



CENTER FOR MONITORING

THE IMPACT OF PEACE (R.A.)

<http://www.edume.org>

NEWSLETTER – AUGUST 2004

CMIP's report entitled *The West, Christians and Jews in Saudi Arabian Schoolbooks* published in January 2003, will be released by next month, through the initiative of CMIP-France, by Berg International, a leading publishing house in the fields of secularism and prejudice. The report is introduced to the French-speaking public by Antoine Sfeir¹, one of the leading experts in the Arab world and has been translated into English for this newsletter.

Marked changes have taken place during the past ten years not only within the Arab and Moslem world, but also in the western world's perception of it.

In 1956, in response to Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, the Suez Campaign was launched by France and Great Britain, with the support of the Israeli armed forces. This opened up the Arab-Moslem region to American and Soviet influence while at the same time tolling a knell on the secularization of Arab societies.

The Arab world was thus divided in two: on the one hand the so-called "progressives", regrouped around Nasser and pan-Arabism, and on the other hand the so-called "conservatives", under the tutelage of Saudi Arabia.

Following the alliance between the United States, France, and Great Britain with Saudi Arabia, secularism within the Arab world repeatedly failed to move forward, while at the same time Islamism gained ground. Saudi oil enabled the Wahabites to establish themselves throughout the world by means of the World Islamic League (*la Rabita*) and Islamic banks. All these institutions were able to legally finance groups and associations through *Zakat* (charity), which is an obligation for every practicing Moslem.

Despite a commitment of about \$155 billion to military expenses during the last decade of the 20th century, i.e. approximately \$15 billion each year, the Arab world could not provide any real military power, nor any capacity for nuclear dissuasion, nor even any substantial international intelligence service - all of these being attributes of modern power in which it is sadly lacking.

Despite the vast movement towards strategic international re-formation, with the establishment of large political groups within the perspective of global application of economic and cultural flux, the Arab world goes against the flow, relying on political division, economic disparity and security tensions. It remains the grand absentee in the movement towards planetary redeployment despite numerous assets: a pivotal position at the intersection of three continents (Europe-Asia-Africa); a world role as the major supplier of energy; extensive spiritual influence.

¹ Antoine Sfeir has worked for over 30 years on the Middle East and Near East. He is President of the Middle East Studies Center in Paris and Editor-in-Chief of *Les Cahiers de L'Orient*. He edited *Atlas of Religions* and published among other books *The Money of the Arabs* (1992), *The Network of Allah* and *The Islamic Affiliates in France and in Europe* (2001).

Moreover, for almost a quarter of a century, from 1970 until 1994, the Middle East had absorbed 45% of the arms sold to the third world, representing 35% of the world's total purchase of armaments, while its population is just 3% of the world's total population. Thus, it possesses more armaments per inhabitant (for tanks and artillery) than the thirty or so European countries comprising the countries of the NATO and Warsaw Pacts.

At the dawn of the 21st Century, the Arab world appears to be a supervised zone marked by a foreign military presence as important as the one that existed during the colonial period, with bases in the Gulf and facilities granted to foreign troops in ten Arab countries including Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

All the human development indicators of the entire Arab world are to be found on the wrong side of the threshold of tolerance, illustrating the deficiency in the political-cultural system.

The average rate of illiteracy, although ten points less than at the beginning of the 1990s, remains one of the highest in the world, just behind southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, two geographical areas which are by no means endowed with the same wealth.

The same applies to the infant mortality rate, an indicator that reflects a country's level of development because it points to both the sanitary state and the level of education of the population, as well as women's status and hospital networks. It is listed among the highest in the world, after sub-Saharan Africa, confirming, as if this were necessary, the Arab world's poor level of development. Iraq holds the record for this, because of recent developments and a ten-year blockade, but the rate of infant mortality remains particularly high in the large countries equipped with good infrastructure as well as in the less endowed countries.

At a time when the menace of Islamic terrorism is becoming clearer, it is imperative to take full measure of one of its motivating forces and to become acquainted with the propagation of Islamic Wahabite ideology.

This ideology, whose principal target is western civilization, i.e. democracy and modernity, is known only to a number of specialists. It appears to be unknown to the media and the public at large as well as to politicians.

This report by CMIP on the Saudi Arabian school textbooks unveils accurately and concretely an extremist and fanatic Wahabism, drawing attention to the dangers it represents both for the contemporary world and for future generations.

It is not simply a matter of understanding the nature of the menace directed against western democracies, but also of providing information on the type of instruction administered in a growing number of Koranic schools across the world, because the dangers of conditioning and indoctrination must not be ignored.

We have been dealing with fundamentalist Wahabite Islam for the past twenty years for several reasons: The French republic has preferred to delegate the keeping of the peace in certain areas, schools and even prisons to religious associations financed and "spiritually" nurtured by Saudi Arabia. Their first project is to "re-islamize" Moslem-culture populations and to impose their theocratic vision on our fellow citizens. Their second goal is to seize power within the Moslem institutions in order to appear to be the sole representatives of Islam. Today, in the "lost territories of the Republic" a generation of French, mainly of Maghreb origin, have been subjected to the indoctrination of these propagandists and supporters of Jihad. The Islam of France, the Islam that the Republic has legitimized, has conveyed and to a certain extent still does convey the ideology contained in this Saudi "pedagogy".

Thus, CMIP's report serves as an excellent tool in helping to understand this archaic ideology; it serves as a warning against fanaticism and extremism, it serves as a means of showing to future generations that another way is possible – that of a modernity which will respect tradition without becoming submerged into blindness.

Antoine SFEIR

360 Madison Avenue, 6th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10017 U.S.A. (212) 699-8823
4 Rav Ashe Street, Jerusalem 93309, Israel Tel: 972-2-6481660 Fax: 972-2-6482823
e-mail: info@edume.org <http://www.edume.org>