aggressor. But the curriculum's intent is also to educate children to ultimately use the same tools to aggressively spread Iranian ideology across the world. Students are taught that the world must implement Iran's "full life program, which humanity at large is now ready to receive." The curriculum teaches students to see the world as a threatening place in which foreigners, who are—arrogant, oppressive and infidels—constantly plotting against Iran. It is Iran's constant duty to help topple these evil regimes around the world

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30 "The Little Leader," Heaven's Presents, Grade 6, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 58-64.


by supporting the uprisings of the downtrodden while preparing for world government under the Mahdi.\textsuperscript{35}

In other words, the term, "defense," in the context of the Iranian curriculum is a paradox. Iran's undermining of others is a welcome revolutionary and religious duty, while the predictable reactions of those in their sights are considered aggression—from which conscientious Iranians have the duty to "defend." The students—from a very young age—are raised in this oxymoronic antithesis of "defense"; on the one hand they are encouraged to aggressively spread the revolution against the West's vital interests, while on the other they are taught to play the harassed victims of foreign conspiracies.

With the fall of the Shah's regime, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed to support the oppressed \{people\} and Muslims and to stand against such tyrannical powers. Those powers that used our country as its regional representative before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, could not tolerate an Islamic Iran that worked against their unjust interests. Therefore, immediately after the Revolution, anti-revolutionary groups—sponsored and instigated by the foreigners and employing alluring titles and slogans—operated according to the wishes and interests of the enemies.\textsuperscript{36}

Keeping its revolution alive, Iran is committed to providing, "complete protection and aid to the oppressed people of the world" as well as training revolutionaries and awakening peoples to overthrow their "dictators and pharaohs".\textsuperscript{37} Consequently, leaders not appointed by God are the \"idolatrous devil\" [\textit{taghut}] (numbers are as they appear in the text).

5- Protection and Help to the Oppressed People of the World:
Considering the anti-arrogance position \{against the U.S.\}, expressed by the Islamic Revolution, the dispossessed and downtrodden of the world benefit from the moral support offered by the leadership and people of Iran. This support has helped the oppressed peoples of Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, etc., to feel less lonely in the struggle against the occupiers of their countries and, with trust in God, fight the oppressors. Iran has declared time and again that it wishes for peace, friendship and fraternity with all countries, except the 'Regime Occupying Palestine,' because it considers supporting the dispossessed and the oppressed to be its human and religious mission.

6- Awakening of Oppressed Peoples:
Nowadays, the Islamic Republic of Iran serves as a role model for revolutionary and right-seeking (\textit{haqq-talab}) people all over the world. All those who wish to overthrow

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 54-55, 120, F140. Persian: foreigners (\textit{biganegan}); arrogant (\textit{mostakberan}); oppressive (\textit{setamgaran}); and infidels (\textit{koffur}).

\textsuperscript{36} Defense Readiness, Grade 9, 2012-13, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 17. Persian: complete protection and aid to the oppressed people of the world (\textit{hemayat va komakha-ye hamehjanebeh az mazluman dar sarasar-e jahan}); dictators and pharaohs (of the age, \textit{diktator va fer'own-e zaman}). The expression "Pharaoh of the Age," typically attributed to the United States: For example, General Mohammad Reza Naqdi, commander of the Basij paramilitary force, declared that, "the spell of the Pharaoh of the Time, namely America, is in its media. With the help of its media, America has launched a big war of deception. They launched large waves of war and murder." "The Spell of the Pharaoh of the Time, namely America, is the Media (\textit{sehr-e fer'own-e zaman ya ni amrika resaneh ast})," \textit{Jahan News}, November 24, 2013, of http://jahannews.com/vdca60nei49nuy1k5k4.html.
their dictator or "pharaoh-of-the-time," can learn from Iran and its experiences. The awakening of the Islamic peoples in the Middle East region, in the countries of North Africa and other places can serve as examples for the reception of the influence and role-modeling provided by the Islamic Revolution of Iran to the oppressed peoples of the world.\textsuperscript{38}

In his recent book, published in Tehran in 2013, Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, confirms this unique situation of Iran, having to struggle everywhere all the time. Iran is not Malaysia, he explains: "We have a fundamental problem with the West and especially with America... This is because we are claimants of a mission, which has a global dimension... How come Malaysia doesn't have similar problems? Because Malaysia is not trying to change the international order. It may seek independence and strength, but its definition of strength is the advancement of national welfare."\textsuperscript{39} Iranian textbooks reflect, indeed, the revisionist policies and worldview of the Iranian regime as expressed in the constitution, which requires Iranians to struggle against the arrogant, "in every corner of the globe."\textsuperscript{40}

In sum, the school textbooks prepare the entire Iranian population for a constant state of emergency, requiring Iranians to foment revolutions throughout the world, particularly across the Middle East, while evil arrogant enemies— who hate Iran and Islam—scheme against them.

\textit{Defense Readiness, Grade 9, 2012-13 (Iranian Calendar,1391), p. 3.}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 24, quoted from the Iranian Constitution, article 154.
2. Never-Ending Jihad

To understand the Iranian curriculum is to realize that jihad means warfare.41 A schoolbook focusing on Islamic edicts devotes a chapter to jihad, under the title, "Defense and Jihad." The chapter begins with the relevant Quranic verse on fighting (qītal): "Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not." (Al-Baqarah, 2:216)42 The grammatical root of qītal (q.t.l.) covers a range of meanings including killing, massacring, murdering and fighting. In the curriculum, justifications for a jihad war are numerous and could be applied to a wide array of scenarios throughout the world.

Jihad means effort and combat in God’s way and defense of Muslims and the oppressed in order to maintain the right and the true, unity and justice, to eliminate transgression and plunder, torture and intimidation, occupation and colonialism and in general, sedition and corruption in the world.43

The liberal definition given here to justify a jihad war, permits its use against anyone, anywhere. Expressions such as "the just and true," "the oppressed," "transgression," "sedition and corruption," and "in the world" suggest that Iran’s next generation is being educated for continuous war against the rest of the world until the establishment of the "just rule," as deemed by Iran’s Supreme Leader.

The text differentiates among the following types of jihad:

1. Defensive Jihad (jehad-e defa‘i) constitutes defense against an enemy transgressing the border or city of the Muslims, or defense of one’s own or other’s life, honor and property.

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43 Ibid., p.12. Persian: effort and combat (talash va mobarezeh); the oppressed (mazluman); the right and the true (haqq va haqiqat); transgression and plunder (tajavoz va chapavol).
2. **Internal Jihad** (*jehad-e dakheli*) represents a war with outlawed people who implement rebellion and disobedience as well as armed uprisings.

3. **Elementary Jihad** (*jehad-e ebtada’i*) defined as an attack on countries ruled by oppressive governments that do not allow free religious activities or freedom to listen to the call of religion. The goal of this type of *jihad* is not to conquer a country but to remove obstacles to the propagation of religion. This includes allowing people the right to guidance from—and familiarity with—the rules of religion, while enjoying the rights of freedom and justice.\(^{44}\)

The goal of such education is to prepare students to fight in any war that is justified by the Iranian regime. This includes any perceived encroachment on any Muslim city or border in the world; any opposition movement within Iran that may express "disobedience"; as well as any "oppressive" country that does not provide its citizens with the "rights of freedom and justice" or allow the free propagation of religion.

Yet *jihad* laws do not imply that anything goes. One cannot just conquer countries. Analyzing the situation with Hezbollah, Iran’s Lebanese proxy, since the 1980s and 1990s, Martin Kramer explains:

> On the one hand, submission to Islamic law freed Hezbollah from non-Islamic moral constraints. Hezbollah felt no need to justify its acts by other codes. Its struggle was a *jihad*, a form of sacred warfare regulated solely by Islamic law . . . . On the other hand, *jihad* had its own constraints. The Islamic law of war is the codification of a moral sensibility. While it is open to interpretation, it is not infinitely elastic. Some of its provisions compel violence—acts of punishment or resistance. But other provisions forbid violence against persons afforded protection by law. The believing public had to be persuaded that Hezbollah’s actions were not criminal but "in the nature of a *jihad*, launched by the oppressed against the oppressors."\(^{45}\)

Going back to the Iranian schoolbook, the text provides some limits on violence in "Defensive *Jihad,*" such as the need for warfare to be gradual (*reayat-e marateb elzami ast*) in order to contain the threat with minimum violence, unless time does not allow for such a policy.\(^{46}\) Similarly, students are taught to avoid chasing an enemy once he escapes. Nevertheless, it is clear that the authors put much effort into the explanation of "defense," which unequivocally justifies *jihad* war, as seen in the following statements: "Explain the following sentence: Elementary *Jihad* is also a kind of Defensive *Jihad*;"\(^ {47}\) and: "An attack is sometimes military and sometimes cultural; it sometimes aims at conquering a land or part of it and sometimes aims at political-economic control."\(^ {48}\) Similarly: "Defense of the oppressed and innocent people is just like defending oneself; the religious laws are the same for both cases."\(^ {49}\)

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\(^{44}\) Ibid., pp.12-13.


\(^{46}\) Religious Rulings, Grade 11, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 15-16.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 15.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 14.

\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 15.
In other words, every jihad war is "Defensive Jihad" since it is also considered "Elementary Jihad" (i.e. an attack on countries ruled by oppressive governments). It can be a war launched in the case of cultural invasion (which is constant in our information age); or it may be a war launched to support any pro-Iranian insurgency, regime (or whomever Iran decides is oppressed). While Kramer notes with Hezbollah in the 1980s and 1990s, that one had to convince Lebanese clerics about certain jihadist practices, the current Iranian textbooks tell another story.

Iran, for its part, has a Supreme Leader who holds complete authority on every decision. Indeed, the school textbook states: "The fate of those captured in battle will be decided by the infallible Imam or the Guardian Jurist [Vali-ye Faqih, Iran's Supreme Leader]." Moreover, the textbook does not refer to issues involving civilians, or situations like hostage-taking, which raised questions among Lebanese clerics at the time. (Nothing is said about nuclear weapons, either, in the context of jihad.) Iranian students are educated to obey the Supreme Leader in all matters — no questions asked. We also know that jihad's supposed limitations did not prevent Iran-Hezbollah terrorist attacks such as the 1994 Jewish Community Center (AMIA) bombing in Buenos Aires or the 1996 Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, in which current Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was allegedly involved.

It will be useful to understand how the continuous jihad war is connected to Twelver Shism's vision of an apocalyptic battle in the end of the days, (as the Mahdi-savior reappears to lead the army of the just). According to the Shiite interpretation of Islam — as explained in the revolutionary curriculum — "waiting" (entezar) for the Mahdi does not connote sitting idle and doing nothing. The "waiting human" and the "waiting society" that comprise the nation of Iran, are supposed to be active in the world, to advance the millenarian agenda. This means perfecting one's society so it becomes a model, and also fighting other regimes that are not Islamist-Khomeinist: "The 'waiting society' does not accept un-Godly, idolatrous governments but stands against them and creates 'resistance' against them." "Resistance" (moqavemat, muqawamah), a term often used also by Hezbollah and Palestinian radicals, does not mean defense, but rather incessant offensive operations aimed at the destruction of one's rival through continuous struggle. The curriculum goes on to explain that the "dynamics of the Shiite society throughout history, has been connected to two elements."

A. "Red Past," i.e., the belief in the [martyrdom of Imam Hossein in Karbala' on October, 10, 680, on the day of 'Ashura' and readiness for self-sacrifice and martyrdom in the way of justice, idealism and truth.

50 Ibid. Notice the ambiguity of the wording in "the infallible Imam or the Guardian Jurist," hinting that both are one and the same, or equal. See discussion in chapter 8 below.
B. "Green Future," i.e., the belief in Mahdism (mahdaviyat), the rejection of idolatrous governments and the effort to spread justice and humanism in the entire world.55 "Green Future" here denotes a struggle to spread the Iranian system (the Shiite "waiting society") to the entire world.

Waiting for the Mahdi really means activity to prepare for his coming.56 Often, a strong belief in the return of the Mahdi leads to peaceful expectation, but in the case of the Iranian curriculum, students are instructed to join a millenarian frenzy of training and preparation, constant emergency, blind obedience and actual participation in conflicts, at home and abroad.

Students are taught that they should personally strive to join the Mahdi savior, as "people of jihad and combat" for which only a few of the very best will be chosen (313 persons, mostly youth, including fifty women).57 "The waiting [student] treats the Occultation period as a [military] operational alert period for helping the Imam. Each and every moment he is waiting for the resounding call of the Imam that will be heard in the world inviting people to join the truth." Those "whom, during their lives, did not fight against the wrong, and did not confront the arrogant ones," will not join the battle for lack of preparedness, just as the Israelites in the Quran (Al-Ma’idah, 5:24).58 Note that training and preparing mean that one should actually participate in: "the constant battle between good and evil have an active presence in the [battle] front of truth and withstand and resist the inner and outer Satans." Those who avoid "the battlefield of the truth seekers against the arrogant ones," remain unprepared and will not be eligible to serve in the close circle of the "Mahdi's friends" as part of the "Army of the Imam" in the apocalyptic final battle against the "oppressors of the world".59

This goes a long way in clarifying whether the Iranian regime has millenarian-apocalyptic tendencies, or not.60 It undoubtedly has. Waiting and preparing for the Mahdi means constant training and participation in conflicts and wars between Iran and

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56 Iran’s Shiism maintains the Mahdi, Islam’s savior, is the Twelver Imam who went into Occultation in 873 CE. He disappeared, yet continues ever since to have a "hidden" presence in the world, until his much awaited reappearance in the end of times. Shiis, an often oppressed minority, had to struggle with the question of what to do until the return of the Mahdi, typically choosing a classic quietist "sitting" (Arabic, qu’ud) or passive waiting over “exiting” with a sword (Arabic, al-khuruj bi l-saif) to fight tyranny and establish legitimate Shii rule. Note that oscillation between "sitting" and "exiting" preceded the Occultation reflecting the weakness of the Shiites and the early Imams. After the disappearance of the Imam, "sitting" and "exiting" often merge with the debate over passive versus active waiting for his return. Meir M. Bar-Asher, Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imami Shiism, Leiden and Jerusalem: Brill and Magnes Press, 1999, p. 48. Amatzia Baram, "The Iraqi Shi’i Community: Between Sistani, Muqtada, the IGC, and the CPA: Congressional Testimony," USIP, April 21, 2004, http://www.usip.org/publications/the-irai-shii-community-between-sistani-muqtada-the-igc-and-the-cpa.
58 Ibid., p. 124. Quran: "They said, ‘O Moses, indeed we will not enter it, ever, as long as they are within it; so go you and your Lord, and fight. Indeed, we are remaining right here.’" (http://quran.com/5). Persian: Occultation period (asr-e ghaybat); [military] operational alert (amadeh-bash).
59 Ibid., p. 125. Persian: Mahdi’s friends (yaran-e emam); Army of the Imam (sepeh-e emam); oppressors of the world (setakmanaran-e jahan).
the "arrogant ones" (i.e. the West); so when the Mahdi arrives, all is in readiness, including weapons.

A comparative study of millennial movements has concluded that in all instances, there is a sense of urgency, with divine judgment, salvation, and millennial bliss as the ultimate goals. And while it is true that the Iranian curriculum also warns against those who predict the time of the appearance of the Mahdi, as well as against possible imposters, yet a frenzy of preparations, training and military actions is already under way at breakneck speed. Everything is being prepared for the arrival of the Mahdi (Qa'im, Imam) and the apocalyptic "horrifying battle of the Imam's army against the oppressors of the world." Those bravely fighting today will form the elite unit of the Imam's army, the "Imam's friends."

In Khomeini's words on applying the Quran, quoted in the textbook for grade 12 students: "We have to prepare ourselves to be the soldiers of the Imam of the Time [that is, the Mahdi] ... the great savior that will fight with all the international power and corruption centers."

Clearly, the apocalyptic future "horrifying battle" between Iran and the world oppressors has permeated backwards to the present. While the Mahdi has yet to show up, the battle already rages and will never stop. We are there, already.

As we will see later on, every Iranian student is taught to blindly follow orders of the religious authorities and the Supreme Leader; only they, the text teaches, are endowed with paranormal powers to connect with the (present-but-hidden) Imam and directly with the Divine. Notice that the apocalyptic terminology is current: Imam (emam) is also a title given the Supreme Leader; sepah is a name given Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC); those participating in the "horrifying battle" are people of jihad and combat; the arrogant and oppressors of the world are typically the U.S. and the West—and so it goes. In short, the continuous jihad war acknowledged by the curriculum forms a part of the live apocalyptic vision "seen" by the Iranian leadership.

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62 Qur’an and Life, Grade 12, 2014-15 (1393), pp. 114, 121,
63 Ibid., p. 125. Persian: the horrifying battle of the Imam's army against the oppressors of the world (nabard-e sahmgin-e sepah-e emam aleyh-e setamgaran-e jahan).
64 Ibid., p. 126. Persian: fight with all the international power and corruption centers (ba tamam-e marakez-e qodrat va fesad-e beynoimelali mobarezeh konad).
3. The Paradox of Iranian Education: Openness and Curiosity vs. Hatred and Submission

While centralized and indoctrinating, Iranian textbooks, particularly those aimed at elementary school, also reveal a heightened attempt to educate students who are God-fearing, loyal to Iran’s Supreme Leader and yet, happy, imparting them with the skills to face the many technological challenges and unpredictable environment of the twenty-first century. Regimented thought and sexuality is part of this utopian/dystopian upbringing but so also is the creation of students with self-confidence and enhanced personal attachment to the divine—alongside exposure to Western approaches to self-improvement. Women are shown to be separate—less than equal—yet happy and contributing to society.

For example, girls sit in separate classes and wear separate clothing—Islamic dress (often in pink in the earlier grades). They may be seen going to the mosque, but most activities, such as Qu’ran study, take place in the men’s section. At home, girls and mothers often perform household chores, but while in school girls study and are active in the laboratory. Moreover, martyrdom of girls has recently been introduced into the curriculum, changing a long-standing revolutionary tradition. As we have seen, fifty women will serve in the apocalyptic “horrifying battle” in the Mahdi savior’s elite force. Still, the male remains the quintessential martyr, and the female devout and veiled. Romance is virtually prohibited, with the exception of supervised short meetings allowed only in family settings as part of a matching process. Students are instructed not to waste their lives in search of their own spiritual ways since the true path has already been discovered and must be followed.

When it comes to science, technology and the arts, the textbooks are careful to encourage critical thinking, cultural appreciation and a spirit of problem-solving. In contrast, the curriculum also tries to instill blind obedience to a regime which teaches hatred toward the forces of arrogance in the West as well as an irrational hatred of Israel. The negative aspect of this ambiguous teaching is bolstered by a one-sided historical narrative dividing the world into good and evil, often including wrong facts and with little or no interest in understanding historical processes, let alone critical thinking.


For instance, the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine (UN General Assembly Resolution 181) is described in an Iranian history book as follows: "After World War II, in the year 1947 AD, the UN Security Council [sic] voted to divide the land of Palestine between the Muslims and the Jews [sic], and this is how the usurper government of Israel was formed." The actual text of UNGA 181 refers to "Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem." It is significant that the Iranian textbook refers to the "Security Council," instead of the General Assembly, and to "Muslims," instead of "Arabs." At least for the authors of the curriculum, this "fact" apparently makes Israel a legitimate target for an Iranian jihad war, and as described above, a project of "occupation and colonialism," approved by the hated Security Council and, "transgressing the border or city of the Muslims."

Relations with Israel are part of the evil character of the previous Shah’s regime. Note that the text speaks about embassy, although the Iran of the Shah never recognized Israel de jure, so there was never an Israeli embassy, but rather a mission (namyandegi).

### 4- Friendship with the Regime Occupying Palestine (Israel).

The Iranian government during the Shah’s era did not give any support to the oppressed people of Palestine but maintained very close political relations with the Regime Occupying Palestine (Israel). These political relations led to the activation of the embassy of that regime in Tehran and to its influence on the policies of the officials of our country. Thus, while Iranian students learn that America is hated for being an arrogant and exploitative enemy, Israel is seen as an inherently illegal entity—an illegitimate, occupying regime. An Arabic-language textbook features a short story about a sheikh subjected to interrogation in an Israeli prison. The sheikh describes Israelis as aggressive and tyrannical "killers of prophets and the innocent and destroyers of the (holy) places, and "devils." He declares that if released he "will return to jihad in the way of Allah." The Israeli judges in the story conclude: "It is easy for us to sentence him to death, but Muslims only sanctify the blood and it would make their martyrs demi-gods . . . prison is a cemetery for the living, so we will bury him there alive." Below is the poem, "On Man," by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish:

They gagged his mouth,
Bound his hands to the rock of the dead
And said: Murderer!
They took his food, clothes and banners,
Cast him into the condemned cell
And said: Thief!
They drove him away from every port,
Took his young sweetheart,
Then said: Refugee!

O you with bloodshot eyes and bloody hands,
Night is short-lived,
The detention room lasts not for ever,
Nor yet the links of chains.
Nero died, Rome did not:
With her very eyes she fights.
And seeds from a withered ear
With wheat shall fill the valley.

While the poem may be legitimate in its own right, such a context in a child's schoolbook adds to the virulent anti-Israel atmosphere of the curriculum, obviously intended to demonstrate Iran's active worldwide revolutionary role. The textbook's short introduction to the poem makes this point all too clear: (Israel-born) Darwish was born in one of the villages of "occupied Palestine," where he became a refugee at age six because of attacks by the "Israeli occupiers." The poem then represents his time in the "prisons of the Zionist regime." This represents a markedly different attitude from that of Darwish himself, who was much more nuanced, referring to Hebrew as: "not the language of the conqueror, because I spoke it as a language of love." By comparison, the authors of the Tunisian curriculum—also educating their children to be pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist—manifest a more humane attitude toward Israel by choosing another poem by Darwish, "Rita and the Rifle," in which he explains why his love for an Israeli girl could not materialize.

But the Iranian curriculum sees the world through the Manichean-like prism of good versus evil, so Israel must be represented as totally evil, and should be eradicated. Another example is a story about Israeli soldiers murdering a Palestinian three-year-old. An earlier IMPACT-SE report demonstrated how the Iranian curriculum took a page from the Palestinian curriculum and media, to turn a peaceful event into a "murder case."

While the curriculum ostensibly respects religious minorities to the degree tolerated by the regime's brand of Islam, the demonization of Israel is a step down the slippery slope of total anti-Semitism. As seen in the illustration, (part of the text's instruction on cleanliness), the filthy and germ-like image carries the Star of David. Classical Shiism's

anti-Jewish sentiment, imbued with the notion of impurity, is clearly apparent. But most pointedly, the demonization of Israel derives from an attempt to erase any relevant context within Jewish history, including those within religious education books for minorities. Moreover, hatred against Israel is featured within minority students' assigned religious textbooks.

While much information is provided on the ancient empires, particularly (and not surprisingly) the Iranian ones, there is no mention of the Israelite kingdoms. Israelite prophets such as Moses or Jesus, are associated with Egypt and the Roman Empires and only within the context of the general fascination of the curriculum with empires. Abraham is presented only as a Mesopotamian. Cyrus' famous declaration to the Babylonians is described, but not the Bible's rendering of his declaration to the Jews and the restoration of their Temple in Jerusalem. The history of the Jews of Iran, and

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80 *Social Studies (Civil, Geography, History)*, Grade 7, 2013-14 (1392), pp. 112-13.
81 Ibid., p. 172
82 Cyrus is described in the Hebrew Bible as the patron and deliverer of the Jews. He is mentioned twenty-three times by name and alluded to several times more. Interestingly, in a visit to the Shiraz Jewish community, Ali Younesi, an advisor to President Rouhani, openly said that Cyrus had allowed the Children of Israel, which he freed in Babylon, either to go to Iran, stay in Babylon or return to Jerusalem using the term
the twentieth century destruction or decline of Jewish communities in the Islamic world are not mentioned. Nor is there any mention of the Holocaust in the curriculum. And the extreme reduction within Iran in numbers of non-Muslims as a result of the policies of the Islamic Republic, represents only another glaring omission. Yet, hate propaganda abounds within the texts, ranging from global conspiracies to anti-Semitism and Israel-bashing.

In another example of the curriculum's worldview of history, the causes for World War II are shown to have originated in "colonialist competition as well as Fascist and racist thinking and ideas entertained by European politicians." In other words, WWII was a Western colonial-racist internal war between equally evil sides. This is indicative of the general framework of the curriculum: to divide the world between the evil West and its oppressed victims. And while Iranian textbooks do teach students to appreciate certain technological and cultural values from the West, the central theme presented to students is that the West morally failed and the world should adopt (Iranian) pan-Islam as the only true program reflecting the wishes of God and the needs of humanity. Rather than offering various legitimate ways by which cultures and civilizations can coexist, students are instead presented with one choice: a battle between good and evil or truth (haqq) and falsehood (batel); or more specifically, between Islam and the West. While the curriculum purports to appreciate differences in various cultures, it insists that conflict is inevitable and Iran must be strong for the coming battle(s).

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85 History of Iran and the World (2), Grade 12, 2012-13 (1391), p. 88.
4. Militarism and Child Martyrdom

War curriculum and education for child martyrdom continues, beginning with the first grade all the way to grade 12. Until last year, this program included preparation for a nuclear war alongside biological and chemical warfare and the use of firearms. Preparation for nuclear war was replaced in the current academic year with battle and martyrdom stories, with new emphasis on girl martyrs. Iranian girls and boys are educated to go to war at any moment; they are taught to see the world as overflowing with enemies of the Revolution who resist the "true program of God" around the world. Regardless of how one might view the current Iranian curriculum, education for death and militarism of young children is disturbing.

Teenagers Preparing for Nuclear War: "To counter nuclear radiation, bridges and water pipes are suitable shelters." Defense Readiness, Grade 11, 2012-13 (1391), p. 45.

Militarism, defense and jihad, are extremely widespread in the curriculum from grade 1 all the way to pre-university. Martyrdom is venerated in Iran—so much so, that it includes youth and children. Examples of martyrdom abound, featuring episodes ranging from Iran’s mythological past; Shiite martyrs in the context of the Battle of

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87 Defense Readiness, Grade 11, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 22-47.
Karbala (680 CE); national martyrs (particularly children) dying in the "Holy Defense" of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88); Palestinian martyrs; and incidents of civil self-sacrifice.

Considering that Iran's mythology past serve as a leading contexts for sacrifice, the story of Arash the Archer provides a useful example. The tale most likely derives from the Avesta, the holy book of the Zoroastrians, updated from A.D. 1288. Arash's "heroic" martyrdom is described in the current textbook.

Quietly and with wide steps, Arash climbed up the mountain, all the way to the top. At that point, he engaged in prayer and whispered to his God: "Oh God of the skies, oh creator of mountains and seas, oh, the power who gave us power, help me so I can save the Land of Iran (sarfizan-e Iran) from its enemies ...." Arash kept God's name on his lips and pulled the bow with all his might. The arrow, just like a sharp-winged bird, began to fly. From the morning until midday it flew; over mountains, valleys, and plains it traveled, until it landed on the river bank of the Jayhun (Amu Daria), on the stem of a walnut tree—no other tree in the entire world was larger or taller than that one. That place became the border between Iran and Turan. The people, old and young, climbed up to the top of the mountain. Arash, lifeless, was found lying on a stone slab. Yes, yes, Arash put his life in the arrow.

The following story, from a book intended for eleven-year-old children, focuses on the death of a boy their age, Abdullah Ibn Hassan in Karbala:

For God's sake, let me go. I want to fight the enemies like my brother Qassem. I want to defend the religion of God. Auntie! I hear the voice of Uncle Hossein calling for help. I want to run and help.

Abdullah's begging proved useful and he came close to Imam Hossein. The Imam was wounded, but his face shone like the sun. As the enemies were coming close, Abdullah shouted: "Oh you, cruel people! Oh you, enemies of God's faith! You want to kill my uncle? No, no, I will never allow that!

One of the enemies raised his sword up ready to bring it down upon the body of Imam Hossein. Abdullah shielded the Imam with his hand. The sword cut his hand off. He then threw himself on Imam Hossein's body, so that the strikes of the enemies would not hit the Imam's body.

Abdullah, this self-sacrificing boy, defended the Imam until the last moment, and eventually, was martyred across the chest of Imam Hossein. He is the last child martyr of Karbala.

Karbala had many self-sacrificing, brave and daring pre-teens and teenagers. On the day of Ashura, seventy-two brave, self-sacrificing believers became martyrs together with Abdullah to teach us a lesson about freedom, protecting the religion of God and fighting the oppressors. After Karbala, Imam Sajjad and Zeinab [Imam Hossein's son and sister] and all the prisoners disgraced the enemies of God, with their patience, steadfastness and fiery speeches. Every year in the month of Muharram, we retell the events of Karbala and try to better know Imam Hossein. We try to walk in this way, in order to achieve pride, freedom and salvation.

Jean Kellens, "Avesta, the Holy Book of the Zoroastrians," Encyclopedia Iranica, August 17, 2011. The story is widely believed to form part of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh (Book of the Kings), but is probably not part of this national epic.


Ibid., pp.103-105
The curriculum also presents cases of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in the civil domain. Students are encouraged to think about and discuss the topic of sacrifice, which is constantly instilled in them. For example, students fill out forms to provide feedback, answering questions such as: "In what way did I enjoy the lesson on the self-sacrificing ones (fedakaran)?" The students receive much instruction about martyrs from the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), presented as the "Holy Defense." One famous such martyr is Hossein Fahmideh, the boy who allegedly exploded himself under an Iraqi tank. Some of the most graphic depictions of this martyrdom have been removed from grade 3 (eight-year-olds) Persian textbooks, but the picture and story remains. And yet, a lesson on "Sacrifice and Altruism," relating the history of the Basij, displays a post stamp featuring the martyrdom of Hossein Fahmideh. The caption reads: "The Eighth of Aban [October 30], the martyrdom anniversary of the Basij school student Hossein Fahmideh, has been declared the School Student Basij Day." Then, a question for students: "Why is martyrdom (shahadat) the highest form of sacrifice and altruism?"
Of particular significance is the following data seen in a Defense Readiness textbook, used by the Basij branch of the Revolutionary Guards to train students to fight:

During the eight years of Holy Defense [that is, the war with Iraq], more than five hundred thousand school students were sent to the fronts: thirty-six thousand Martyrs, thousands of those missing-in-action, invalids and liberated (prisoners-of-war) of this sacrificing section were offered to the Islamic Revolution.98

According to journalist and foreign policy analyst, Robin Wright, the numbers of dead children are not known, but her eye-witness testimony, from an Iranian offensive aimed at conquering Iraq, confirms the story.

During the Fateh offensive (in February 1987), I toured the southwest front on the Iranian side and saw scores of boys, aged anywhere from nine to sixteen, who said with staggering and seemingly genuine enthusiasm that they had volunteered to become martyrs. Regular army troops, the paramilitary Revolutionary Guards and mullahs all lauded these youths, known as basij, for having played the most dangerous role in breaking through Iraqi lines. They had led the way, running over minefields to clear the ground for the Iranian ground assault. Wearing white headbands to signify the embracing of death and shouting: "Shaheed, shaheed" [Martyr, martyr] they literally blew their way into heaven. Their numbers were never disclosed. But a walk through the residential suburbs of Iranian cities provided a clue. Window after window, block after block, displayed black-bordered photographs of teenage or pre-teen youths.99

Perhaps it is too much to expect, to discern even the slightest inkling of regret for the bloodbath which claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands in such futile offensives. That the curriculum has failed to acknowledge the futility of such pointless human-wave assaults, including so many-sacrificed school children, is clear evidence that there is little introspection from those involved in the creation of the educational program. On the contrary, the curriculum continues to encourage enthusiasm for military participation from the first grade (six-year-olds).

Moreover, children are instructed not to obey their parents in matters regarding martyrdom. A grade 7 (twelve-year-olds) short story follows a teenage volunteer who comes home for military leave. Worried that his mother might not let him return to the battlefield, he pretends that he had returned home for good. But when the time arrives to return to the front, his mother tries to stop him, locks the front yard’s gate and insists that six months in the war are enough and others could take over. The boy disobeys his mother and leaves home by jumping over the wall. The story ends with an emotional farewell at the railway station in which the entire family (including his mother) participates and the boy, happily, travels to the battlefront in Ahvaz with his friends.100

This heart-wrenching story speaks volumes about the single-minded willingness of Iran’s leadership to sacrifice its own children. A more direct call to ignore the parents in

jihad matters is featured in the Islam textbook for thirteen-year-olds: "Defense of Islam and the Muslims is a duty, and does not require parents' approval, even though it is commendable to obtain their consent as well." Note that the Iraq-Iran War was an intra-Muslim war (though not from the perspective of the "Holy Regime" [nezam-e moqaddas] in Tehran).

As mentioned before, the curriculum also features cases of Palestinian martyrdom. In the invented story of Israeli soldiers killing a Palestinian toddler, one now sees the depiction of a slightly less-horrific murder. The 2004 edition reads: "Then the Israeli officer pounded Muhammad's head with his rifle's stock and his warm blood was sprinkled upon Khaled's hands." The newest version relates the following: "At that moment, the Israeli officer martyred him, shooting a bullet from his rifle." Both versions are outrageous lies, but perhaps the shooting is meant to seem less appalling than pounding the toddler's head to death.

Against this background of child martyrdom, a new Persian reading book within the curriculum implausibly features elements from The United Nations Convention protecting the "Rights of the Child." "In times of war or during a flood, earthquake or other natural disaster, children are clearly the most vulnerable—they are not equipped to cope with such suffering and difficulties." So, in place of seeing children as cannon-fodder, are we perhaps at last starting to see some interest in the well-being of children?

Beyond these hoped-for changes, there are underlying signs that most policies remain in place. While Iran enthusiastically supports organizations such as the Palestinian Hamas, support for their strategy of sustained civilian casualties (as a means of deterrence and soliciting sympathy) was not apparent in the examined Iranian curriculum. In a lesson on passive defense, one finds this: "Avoid establishing high-risk installations in population centers and remove such installations outside the cities." Yet, when it comes to Iran's nuclear installations, such prohibitions are evidently not applied. Experts identify Tehran, Isfahan, Natanz, Bushehr, and Arak as sites exposing local populations to significant dangers. Indeed, as discussed earlier, until recently, Iranian students were being prepared for a nuclear war (along with biological and chemical warfare). The reason behind the recent removal of nuclear warfare preparedness from the text is not clear. The fact remains that this subject had been taught for many years—reflecting the assumption that a nuclear war or disaster was imminent.

Finally, despite an apparent (though minor) toning-down of references to death and hate, sadly, this philosophy still forms a central motif in the curriculum. Education for

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103 Persian Reading, Grade 3 2012-13 (1391), pp. 133-135.
104 "Lesson 4: "Children have the Right to ..." [kudakan haq darand keh], Persian Reading, Grade 4, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 22-26.
105 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
militarism begins in the first grade and children are still taught to be ready to sacrifice their lives against evil enemies lurking and scheming against Iran. And one-sided anti-Semitic and anti-Western education continues, unabated.


Children as Soldiers: "Look at the pictures and present them in a show." Persian Reading, Grade 6, 2012-13 (1391), p. 53.
5. Sources of Imperial Fascination: Aryan Roots, Global Islam and Third-Worldism

Where are all these mental war preparations heading? Who are the Iranians and what is their role in the world? Is Iran Shi'ite, Islamic or Iranian-nationalist? The collective identity reflected in the textbooks is manifold and its various elements are expressed across the curriculum. Hence, nationalist and political thinking finds its way into religious books alongside technology, methods of organization and the encouragement of many aspects of rationalist modern thought. Mystical and religious identity can also be found in Persian literature books, which are often excerpted or referenced in the texts. Maps of Iran abound and typically include the waters of the Caspian Sea, the Gulf and the Indian Ocean; they are often ornamented with red tulips representing the martyrs who died defending the homeland. Additionally, the Iranian homeland has a long history as an empire or as part of large empires in which Iranians were the dominant ethnic group. Memory of (and fascination with) past empires, is cherished.

An important section of a new social studies book is dedicated to the "Formation of the Great Empires in Ancient Iran." The title of the first lesson in this section reads: "The Aryans Created Powerful Governments in Iran." The text also points out that various peoples lived in parts of Iran "thousands of years ago," but the story in the text begins four thousand years ago, according to some historians, when nomadic tribes known as Aryans gradually migrated into "the land of Iran" (sarzamin-e iran) from an area north of the Caspian Sea. "The three great Aryan peoples were the Medians, Parthians and Persians." Students learn that the Aryans not only created powerful governments and developed an advanced civilization, but also built an empire containing most of the important countries of that time: "For this reason, one can remember the Achaemenid government as the first-ever global empire." While these empires existed in the past, connections to current geography are made: "He (Cyrus the Great) attacked Babylon (today's Iraq) and Lydia (today's Turkey) and the Kingdom of Iran extended from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean." These empires were big and powerful, much more than the Islamic Republic. With a hint to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the text speaks about Darius' "Army of Immortals," serving in what was "the greatest wish of Persian youth (javanan-e parsi)."

Fifth graders thus learn that Iran was once the strongest country on earth:

110 Ibid., p. 115.
111 Ibid., p. 116.
112 Ibid. Persian: three great Aryan peoples (seh qom-e bozorg-e arya’i); Medians, Parthians and Persians (madha, partha va parsha).
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., p. 126.
Two-hundred years elapsed since Cyrus had founded the Achaemenid Dynasty. Two-hundred years since our country had been considered the mightiest country in the world. Persepolis, with its stunning grandeur and glory, was the ruling center of this wide territory.  

Let us fast-forward to the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722). The Safavids, led by mystic-warriors, formed "the last Iranian Empire that was about 1.5 times larger than present-day Iran." In the next section, we will see how Azeri-Turkish speaking Azerbaijan—serving as the Safavids' center throughout the sixteenth century—is also considered Aryan.

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Queen of Sheba (Royal/Imperial imagery can be found interspersed with religious symbolism.)

Imperial Imagination: Double-page trade map.

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119 Qu’ran Learning, Grade 1, 2010-11 (1389), pp. 32-33.
120 Social Studies; Grade 7, 2013-14 (1392), pp. 136-7.
Military Training (The curriculum includes disassembly, reassembly and firing of assault rifles.)\textsuperscript{122}
Ancient Roots: Making Offerings for Nowruz (New Year) in Persepolis. Ancient Zoroastrian fire temples. Historical and imperial influences before Islam. ¹²³

¹²³ Social Studies; Grade 7, 2013-14 (1392), p. 146.
"Realm and Possessions of Islam in Various Periods."\textsuperscript{124} (Note the dynamism of the graphic, expressed by the red colors of the arrows and the nationalistic dimension expressed through the tricolor red-green-white of the Iranian flag on shown throughout the continental areas. Green is also considered to be a symbolic color of Islam.)

Existing more than two thousand years ago, the Parthian Dynasty (247 BCE–224 CE) is also described in the curriculum as an Aryan tribe that succeeded in vanquishing the Seleucids-Hellenists, who had established themselves in Iran and other areas of the region, following Alexander’s conquests and subsequent death. The Sassanian Dynasty attacked and was later destroyed by "the Arab-Muslims," but it did not carry the Aryan "pedigree."

Consider that the association with the primordial-essentialist Iranian identity (\textit{iraniyyat}) was never fully removed from the curriculum even during Iran’s "Cultural Revolution" and the height of Islamist fervor in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{125} Nevertheless, the emergence of Aryan-Persian imperialist reveries in Iranian schools is significant and goes hand in hand with an intensifying public discourse dating back at least to the rise of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{124} \textit{Social Studies}, Grade 6, 2012-13 (1391), p. 47.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Haggay Ram, "The Immemorial Iranian nation? School Textbooks and Historical Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran," \textit{Nations and Nationalism}, 6 (1), 2000, pp. 67-90 (particularly 71-72). Nevertheless, the current research demonstrates that recent years brought an intensification of this identity indicator.
\end{itemize}
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and continuing to the present time. The issue of Iran’s imperial past often rises in the context of territorial disputes. Here is a claim expressed in the context of a territorial dispute with the United Arab Emirates: “From the time Cyrus the Great created a world empire twenty-five hundred years ago, the Iranians continuously governed a sizeable part of the world, until the advent of Islam in Iran. Only during the last two hundred years or so, Iran has lost its imperial glow.”

The following excerpts from an article by the secretary-general of the Hezbollah-Iran organization, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqer Kharrazi, constitute a fine example of the tight connection between the nationalist-imperial education and Iran’s Islamist-imperial strategy.

Whether you are Arab, Azeri, Kurd, Baluchi, Luri, Turkmen, Persian, Tajik, Caucasian, Afghan, or anything else [is of no significance]. None of these [in themselves] are considered Iranian, because Iran is the sum total of the above mentioned peoples. The [nation]-states of the above peoples, which today border Iran, are actually territory that was severed from the state [that is, from Greater Iran]—a separation that was the result of a scheme by the other religions or by the historical plunderers due to the weakness of Iran’s rulers at that time. . . .

[The Iranian nation] must defray the costs of the wars being fought by the Iranian nation of Lebanon and by the Iranian nation of Palestine— [since these nations] lived under Iranian rule centuries ago. . . . Of course, [these peoples in Lebanon and Palestine] must know that they are not considered [fully] Iranian, but that their peoples’ identification with Iran [is based on their once having been] part of Greater Iran. Thus they were once defined, and thus they must [continue] to be defined."

Thus, the Lebanese and Palestinian Arabs are Iranians in the sense that they are part of the past and future “Greater Iran.” Kharrazi, having close family ties with Iran’s Supreme Leader, also stresses the superiority of Persians over Arabs— making the former more deserving to lead the Islamic empire as it paves the way for the coming of the Mahdi.

Iranian textbooks demonstrate indeed that Iran’s collective identity is both pan-Islamic and "imperial," which accommodates the notion that Shiiès in general and Iranians particularly, have a manifest destiny to lead this multi-national Islamic collective toward

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implementing the one true program, under the leadership of the One Supreme Leader. Students are educated to be responsible for the Islamic Nation: "In addition to my country, I am responsible toward the Muslims of the World, 'The Islamic Nation'[eslami]."129 Across the curriculum one sees a special emphasis on accomplishments made throughout the Islamic civilization, typically shedding light on the contributions of Iranian scholars through the ages.

An Arabic language book offers the following description: "... while the Muslim civilization was shining in Al-Andalus (Spain), during the third and fourth centuries of the Hijra (816-909 CE), Europe was still immersed in barbarism." The Europeans went to the Muslims to learn as they could find no other "lamp to light their way."130 Thus, the introduction to a pre-university geography textbook includes: "in the formation of the science of geography, one should not forget the role and place of the Muslim geographer."131 The text goes on to mention the contributions of various Persian and Arab individuals within Islamic civilization. The ethnic origin of each scholar does not show in the school textbook. Yet the joint Islamic, Persian-Arab—and one dare also say Shiite-Sunnite—heritage is evident. 132

The book also gives credit, however, to Babylonian and Ancient Egyptian maps as well as to the Greek cartographer, Ptolemy. Also mentioned are legendary/mythological figures such as the Iranian pre-Islamic King Kaykavus who traveled in the sky carried by four eagles seeking a clearer view of the earth and Icarus, the Greek who flew too close to the sun in his wings made of feathers and wax.133

The Iranian curriculum depicts Arab-Sunnis and religious minorities as part of Iran's global-Islamic mission—not as enemies. Indeed, a major finding of this report is that traditional Shi'ite antipathy of Sunnism has softened by shifting hostility toward the West and Israel. The Sunnis are considered to be fully legitimate Muslims—significant elements of the "true program"—even as anti-Shiite historical Sunni figures are criticized in those historical contexts.134 So we have the "Islamic Revolution" and "Islamic Republic," but not "Shi'ite," "Imami," "Ja'fari," "Husseini" or "Alawi" revolutions. In contrast to this, Shiite concepts and famous characters remain at the center of the ideology.

130 Arabic 1 and 2, Pre-University, 2012-13 (1391), p. 34.
131 Geography, Pre-University, 2012-13 (1391), p. 1.
132 Ibid., Al-Khwarizmi (Persian); the translations from the Greek of Al-Kindi (Arab); and the Dictionary of Countries (mu’jam al bultan) by Yaqut Hamawi (Greek-Arab). Then, among the other Iranian and Arab geographers one should mention Ibn Haqal (Arab), Ibn Balkhi (Persian), Estakhari (Persian), Maqdisi (Arab), Abu Rihan Al-Biruni (Persian), Al-Idrisi (Arab), Hamd-Allah Mostawfi(Persian, from Arab origin), and Al-Ma’sudi (Arab).
133 Ibid., pp.33-34, 78-79.
The teacher of our Ashura uprising, Holy Imam Hossein the father of Abdullah, is the one, who, with the sacrifice of his soul and the souls of his friends and relatives, have created an eternal epic, an epic that gives hope to the free souls and hearts of this world, enduring and alive, even those having limited power and facilities.  

The message here is ostensibly universal and directed to the "free of the world," but the paradigm is Shiite, expressing the martyrdom of Karbala. From an elementary age onward, Iranian Shiites are taught to love the family of the Prophet—along with Arab dress, customs and the environment of the "Holy Family"—celebrating the birthday of the Prophet with stories about the "Compassionate Family" and the "Prophet's Family," "The Best Friend (Hassan bin Ali)—are all part of the religious framework. Obviously, learning to pray is conducted according to the Shiite way. Actually the term "Shiite" is rarely used. Hence, in the sentence, "Our first Imam, was born Rajab 13." there is no Shiite reference. In higher grades, we found, "the authentic thought of the true Islam—i.e., Shiism" together with criticism of the Umayyads and Abbasids—without mentioning directly that these dynasties had been, Sunni.  

Note that while the curriculum avoids attacking Sunni Muslims directly and criticizes only specific Sunni individuals without describing them as Sunnis, when it comes to Christians and Jews—let alone Bahá'ís—the criticism is direct and unequivocal. Shi-i-Sunni unity is considered to be a first priority, despite the belief by Iranian clerics that Shiism is "right."

Recognizing the role of Shiism in Islamic history and explaining its rightfulness (or truth, haqqanîyayat), historically and theoretically, should not keep us unaware of an important and critical issue: preserving Islamic unity and striving for the pride, dignity, independence and protection of its interests. Myriad common beliefs—such as the belief in God, the Messenger, the Quran and Resurrection—constitute the underlying unity among us, as Muslims. Therefore, keeping and strengthening Shiite-Sunni unity and the struggle against their divisive causes and designs, forms one of the pillars of the strategy of the Islamic Revolution that requires wisdom and vigilance of us all.  

The passage is followed by a quotation in a similar vein from Khomeini calling for struggle against the West and "Westoxication"[gharbzadegi]. The textbook then

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136 Heaven’s Presents, Grade 2, 2012-13 (1391), P. 46-7, 50, 64-67.

137 Ibid., 28-33, 54-57, 59.

138 Ibid., p. 60.


140 Ibid., p. 81.

141 Westoxication (gharbzadegi, translated also as Weststruckedness), or the (Plague from the West, Occidentosis), is a term that became popularized in Iran by Jalal Al-e Ahmad since the early 1960s, suggesting that Iranians had been unduly overwhelmed by Western culture and should look for an authentic alternative in which could also include elements from the West. Popular with Khomeini and others, the
blames converted Jews and Christians—particularly the Jewish convert Ka‘b al-Ahbar—for marginalizing the role of the Imams by spreading wrong interpretations while altering traditions in the service of the Umayyads and Abbasids.142 While the Sunni Muslim world is naturally suspicious of Iran’s ecumenical position, the fact that Iranians teach their children the value of uniting Islam against the West, suggests to the observer that this call is genuine. And though the internal goals of Iran’s leaders continue to include an Aryan-Iranian-Shiite hegemony over the Sunni Arabs, it does not include enmity toward them. As has been shown, methods for tempering animosity toward Sunnis currently include blaming the West for any anti-Shiite sentiments from the Sunni population.

Generally speaking, the spirit of protest that so characterizes Shiism, combine easily with Iranian traditions of populism;143 this allows the curriculum to embrace the non-Western world as dispossessed and oppressed peoples. Thus, the global program is not intended for Muslims alone but aims to protect what it defines as “all” the oppressed including “recognized” religious minorities—but excluding those considered to be secular-democratic, atheists and members of animist or new religions like the Baha’i, who are seen as an artificial creation of world colonialism.144 Interestingly, the disavowal of Baha’ism is not supported by the classic Islamic argument that Mohammad is the “Seal of the Prophets,” but rather from a Third-Worldist, anti-colonialist perspective. There can be little doubt that Iranian Khomeinism clearly has a pronounced Third-Worldist agenda.145

Following this line, the introduction to a teacher’s guide for the text, "Defense Readiness," explains that the Islamic Revolution has been a turning point in the history of the country but also serves as “a model for all free loving and believing nations in the world.”146 In a Persian literature book covering "Resistance Literature" [adabiyyat-e paydari], one can find an abridged version of the 1952 short story Gileh Mard (The Man from Gilan), by the late Iranian communist author Bozorg Alavi (1904-1997).147 It also includes an excerpt from American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 Uncle Tom’s Cabin;148 Chilean communist poet Pablo Neruda’s 1973 poem "To You I Call";149 and

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142 History, Grade 9, 2013-14 (1392), p. 43.
146 Ibid., pp. 65-71.
poems by Palestinian writer and scholar Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and communist-nationalist poet Mahmoud Darwish.\textsuperscript{150}

Iran’s Third Worldlist identity—as reflected in the textbooks—remains an innate part of the country’s character and policies, as evidenced in the following declaration by President Hassan Rouhani: "The government and Foreign Ministry of Iran, as a revolutionary country and head of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), will support the defenseless [Palestinian] people with all its might."\textsuperscript{151}

The significance of accepting Sunnis and Third-Worldists as partners in the new global Islam cannot be underestimated. Alliances and collaborations initiated by Iran should be understood as embodying true and deep ideological commitment, not just pragmatic considerations, as some observers wrongly believe. As such, Iranian collaboration with radical Sunni groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and elements of Al-Qaeda—as well as populist-secular regimes in Venezuela and Syria—are natural ideological fits. And beyond such partnerships, Iran also promotes alliances based on a calculation of interests that do not reflect natural affinities.\textsuperscript{152}

What makes things complicated and elusive for students is the element of dissimulation that the curriculum tries to implant in them. Young students are taught that it is right to deceive one’s enemies. A Defense Readiness text teaches students: “to keep the principles and rules of passive defense, such as: choosing safe places, spreading out, retrofitting and fortification, camouflage, concealment or misleading the enemy [farib-e doshman] …”\textsuperscript{153} Another example is: "The Preparations of the Prophet in the Migration (Hijrah) from Mecca to Medina." The text explains the four steps taken by the Prophet Muhammad in order to mislead his opponents in the city of Mecca. These included sending his followers away before him; Imam Ali sleeping in the place of the Prophet in order to "mislead the enemies" [farib dadan-e doshmanan]; the Prophet exiting the city southbound, instead of northbound towards Medina and hiding in a cave; and finally, his taking a detour to Medina through rugged terrain.\textsuperscript{154}

Dissimulation and concealment (taqiyyeh) go back a long way in Shi‘ite Islam. A religion textbook explains that the great Imams used two methods to fight against illegitimate rulers. The first was that the Imams by would lead uprisings against the usurper rulers. If uprisings were not possible, they chose one or more of the following: "(1) No support for the rulers; (2) announcing oneself as the rightful Imam; (3) spreading awareness

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., p. 72. The poem "To You I Call" (Spanish: A ti te llamo, Persian: to ra mi khanam) was picked from Neruda’s last collection Incitación al nixonicidio y alabanza de la revolución chilena [1972-1973], (Incitement to Nixonicide and Praise for the Chilean Revolution) translated to the Persian by American Iranians Faramarz Soleimani and Ahmad Karimi Hakak.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., pp. 74-77

\textsuperscript{151} Press TV, July 22, 2014 [http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/07/20/372114/iran-will-back-palestinians-with-all-might/].

\textsuperscript{152} One such example is the Iranian-Russian collaboration that is often shrouded with suspicion and mistrust, but has nevertheless yielded substantial achievements for Iranian policymakers over the years (such as with nuclear negotiations and saving Syria’s Assad regime).


\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, p. 52.
among the people; and (4) "choosing the right way to fight". The latter is elaborated as follows:

The Imams chose the ways of fighting with the rulers according to the conditions of the time in such a manner that will allow both the preservation of the authentic thought of true Islam—i.e., Shiism—and also, gradually, to weaken the structure of oppression and injustice created by the Umayyads and the Abbasids. At the same time, to pass on to the next generations the way of life of the Imams, as the true Islam.

They tried to advance those parts of their actions and fighting to which the enemy was sensitive, in the framework of "taqiye." This means to keep their actions hidden, so that while they hit the enemy, they would sustain less impact from the enemy's attack. Amid these situations, the communication between the Imams and their friends in various places across the Land of Islam (sarzamin-e eslam). By keeping communications secret, our Imams stopped the rulers of the Umayyads and the Abbasids from identifying these close, reliable and self-sacrificing (fedakar) friends and render them martyrs.156

Iranian students also learn about the treaty of the Shiite Imam Hassan with his enemy, Mu'awiyyah, intending only to gain time, build power and gradually undermine rival dynasties— but never genuinely reconciling.157

Imam Hassan too, just like his grandfather (Prophet Muhammad) issued the order of jihad against Mu'awiyyah. Spending large sums of money, Mu'awiyyah succeeded in dissuading most of the commanders in the Imam's army from fighting against him; using various kinds of tricks and ruses, he managed to convince the people to support him. The Imam, after weighing the situation—against his own inclination—finally deemed it advisable to abandon the war and sign a peace treaty with Mu'awiyyah.158

This instrumental peace lasted until the uprisuing and martyrdom of Imam Hussein, Hassan's brother and has served as the Islamic Republic's model since its inception: "But when Yazid reached the throne, the Imam changed his methods to adapt to the new conditions, while deciding not to give his vow of allegiance (bay'ah) to Yazid, and revolted against him."159

Worth noting, is that the Hassan pattern of instrumental peace with the enemy was also used by Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei, as justification for his country's engagement in nuclear negotiations with the American "enemy." Quoting a book he translated, based on Imam Hassan's tactics, Khamenei defined this as, "Heroic Flexibility" [narmesh-e qahramananeh]."160 Thereafter, Khamenei's type of taqiye, while referring to ancient

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155 Persian: shiveh-haye dorost-e mobarezech.
158 Ibid., pp. 103-4.
159 Ibid.
Shiite-Sunni clashes, resembles the general Islamic (Sunni and Shiite) version of *taqiyyeh* to be directed against non-Muslims in the eternal war to spread Islam.\(^{161}\)

It is also true that issues with Christianity and Judaism are another focus in the curriculum—among them allegations that they falsified their holy texts. Animosity toward the largely Western, Christian colonialism is underscored, as is loathing toward a Jewish Israel. As stated before, there is a general denial of the Holocaust while blaming European colonial competition and racism for the horrors of WWII—in particular the unleashing of nuclear bombs.\(^{162}\) And while criticism of some Sunni individuals and dynasties from the past continues to be taught—with Shiism presented as the purest form of Islam—this must be seen as part of a whole. Students are educated to love the Sunnis as fellow Muslims—albeit not as fully equal—and even to include traditional minority religions as part of the divine camp.\(^{163}\) Special schoolbooks for minorities ascertain that all share the fundamentals of the Khomeinist religious outlook.\(^ {164}\)

A consequence of such "openness" is that, despite the narrowness of its focus, the ideology being implanted in Iran's young minds is flexible and modular: There is the belief that Iran, representing all that is good, pure and divine, can bring into the fold almost every group on earth. It is true that the textbooks argue that Islam is the only true "program for life"; that Iranians have an outstanding Persian culture and Aryan roots;\(^ {165}\) that they hold on to Shiism over other forms of Islam because it is the right way; that they blame Jews and Christians over falsifying their own holy texts and rejecting the Prophet Mohammad; that they believe Israel is beyond repair; and that they are conducting a cataclysmic struggle against the Western democratic and colonialist-permissive culture. And yet, Iranian ideology, as reflected in the textbooks, is ready-made for empire-building. While by no means egalitarian, it has the appearance of being inclusive. Though Persian (Aryan)-Shiite males will always remain the hegemons, many others are permitted to form part of the system. As will be elaborated, a Baha'i, a gay person, an atheist or an Israeli would likely never be accepted in any current or future empire; but a Zoroastrian, a Shi'ite woman, a Sunni man or a Christian Lebanese could theoretically become a part of the future Iranian world order. The Iranian ideology appears to be rather flexible, incorporating multi-ethnic and multi-religious aspects, while casting—at least in theory—a wide net to include "oppressed and innocent people" everywhere.\(^ {166}\)

In sum, Iranian students look to the past and see the (Aryan) "Kingdom of Iran extending from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean." They are proud because the Iranian-Achaemenid Empire is considered to have been "the first global empire." They believe, as students everywhere do, that empires are exciting (just look to the plethora

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\(^{164}\) *Divine Religions Studies and Morals for Religious Minorities (Jewish, Zoroastrian and Christian)*, Vol. 1, Grade 10, 2012.


\(^{166}\) *Religion and Life*, Grade 12, 2014-15 (1393), p. 120, 140.
of empire-based video games) and as they look to the present, they see fellow Iranians supporting "the oppressed peoples of Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan."

Looking into the future, they learn about Iran’s "New Islamic Civilization (NIC)" and it’s "Full Life Program," which as the curriculum proclaims: "Humanity is now ready to receive." While keeping its Aryan-Shiite framework, the new global civilization is modular—inviting to the fold Sunni Muslims, monotheists, Third Worldists and other so-called oppressed peoples (with some notable exceptions). Equipped with their "infallible and trustworthy Leader," Iranian students are expected to propagate the message worldwide and defend themselves from cultural invasions from abroad. They know now that a jihad war—requiring martyrdom on a mass scale and for which they have been trained from the first grade—could be launched as part of "an attack on countries ruled by oppressive governments." The attack should, nevertheless, be considered a defensive jihad because any "defense of oppressed and innocent people is just like defending oneself." Meanwhile, Iranian students are trained in the art and tradition of "dissimulation" (taqiyyeh) and of "misleading the enemy." They know that the world is experiencing a major struggle between the powers of good and the powers of evil. And they are being prepared.

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Iran remembers: "The government of Azerbaijan is republican. In the past, this country was one Iran’s provinces, but Shah Fath-Ali Qajar, during the wars with Russia under the Tsars conceded all the territories to the north of the Aras river, including Azerbaijan, to Russia."^{167}

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6. Minority Discrimination

As we have seen, the role of Iranian nationalism, with its emphasis on Aryan origins, Persian language and imperial glory, is intensifying, together with Iran’s revolutionary, pan-Islamic and global intentions. This Persianite view of Iran and the fascination with empires have critical implications for the curriculum and the entire student population. While only about half of Iran’s citizens grew up in Persian speaking homes, the entire curriculum is taught only in Persian, defined as Iran’s “cultural identity” [hoviyat-e farhangi] and “the spirit of the nation” [ruh-e mellat]. There is minimal and lopsided education about the cultural roots of the non-Persian provinces; overall, this cultural discrimination against ethnic minorities is glaring.

A series of experimental geography upper high-school textbooks entitled “Province Knowledge” [ostan-shenas] tries to address the “problems” of local patriotism and potential separatist tendencies. Some of these books even include a few lines in the mother-tongue of these minority students. According to the constitution, “the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed, in addition to Persian” (Article 15). Still, there is in fact, no Azeri-Turkish language curriculum—or any other minority language taught in Iran’s educational system (except for Arabic).

The central government’s fear of possible state disintegration and ethnic conflicts often seem to dictate the way reality is presented in the curriculum. Some examples include an emphasis on Persian poems by Azeri poets, or the loyalty of the population and their roles in national Iranian revolutions. Other examples speak to the supposed

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168 Even though in never disappeared: Ram, “The Immemorial Iranian nation?”
169 According to the CIA World Factbook (updated June 22, 2014), 53% of Iran’s population are Persian speakers. Still, the same source argues that 63% are ethnically Persian. This discrepancy probably reflects an assumption that speakers of Gilaki and Mazandaran regard themselves as Persian. According to the CIA, Azerbaijanis – as an ethnic group – form only 16% of the population, but the percentage of the Azeri-Turkic speakers is 18%. In a New America Foundation opinion poll from May 2009, 50.5% of the 1001 respondents across Iran identified themselves as ethnically Persians, while 21.6% as ethnically Azeris (Others include Gilaki & Mazanderani 6.9%, Kurd 7.6%, Lur 5.9%, Arab 2.7%, Baluchi 1.4%, Turkmen 0.9 %, Bakhtiari 0.2%, Khajali 0.1%, Janubi Arab 0.1%, Turk Qashqa’i 0.1%, Lac 0.2%). New America Foundation and Terror Free Tomorrow (TFT), Results of a New Nationwide Public Opinion Survey of Iran before the June 12, 2009 Presidential Elections, May 2009. [http://www.terrorfreetomorrow.org/upimagesft/TFT%20Iran%20Survey%20Report%200609.pdf].
Aryan roots and original-Pahlavi language of the Turkish-Azeri citizenship (the region being the birthplace of Iran). Also, the role of the local Safavids (1501-1722) in uniting Iran is fully explained. The historical drive for autonomy and self-rule is either not mentioned or downplayed and blamed on Russian foreign occupation. The "racial origin" of the Kurds, is also considered to be Aryan: "The Kurds come from the Aryan race and were made up from the Medes communities." The textbook stresses the great variety of Kurdish dialects, the solidarity brought about by the Islamic Republic (the Kurds being one of the Iranian tribes/ethnic groups [aqvam-e irani]). Our research showed nothing in the Kurdish language and the text presents a one-sided narrative of the problematic history of the province. Inherent within the texts are veiled threats to various minorities, including the Kurds and Baluchis, among others. In his introduction, to the textbook for the peoples of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, the Supreme Leader warns: ". . . be aware that the enemies of Islam will not destroy this coexistence and brotherhood between Shiites and Sunnis." Similar cultural discrimination is evident throughout the curriculum.

"Is it a sin that I do not speak Farsi?" (A girl holding a Persian, grade 4 textbook in her right hand and a protest sign in her left.)

This form of discrimination points to the bias found within the curriculum—and generally throughout Iran—against all non-male, non-Shiite, non-Persian citizens. Consequently, various degrees of prejudice and segregation are experienced by numerous minorities and groups, including, but not limited to: women; religious
minorities—particularly Baha'is—but also Sunnis, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians; Muslim-Sufis; people who are secular; gay and lesbian; those living with his or her girlfriend or boyfriend; rock, pop and heavy metal fans; lovers of wine, internet surfers; atheists; or anyone with pro-democracy inclinations.

A new social science schoolbook teaches students about their rights and responsibilities. While the model being presented obviously is meant to help create a safe environment that encourages human interaction and a productive life, it is nevertheless far from being democratic and egalitarian. The text teaches that natural rights emanate from God, who created humanity: “With the creation of human beings, God has given them rights. The meaning of a right is something that a human being merits because of his human status and dignity (maqam). Human beings have natural rights from the beginning of creation and birth.”

For example, all human beings have the right to live, which is their most important right. They have the right to benefit from Divine blessings, to work and endeavor to secure their needs, marry, raise a family, study and choose their way of life. Human beings have the right to be free: this means that they should not be slaves or dependent on other people because God has created them to be free.

Note that property rights are not clearly expressed, a perennial challenge in Iran. Students are entitled to express their views, as long as they are respectful: "Every student has the right to express his or her opinion regarding school problems or teaching methods at the school, in a polite and respectful manner.” However, when it comes to sensitive political issues, such as choosing (Shiia) Islam (or at least a tolerated religion) or displaying complete loyalty to the Supreme Leader—there is no room for wigging. There is only one path to choose since, "human life is too short for experimenting.”

While the Sunni Muslims are considered as coreligionists, with whom unity is imperative, the attitude toward other religious minorities is less clear; as long as they are loyal, however, they are welcome to remain. The big exception to this are the Baha’is. "During the post-2000 era, the Baha’is continued to experience the worst treatment of any other minority or group.” As Baha’i persecution continues in Iran, the schoolbooks—through 2014—continue to present the Baha’i faith as a colonialist invention aimed at sowing discord among Muslims.

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184 Social Studies (Civil, Geography, History), Grade 7, 2013-14 (1392), p. 2.
185 Ibid.
190 Sanasarian and Davidi, "Domestic Tribulations," p.58.
Colonialism's Cult Fabrication

The English and Russian governments greatly feared the unity of the Muslims in Iran. Therefore, they tried to divide the people and destroy their unity. One of their actions in sowing discord was through sedition and turmoil created by the founders of false cults and religions. Among these false religions were Babism and Bahai'sm. Initially, the founder of the Babi sect, Sayyed-Ali Mohammad, claimed to have been the Bab (in the terminology of this sect Bab ['gate' in Arabic] used to denote a person who connected people with the Hidden Imam). A little later he openly called himself the Promised Mahdi (a sort of a Messiah in Muslim tradition) and finally claimed to be a prophet. The Babi cult was supported by Russia and England. Following the turmoil unleashed by the Babis in a number of cities, their leader Seyyed Ali Mohammad Bab was executed by orders of the Prime Minister of Iran, Amir Kabir. Mirza Hossein-Ali Nuri, a student of the Bab, who had given himself the title Baha' ['splendor' in Arabic], for a while, called himself a new prophet and then, after claiming Divinity, created the Baha'i cult. This cult too was supported by England.191

At the end of the preceding paragraph, entitled "Colonialism's Cult Fabrication," there is a footnote saying: "Currently the center of Baha'ism is in Israel." The combination of false statements: 1) that colonialism created cults aimed at destabilizing "true" Islamic teachings; 2) that there was/is a conspiratorial association between Israel and the Baha'is; and 3) the omission of massacres by the government against Baha'is, is clearly meant to mislead students by demonizing both the Baha'is—and Israel. The Tehran-born founder of the Baha'is, Bahaullah, had been banished to the city of Acre during the nineteenth century, in what was then the Ottoman Province of Syria. That the city became part of modern Israel only eighty years later is not mentioned in the textbook.

While accepting Christians into the fold as long as they fulfill part of the Islamist-Khomeinist agenda, the Iranian curriculum sows the seeds of suspicion against Christians and Jews, having a policy of "trust but verify."

The dear Prophet of Islam, as well, presented himself, in the time of his appearance (zuhur), as continuing and completing all the prophets, and asked the Jews and the Christians to believe in him. This time too, however, some of the Christian and Jewish leaders, regardless of the fact that the coming of the Prophet of Islam had been promised in the Torah and the Gospel, rejected his prophethood and rose up to fight. Had this clique (dasteh) of Jewish and Christian leaders accepted in that day, the prophethood of the Holy Messenger, this difference would not have arisen.

The Holy Quran explains that the source of this discord and difference of religions is that clique of religious leaders who wanted to keep their own position, status and interests. [They] withheld against the preaching (da'vut) of the new Prophet, rejected his prophethood and caused the difference and division of the disciples of the prophets into a number of groups.192

Otherwise put, Christianity and Judaism are false religions. No wonder that school textbooks directed at these "respected" minorities—and Zoroastrianism—do not include actual religious teaching, but rather ideological, philosophical and mystical material.193

192 Religion and Life, Grade 12, 2014, p. 27.
7. Modernity, Technology, Power

S.N. Eisenstadt explains that Islamic fundamentalism—now widely known as Islamism—is typologically a modern phenomenon falling within the category of utopian-revolutionary-violent movements he equates with the Jacobins of the French Revolutionary period. Iranian Islamism is not (yet) infatuated with beheadings as were the French revolutionists or the current Islamic State (IS) militants in Iraq and Syria; but mass executions and public hangings from cranes and other horrors, remain a hallmark of the Islamic Republic. The pursuit of technology and science in the curriculum supports Eisenstadt’s reasoning. Certainly, a major force behind modernization in the Middle East since the eighteenth century has been the drive to acquire military power capable of both confronting the West as well as managing local competitors. The Islamic Republic continues a tradition that follows the Safavid, Qajar, Pahlavi and other Iranian dynasties; all imported military and scientific knowhow. Each of these regimes tried to keep Iran independent with distinct policies. For the Islamic Republic, however, the notion of self-sufficiency (khod-kefa’i), particularly in military and nuclear technology—all-the-more-so since the beginnings of the 2000s—has become a paramount discourse.

The Defense Readiness curriculum prepares Iranian students for the most sophisticated military challenges Iran may be facing. We have mentioned the active preparation for a nuclear war as well as mastering the use of assault rifles (assembling, disassembling, firing) and other weapons such as mortars and landmines. To that, one should add such areas as cyber and electronic warfare. Special attention is given to teaching about the Stuxnet worm—used to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities—but the education goes far beyond that. Indeed, this high-school curriculum will probably help to create a generation of Iranian “cyber-fighters.” Just as the nuclear war readiness education reflects Iran’s nuclear project, so school cyber education reflects Iran’s focus on cyberwar. As with nuclear capabilities, cyber warfare "optimally fits in with Iran’s asymmetric warfare strategy.”

Iranian adherence to a policy of self-sufficiency does not suggest a disinterest with what occurs in the rest of the world. The following admonition directed at Persian language teachers at the elementary school level, displays surprising sincerity in that regard.

The test results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) show that Iranian students display extremely low performance in text comprehension.
Fourth Grade students have participated in three rounds of literacy tests: in 2001, 2006 and 2011. The position of Iran in the 2001 PIRLS was thirty-second among the thirty-five countries tested. In the 2006 PIRLS, Iran achieved fortieth place out of forty-five participating countries, and in 2011 Iran’s position was thirty-nine out of forty-six participating world educational systems. As noted, the performance of Iranian students in the PIRLS tests is unacceptable and inadequate.198

This candid admonition is accompanied by state-of-the-art exercises and didactic measures to be implemented in the classroom, in order to improve levels of language comprehension. To this, one should add second language textbooks for English, French and German.199

On attitudes toward modernity, one can learn from a pre-university mathematics text focused on probability and calculus.200 The book’s bibliography includes items published in Iran before the revolution (1966) as well as in the U.S. Some space is dedicated to anecdotes covering the history of calculus. Ancient Greek mathematicians—particularly Archimedes—receive praise for devising a way to calculate the areas of polygons, a method also applied to calculate the area of a circle.201 Even more interestingly, in a concluding page, praise is showered on Sir Isaac Newton and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and again, on Archimedes.202 No Persian or other Muslim mathematicians are mentioned, in contrast with many other school books in which Iranian and Islamic cultural achievements are stressed.203 This particular math book includes some gender-discriminatory preferences. Probability problems explore the chances of having baby boys, rather than girls, more boys than girls or boys first and girls later.204 In "beads and mice" probability questions, one calculates chances for receiving white beads rather than black ones, first or in greater quantity.205 These practices may have been imported from old Western textbooks, but currently represent the contemporary environment in Iran.

199 English 1, Grade 10, 2012-13 (1391). French 1, Grade 10, 2012-13 (1391). German 1, Grade 10, 2012-13 (1391). See also English vocabulary in Physics 1 and Laboratory, Grade 10, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 170-73.
200 General Mathematics, Science Program (1) and (2), Pre-University, 2012-13 (1391).
201 Ibid., pp. 150-151.
202 Ibid., p. 174.
203 Ibid. See "Muslim-Iranian" Ibn Sina in Mathematics, Grade 9, 2012-13 (1391), p. 65.
204 Ibid., pp. 2-4, examples 1-4, p. 8. On page 13, for calculating percentage of people having academic education, women, for the first time comprise a majority of the population (52%).
205 Ibid., pp. 8-9.
8. Mysticism and Blind Obedience

An important finding of the report is the weight given to the mystic dimension of decision-making and thinking in Iran. This type of thinking is presented as superior to the West’s rational-empirical paradigm, which, with all its strengths, covers only part of reality. Encouragement of intimate relations with the Divine begins in elementary school, perhaps even before. Here is an example from grade 4:

I said: 'Father, where is the closest place where I could find God?' He pointed at my heart. Suddenly I felt somebody was knocking in my heart. Now, whenever I want to seek God, or talk with Him, I know well where I can find Him.206

A piece intended for thirteen-year-olds explains that: "cleanliness and purity, refinement and chastity escort us in the beauties of the world’s divine glory . . . . The creator of all blossoms and beauties, He is the one who is always with us. Thus in every deed and action, in every time and place, we should remember Him."207 Thus, nature and mysticism are commonplace. Following is a description of a mystical experience by Ali Shariati, a leading ideologue of the Islamic Revolution:208

I looked at the grand lesson of nature, with eyes full of curiosity and thirst. I listened, I looked, I opened my heart. And my soul was so drowned in understanding that it was shaking with excitement. I felt that the springs of mystical knowledge (cheshmehha-ye ma’refat) would open up from deep inside me and the clear, cold and sweet waters of realization and wisdom would bubble through my being.209

Arguably, there is likely no harm in developing imaginative and such "mystical" thinking in the school setting. For the current Iranian polity, however, this outlook is tightly connected to a demand for sacrifice and blind obedience to the divinely-sanctified Supreme Leader. Hence, the Basij, the Revolutionary Guards' paramilitary volunteer force, is described as the School of Love (madraseh-ye ʾeshq), using the religious-mystic term typically associated with Sufi mysticism, but in the discourse of Imam Khomeini and the Iranian regime, it is related to martyrdom.

Lesson 4, Basij: The School of Love

The word basij (mobilization) conveys an unbreakable bond with the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini, velayat (obedience to God’s friend), Holy Defense (Iran-Iraq War, 1980-88), self-sacrifice and martyrdom. This bond made the Basij the eternal keeper and guardian of the values and achievements of the Islamic Revolution. "Basij is the School of Love, the primary school (maktab) of the anonymous witnesses and martyrs (shahedan-oshahidan), whose followers chant the call for martyrdom and heroism on their towering minarets."

206 Persian Reading, Grade 4, 2012-13 (1391), p. 3.
207 Persian, Grade 7, 2014-15 (1393), pp. 42-43
Children are taught to talk to God and that their leaders communicate with angels.\textsuperscript{210}

Before continuing our discussion of mysticism and blind obedience as presented in the textbooks, a few words of background will be helpful regarding the Supreme Leader’s source of legitimacy. The guiding principle of the Iranian system is \textit{velayat-e faqih}, the Guardianship of the Jurist. \textit{Velayat} denotes the total authority, the "guardianship," of the \textit{vali-ye faqih}, the guardian jurist. But \textit{Velayat} (or \textit{wilayah}), originally denotes within Shiism the Holy Imams’ close friendship with God, a special channel imparting to them the same supernatural powers and infallibility of the prophets. In the mystical context, the \textit{vali} corresponds to the "perfect man" [\textit{al-insan al-kamil}], which denotes a saint or God’s close friend (\textit{amicus dei}) as: "one who has progressed so far on the mystic path that he has achieved a station in which he has a special bond with God, an intimacy with God, with the result that he is protected by God."\textsuperscript{211} Khomeini ascribed this status to

himself, and it was later attributed also to his successor, Ali Khamenei. The necessity of total obedience to the leader derives from this.\textsuperscript{212} Accordingly, students are taught that the leadership of Islamic society is in the hands of a person worthy to represent the Mahdi (emam-e zaman).\textsuperscript{213} According to Iranian Twelver-Ja’fari Shiite Islam, the Mahdi or Wali al-Asr is the twelfth Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi who went into Occultation (referring to his disappearance and continued "hidden" presence) in 873 CE. Until the Mahdi returns, near the end of times, Iran’s Supreme Leader is in charge of the Ummah according to Article 5 of the Iranian Constitution.

During the Occultation of the Wali al-Asr (may God hasten his reappearance), the wilayah (=velayet) and leadership of the Ummah devolve upon the just and faqih (jurist), who is fully aware of the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessed of administrative ability, he will assume the responsibilities of this office in accordance with Article 107.\textsuperscript{214}

Khomeini openly argued that power, guardianship and leadership may be given to a certain jurist based on reasonable requirements, like resourcefulness and knowledge of Shiite law. Implicitly, he wanted power given to a spiritually "perfect man" (al-insan al-kamel). Indeed, the school textbooks more than hint that the Leader entertains exceptional mystical powers in the original sense of velayat, such as having close "friendship" or "proximity" with God, "saintliness," and grasping the "hidden meaning of the prophecy" (al-walayah batin al-nubuwwah).\textsuperscript{215}

As the founder of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini’s picture and one of his quotations is found at the beginning of every book. Pictures, speeches and letters of the current Supreme Leader are also widespread. Offering the example of the youth who fought to liberate Khorramshahr in the Iran-Iraq war, current Supreme Leader Khamenei stresses confronting Iran’s enemies and having obedience.

All that is evident as a central point in the calculations of this nation’s and country’s enemies is that in different ways they would make this young, passionate, future-building generation, powerless to create a prosperous, free, believing and pure Iran for the future ... The youth must be proud of their country, their revolution, their Islamic regime and of the hoisted flag of Islam and [from such pride] create the future.\textsuperscript{216}

Obedience and loyalty to the Leader and the regime are required in the face of ever-plotting enemies. Students are taught that Iran is in a perpetual "state of emergency," justifying a continual dictatorship, as is apparent in the Mahdi context and elsewhere. This is a step beyond Carl Schmitt’s argument that emergency represents a "state of exception" (ausnahmeszustand), which allows "commissarial" dictators (such as Hitler),

\textsuperscript{213} Social Education, Grade 9, 2012-13 (1391), pp. 51-55.
\textsuperscript{216} Persian, Grade 7, 2014-15 (1393), pp. 34-5.
complete, albeit temporary powers to exert violence; since, "the leader defends justice." 217 So while Iranians are meant to speak freely, listen patiently and love each other, they are also expected to always follow the directions of the Supreme Leader. "All are submissive and obedient to the Guardian-Jurist (the world's Supreme Leader)."

Moreover, the Leader is supposed to be infallible (rahbar-e ma'sum). 219 Both Khomeini and Khamenei are thus elevated to a level of holiness, just like the infallible Prophets and Imams, who are never wrong and deliver the word of God. 220

What we see then, is an effort to spread a version of Islam across the world, led by Iran's Supreme Leader, here portrayed as a faultless Prophet, endowed with mystical powers and incidentally, one who requires absolute, blind obedience. Paradoxically, the Sufis—Islam's religious mystic dervishes—are persecuted in Iran; 221 yet in the curriculum, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei heaps praise on mystic warriors and ayatollahs. He also praises the Safavid mystic-kings as warrior-mystics ('oraфа-ye mojahed). The Safavids royal dynasty was originally a Sufi order, but Khamenei describes the founder of that order, Sheikh Safi a-Din Ardabili (1252-1334), as one of those "religious scholars who were both legal experts and great mystics." 222 Moreover, the Supreme Leader denies that he was a Sufi, while nevertheless remaining a mystic.

Contrary to what some people believe, Sheikh Safi a-Din Ardabili was not a Sufi. He was a religious scholar, a mystic, an exegete and a seer (mohaddas). 223

The origin of the latter term, mohaddas, relates to the Shiite Imams, in the sense of "one who speaks to angels." 224 In fact, the school textbooks teach students that it is not

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218 Social Education, Grade 9, 2012-13 (1391), p. 73. Persian: All are submissive and obedient to the Guardian-Jurist (hamegī moti' va farmanbordar-e vali-ye faqih hastand).


220 The concept of rahbar-e ma'sum, infallible leader, is theoretically troubling to many Iranians. One solution to this theological dilemma is the one ascribed to the martyr Dr. Mostafa Chamaran: "I am not saying that vali-ye faqih (jurist guardian) is ma'ṣum (infallible). But when a nation, abiding by God's decree, put their trust in the vali-ye amr (Leader of the Muslims, often vali-ye amr-e mosalmān), God does not allow this Leader (rahbar) to err, and thus imparts infallibility upon him." Boraq Payamak, Sharivar 5, 1393 (Aug 27, 2014) [http://boraqsms.com/sms_view.php?id=1348#.VN_GkPmUdz4]. Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi argues that the Supreme Leader cannot be corrupted: "Otherwise, God would not have chosen him." He stresses that the Leader is not elected by the Council of Experts, but is rather discovered (kashf) by a message sent to them by God. Katajan Amirpur, "A Doctrine in the Making: Velayat-e faqih in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in eds. Guðrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidike, Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies, Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 226, 231-232.


222 Province Studies: Ardabil (Experimental Edition), 2012-13 (1391), p. vii. Persian: religious scholars who were both legal experts and great mystics (’olama-e faqih va dar ein hal ‘aref).

223 Ibid.

uncommon for the great religious scholars to receive direct answers from other-worldly sources such as the Prophet Mohammad, while they are sleeping or awake. Here is one example:

This spiritual guidance has various forms and shapes and is proportional to the merit and talent of people. It often happened that pure-natured scholars, despite all the effort they had invested, could not solve a certain problem and the Messenger of God provided them with the correct answer by way of inspiration/revelation (elham) either while asleep or awake.225

All this should not be surprising. Ayatollah Khomeini, Khamenei’s close mentor for decades, was considered a fully trained mystic who published a great deal in this field; decisions he apparently reached through the practice of divination are believed by many to have prolonged the Iran-Iraq war for years, killing Muslims by the hundreds of thousands for no apparent reason.226

A few excerpts from a school book on Islamic philosophy for the pre-university level227 can shed light on the seriousness given mystical thinking and divination by the curriculum. What begins in grade 1 and through elementary school levels as sensing God through spiritual experiences and in nature, culminates with mystical decision-making procedures for young adults.

This particular book opens with the first paragraph of Khomeini’s much-read "historical letter" to Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989, inviting him to study Islam—with an emphasis on controversial Muslim philosophers and mystics.228 The mystical nature of that letter came as a surprise to both Iranian clergy and outside observers of Iran. After all, the political system of the Islamic Republic was believed to be based—according to Khomeini’s own interpretation in his 1971 Islamic Government—on the principle that the clergy alone should wield the executive powers of the Prophets and the Imams. This

was on the basis of legal competence, though they were by no means considered equal
to the Imams in the sense of sainthood or mystical powers (velayat/walayah). 229

For a variety of reasons Khomeini seemingly blurred his mystical proficiency—which
arguably had been the reason behind his insistence on wielding absolute worldly power.
Rather, he opted for taqiyyeh, (dissimulation) to avoid unnecessary controversy. 230 He
needed the clerics on his side, and the concept of only one "perfect man" in a generation
could possibly contradict the theology of the "Hidden" Mahdi. 231

Surprisingly, the philosophy text, as with the rest of the curriculum, is not shy about the
mystical understructure of the regime but rather encourages students to develop their
own mystical powers. Hence, the main philosophers and mystics discussed in the book
are precisely the same five featured as "recommended reading" for Gorbachev in
Khomeini's letter: Al-Farabi (872-950) and Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037) for
peripatetic philosophy (hekmat-e masha'), Sohravardi (1155–1191) for Illuminationism
(hekmat-e eshraq), Mulla Sadra (1571-1640) for understanding the science of non-
matter and Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) as the most important source on mysticism. The book
explains that a leader of Farabi's "Virtuous City" should have open channels with the
divine.

The Prophet was during his time, the teacher, governor and guide of the virtuous city
and this status was delegated to the Imams and his heirs. According to Farabi, the head
of the virtuous city who is the leader of the people on the way toward happiness, must,
by himself, reach the highest level of human happiness, which is the very connection
with the angel of revelation or the active intellect. The revelations of the Prophets and
the inspirations of the saints— all emanate from this connection. 232

In other words, the leader of a virtuous country such as Iran must by himself, reach the
level of direct connection with the angel of revelations (i.e., Jibreel, who was the source
of Prophet Muhammad). A similar idea is conveyed to Iranian students through direct
quotations from Sohravardi, the Illuminationist, who also speaks about chains of angels
performing various assignments with which the expert can connect. 233 In his words:

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to the letter by clerics, see Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Khomeini the Poet Mystic," Die Welt des Islams 51 (2011),
p. 439.
230 Ruhollah Khomeini, Mishab al-hidayah ila al-khilafa wa al-wilaya (The Lamp of Guidance for Khilafah and
Walayah), Beirut: Mu’assasat al-wafa’, 1983. Also, Tehran: Mu’assasah ye tanzim-e nashir-e athar-e emam
231 Other, less convincing theories, suggest that from a theological perspective, an individual endowed with
wilayah and khilafah (vice-regency) should remain modest about his powers, that Khomeini may have had
some self-doubts or certain regrets—or even that he secretly believed that he was an amateur. Lloyd
(rahnama); the virtuous city (madinah-ye fazeleh), status (maqam), the angel of revelation (malak-e vah),
the active intellect (‘aql-e fa’ad); the saints (avliya’ plural of vali, the friends of God or saints having
walayah).
233 Ibid., p. 80.
"Whenever a sage has become immersed in theosophy and has become a master in the field, he has full authority, and is the Caliph and deputy of God. . . . Because the owner of the status of Caliphate must receive matters and truths directly from the source of Glory."234

The segment on Mulla Sadra, as well, provides guidelines on tuning into the "divine information superhighway." Sadra describes how he climbs from light to light discovering more and more secrets. "What I learned earlier through logic (beh borhan), I could also see, and in much more abundance, by way of the 'seeing heart'" [rah-e shohud-e qalbi].235 Understanding can be achieved then through three main ways: Islamic revelation, logical thinking and heart seeing.

The combination of this presumed paranormal power, "proportional to the merit and talent of people," with dictatorial authority granted by the constitution to the Supreme Leader of Iran, has repercussions for civil rights as well as the nuclear issue. The texts explain that while security needs are constant, the decision about which weapons are allowed to be used is an ever-changing mission—relegated to religious experts on an ongoing basis.

The need for security is constant. However, the ways to guarantee security with the equipment and weapons that are to be used to this end, as compared to previous periods, are very different. Islamic learning (ma'aref-e eslam) is such that religious experts can extract from it new laws concerning banking, banknotes, procurement and use of new weapons, in accordance with the new needs of society . . . .

To reiterate, this description rules out the possibility of an all-encompassing binding fatwa (religious edict) in matters of weapons; students are taught that decisions are made as needed by Islamic scholars, and ultimately, the Supreme Leader.237 This paradigm is married to a strategy aimed at implementing the vision of the Islamic Republic's founding father to spread the revolution, slowly but surely, until it covers the entire world and prepares it for the coming of the Mahdi.

The crusade (nahzat) for Islam cannot be confined to one country and cannot even be confined to the Islamic countries. The crusade for Islam should follow in the footsteps of the Prophet’s crusade. The Prophet’s crusade was not intended for one place; though the Prophet of Islam belonged to the people of Arabia, his call (Da’wah) did not belong to Arabia, was not confined to Arabia—his call belongs to the entire world.

Imam Khomeini238

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234 Ibid., p. 57. Persian: theosophy (ta’alloh); full authority (riyasat tammah); Caliph and deputy of God (khalifah va janeshin-e khoda).
235 Ibid., p. 96. The quotation is taken from The Four Journeys: Asfar, Vol. 1, Introduction. No other details provided.
Blurring the lines between imagination and reality. **Above:** A boy appears to be rising to heaven. **Below:** A mysterious girl seen through a poem dedicated to God.
Conclusion

The worldview expressed within the current Iranian curriculum clearly teaches that scientific, rational thinking and creativity are encouraged—but not less so than mystical thinking, blind obedience to the Leader, militarism and child-martyrdom. And while readiness training for nuclear, biological and chemical war does not appear in the latest textbook editions, a new emphasis on the martyrdom of women, as well as cyber warfare now exists. The line separating life and death, heaven and earth, paranormal intervention and natural science is blurry and often indiscernible. In contrast, the line separating good (led by Iran) and evil (led by the West), is clear and unbridgeable within the curriculum.

Iranian youth are taught that Iran is committed to the mission of implementing its New Islamic Civilization around the world. They are taught to support "freedom fighters" everywhere and protect the homeland from ever-conspiring enemies. In other words, Iran is committed to constantly undermine other regimes and anticipate their ensuing hostility.

Students learn that no checks are needed on the Supreme Leader's authority, including his right to sanctify new weapons. They are taught to subscribe to an Iranian policy that is largely irrational—with the creation of a global utopia depicted as the only "right" program for humankind. Even more troubling, the schoolbooks advocate blind obedience (to the Supreme Leader), mystical communication with celestial beings, and a jihad war culminating in an apocalyptic battle. On the way to establishing the just world government of the future, students are encouraged to prepare the ground for the reappearance of the hidden Mahdi, the Shiite Messiah, whose presence is with us like the sun behind the clouds.239

From the perspective of education and nation-building, one cannot deny that Iran is attempting to create an alternative to the Western way of life. And the authors of the curriculum have provided Iranian students with a wide array of tools for their future lives.

Unquestionably one can find within Iran's educational curriculum an emphasis on strong family values, morality, and commitment to one's friends, the Islamic Nation and the meek and oppressed. Alongside an emotional and mystical grasp of reality, and an uncompromising religious worldview, this might indeed appear to be a worthwhile experiment—combining the best of modernity with a serious link to the wisdom of the ages.

But this must be viewed within the harsh paradox that is simultaneously present in the selfsame curriculum that teaches Iranian children to hate and weaken their enemies—especially in the West—while extolling the virtue of suicidal martyrdom. Not a little discernment is required to understand such a dichotomy.

An evident split divides the rational, inclusive dimension of the curriculum from that of the mystical-totalitarian exclusive one. Some scholars believe that despite these "circles of inclusion and exclusion," aimed at identifying "outsiders" and their Iranian "Westoxicated" allies, the impact of the Iranian curriculum is limited: "... the sharp contrast between preaching and practice in the larger society has led Iranian youth to question the 'truth' of what is conveyed in the classroom."240

Indeed, the violent oppression in Iran itself—amid Iran-induced turmoil in places such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Gaza—point to limitations of this worldview's convincing power. But the curriculum does not need to convince each and every individual—just enough radical leaders, committed military commanders, soldiers, scientists, technicians, legal experts, and a range of other key elements of Iranian society and the region—all led by an absolute Supreme Leader. Imperial dreams aside, the phantasmagoric character of this educational system must be factored into any assessment of Iran's intentions and plans for the future.

IMPACT-SE Methodology

The following is an updated condensed version of the IMPACT-SE, UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance in school education.241

1. RESPECT: The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the "Other," his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.242

2. INDIVIDUAL OTHER: The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the "Other" as an individual and his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated243.

3. NO HATE: The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.244

4. PEACE MAKING: The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.245

5. UNBIASED INFORMATION: Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers’ guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use the same standard to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.246

6. GENDER: The curriculum should foster equality and mutual respect between women and men. It should refrain from stereotyped gender roles.247

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241 The methodology was initiated by Yohanan Manor and Jean-Claude Nidam. This is an updated version of the standards prepared by Eldad J. Pardo, Jean-Claude Nidam and Shimon Shetreet (May 2014).

242 As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, II.

243 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.


245 The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination
(7) SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY and COOPERATION: The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.\footnote{Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing "systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance," see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.}
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