Hamas's Web School for Suicide Bombers
Radical Islam

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All states use education as a medium to encourage responsible behavior in their children, at least in part to develop a law-abiding, civic-minded citizenry. Authoritarian regimes have a history of distorting this trust, often turning schools into places of indoctrination for a state or religious ideology. The Palestinians have, for some time now, created an educational system exemplifying this indoctrinational approach: Their textbooks deny Jewish and Israeli legitimacy within historic Palestine, demonize Jews and Israelis, discourage compromise or negotiated peace, and glorify violent struggle to achieve what are often termed "Palestinian aspirations." Since coming to power through elections in early 2006 and following its military coup in Gaza in June 2007, Hamas has continued this path of indoctrination, utilizing its popular children's website, Al-Fateh.

Formal Education in Gaza

After a series of clashes, predating Hamas's parliamentary win in 2006 but intensifying thereafter, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in a swift but brutal campaign, which lasted little more than a week (June 7-15, 2007).[1] Hamas now controls the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) retains almost no standing, except perhaps in the field of education: All the schools in the strip—the very small number of private schools, the public schools, and those run by the United Nations Works and Refugee Agency (UNRWA)—follow the official PA school curriculum and use the corresponding textbooks.

This may be surprising in view of the cardinal importance Hamas attributes to the education of children and youth as a means of achieving its ideological and political goals. Article 15 of the Hamas charter states:

It is necessary that scientists, educators, and teachers, information and media people, as well as the educated masses, especially the youth and sheikhs of the Islamic movements,This cartoon from an Al-Fateh web page shows a young girl with a slingshot and, at the top, a boy with a sword. Al-Fateh promotes violence towards Jews, who are regularly accused of being enemies of Islam, thirsty for Palestinian blood, and lusting to commit murder and acts of cruelty. Comments on the website assure its readers that "with God's help, the accursed Jewish state will be totally destroyed."
should take part in the operation of awakening. It is important that basic changes be made in school curriculum to cleanse it of the traces of ideological invasion that affected it as a result of the Orientalists and missionaries who infiltrated the region following the defeat of the Crusaders at the hands of Salah al Din (Saladin).[2]

Despite this, Hamas has yet to introduce its own school curriculum. Perhaps this is due in part to a concern for Palestinian unity; perhaps it is merely a desire to avoid the heavy expense such revisions would necessitate. Most likely this results from Hamas's recognition that continued implementation of the official PA curriculum is the only way currently that allows internationally recognized matriculation examinations to proceed and for diplomas to be awarded. In 2009 for example, practical steps were taken by Hamas to ensure that the examinations would take place at exactly the same time in both Gaza and the West Bank.[3]

But if Hamas is apparently content at this time to rely on PA-sanctioned curricula, it nonetheless resorts to other methods in order to leave its imprint on Gazan education. Firstly, it sees to it that the teachers employed throughout the strip impart its ideological and political views alongside the official pedagogical and educational approaches.[4] One way to get a good idea of the substance of those views is by turning to Al-Fateh, Hamas's web-based magazine for children and youth.[5]

**Its Master's Voice**

*Al-Fateh (Al-Fatiḥ)* website went online in September 2002. Its name is indicative of its ideological ambition. *Al-Fateh* (the conqueror) is not related to the Fatah party, Hamas's Palestinian rival; the apparent link is purely fortuitous and only linguistic. Fatah is an invented word. It starts with an acronym from the initial letters in Ḥarakat Tahrīr Filastin, the Movement for the Liberation of Palestine, HTF or Ḥataf. It seemed ill-omened that Ḥataf can be read as ḥatf or death in Arabic letters where only the consonants are shown. Fatah's founders decided to write the initial letters backwards, as FTH or Fataḥ, which can also be read as *fath* or "conquest, victory" when the vowels are changed.

Although Hamas has denied any connection to *Al-Fateh*, there is evidence to the contrary. *Al-Fateh*'s Internet server (located in Russia) also hosts the Palestine Gallery,[6] the photo portal website for Hamas's online Palestinian Information Center (PIC).[7] The Arabic portal of the PIC contains a number of links to Hamas-affiliated websites, including that of Hamas's military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and *Al-Fateh*, showing Hamas's intent to refer readers to sites whose content supports its ideology. Hamas's public rejection of ownership may be useful in preventing host countries from shutting down the servers as was done to the site of the Qassam Brigades in 2008.[8]

In spite of the denial, the web magazine's ideological affiliation with Hamas is evident when one considers the content and messages conveyed on the site. It identifies itself exclusively with both the ideology and activities of Hamas, including military actions that deliberately target civilians.

The website expresses the same religio-political positions that Hamas takes in its charter, including the doctrine that the entire land of historic Palestine is *waqf* (an Islamic endowment) and that its liberation by violent jihad is a religious duty.[9] Pride of place is given to Sheikh Ahmad Yassin,[10] the founder of Hamas. The site repeatedly quotes the words of the movement's leaders and extols the members of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Except for a few references to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, no other Palestinian movements or leaders are mentioned. It jubilantly reported Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections[11] and repeatedly commemorates Hamas martyrs (*shahids/shuhada*), publishing their last wills and testaments.[12]
In an analysis of 159 issues published between September 2002 and October 2009, four major themes recur: hatred and contempt for the West, annihilation of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants, demonization of the Jews, and a cynical form of indoctrination that aims to turn children into future suicide bombers.[13]

### Hatred and Scorn for the West

*Al-Fateh* depicts the West as decadent and inferior to the Islamic world, both from a scientific and a moral perspective. Many scientific discoveries achieved by the West are claimed to be of Islamic origin. Thus, Christopher Columbus was not the first to discover America, which "he reached hundreds of years after the Arabs and Muslims."[14] The "legend" that Sir Isaac Newton discovered gravity is but a ruse to hide the fact that the idea was of Arabic provenance.[15] Other scientific "firsts" appropriated without acknowledgment by the West include the knowledge that the world is not flat and the discovery of electricity.

Ideas of human equality and social justice, whose roots extend from the Bible through the Magna Carta through the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, emerged according to *Al-Fateh* in reality in Mecca in the seventh century. While Western nations have time after time violated their own proclamations concerning human rights, *Al-Fateh* states that the emergence of Islam in Mecca brought equality between the slave and his master, between the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the man and the woman, the Arab and the non-Arab … And from these roots grew a strong Islamic society which has no oppressor or oppressed, and in which no man can steal the rights of the other.[16]

The West is regarded as a source of decadence, corruption, and cheap values that should be avoided—from "Western imperialist clothing" to television programs.[17] The site also warns against celebrating Western holidays, which are alleged to provide an opportunity for Westerners to scorn Muslims:

the West looks at us … disdainfully and derisively, with a glance full of arrogance … They have the right to do so, because we have celebrated their [holidays] while they have not even thought to celebrate ours … because we have distanced ourselves from our ideal values and clung to their decadent values.[18]

In this somewhat difficult passage, *Al-Fateh* uses the status of women to illustrate the inferiority of Western values:

Many Orientalists accuse Islam of failing to grant the woman what it grants the man. We do not see this phenomenon in reality, but from reading history books we find something interesting: Century after century, we see that the nations of the West exploit and deny their basic human rights more than any other nation. The meaning of freedom has changed for the European woman and become entwined with the concepts of loss, escape, and disintegration … [so that] suicide has become the only option for those despairing and falling in perdition.[19]

The West is further the enemy of Islam both because of its "severe attacks in beloved Palestine, in Iraq, in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, in Chechnya and in the Balkans, in India and in Kashmir"[20] and its "subjugation" of Muslim peoples:

We are currently subjugated by the Jews, the Americans, and the British who occupy our holy land of Palestine, in Iraq, and in many Arab and Muslim states … It is [incumbent] upon us, the lion cubs of
Arabism and Islam, to be prepared to fight those abject people and to liberate our country from occupation.[21]

The website provides the obligatory references to Western imperialism and the crimes of the Crusaders:

The savage and backward feudal kings of Europe came at the head of huge armies as invaders and occupiers and seized many Arab cities on the Syrian coast.[22]

See the crime that Britain has brought upon us: Britain conquered Palestine in a Crusader spirit, as articulated by their commander, General Allenby, who, after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1917, said: "Today the Crusades have ended."[23]

This last, unsubstantiated quotation is taken directly from article 15 of the Hamas charter although it is a matter of controversy whether Viscount Allenby ever uttered such a comment.

Annihilation of Israel and the Jews

For Al-Fateh, Israel is an illegitimate state since "greater Palestine" is an Arab, Islamic land. Thus, the Jews have no rights whatsoever in "Palestine"

where the Arab Canaanites have dwelt since ancient times, a long time before the arrival of the Jews in Palestine, and even when the Jews immigrated into Palestine, the Arab tribes were there until the arrival of Islam, which made Palestine an Arab Islamic land … and since that time to our day the Muslim Arabs have never left … and everything in it testifies to Palestine being Arab and Muslim, despite the arrogance of the Jews and the imperialism that helps the Jews occupy it.[24]

According to a number of modern Arab historians, the ancient Babylonians, Aramaeans, and Phoenicians were all Arabs who emigrated from the Arabian Peninsula.[25] This "Arabization" of the Canaanites is meant to portray the Israelites (and by extension, the Jews) as interlopers in the land and to transform the Arab Palestinians, the alleged Canaanite descendants, as the only legitimate and indigenous inhabitants. But as even partisan supporters of the Palestinian cause such as Rashid Khalidi have noted, Palestinian nationalism developed a historiography that "anachronistically read back into the history of Palestine over the past few centuries, and even millennia, a nationalist consciousness and identity that are in fact relatively modern," creating a "predilection for seeing in peoples such as the Canaanites, Jebusites, Amorites, and Philistines the lineal ancestors of the modern Palestinians."[26]

This denial of a Jewish connection to the land extends to the Kotel or Western Wall, a remnant of one of the supporting walls of Herod's Temple and the holiest, accessible site for Jewish prayer:

The Western Wall, a noble and honored Arab and Islamic remnant, [is] one of the walls of the Al-Aqsa Mosque … the most ancient Islamic site in Jerusalem. The occupying Jews claim that this wall is all that remains of their ancient temple, called Solomon's Temple. In actual fact, the Jews' claim is false, fake, and incorrect, and history and archeological research prove our statements. The ancient Jewish temple was completely destroyed by the Romans approximately 2000 years ago. All archeological researchers prove that this wall was built in the Umayyad period … the Western Wall of the Al-Aqsa Mosque is thus an Arab Islamic remnant and consequently has no connection at all to Solomon's Temple.[27]

Like other Palestinian educational literature, Al-Fateh website frequently depicts the map of the Middle East
without Israel and instead shows only "Palestine." It avoids the phrase "the State of Israel," instead employing terms of derogation and condemnation, including the "Zionist entity," "the cursed state," the "state of the monstrous entity," the "criminal state," the "alleged entity," and the "thieving usurping entity."[28]

Not content with expunging any past connection to the land, *Al-Fateh*'s hostility and contempt for Israel are intertwined with an expressed longing to annihilate it: "All Muslim children are the hope for the future, and by their hands, with God's help, the accursed Jewish state will be totally destroyed."[29] This uncompromising hatred is tied to a condemnation of the Jews reputedly uttered by Muhammad, echoed in turn in the Hamas charter:[30]

> Palestine is an Islamic [religious] endowment [waqf]. It is the Muslims' primary problem, and its liberation is a personal religious duty for every Muslim. I recall the saying [hadith] uttered by God's Messenger [Muhammad]: "The Hour of Judgment will not arrive until you fight the Jews and kill them … and until the trees and the rocks will say: 'O Muslim, O servant of God, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him," except the salt bush [gharqad], for it is [one] of the Jews' trees.[31]

That this exhortation is not confined to the past or some theoretical clause in an organizational charter is made explicit in numerous *Al-Fateh* issues: "You will be in the ranks in the near future, the future in which we cleanse our holy land of the impurity of the Jews."[32] Israel's destruction and the violent liberation of Palestine are described as one and the same thing: "The way to the complete liberation of the land is through the muzzle of the gun."[33] Leaving nothing to chance, God Himself is called upon to accomplish the goal: "O God, you should deal with the aggressive Zionists, O God … kill them … and do not leave [even] one of them."[34] This destruction is aimed not only against Israel but against Jews generally: "Oh, our Aqsa [Mosque], we shall return; we are the soldiers of God's religion. We will rejoice at the victory and kill the Jews by the sword."[35]

It is not surprising then that *Al-Fateh* rejects any peace settlement, any negotiations that might lead to a settlement, and all past agreements concluded with Israel, echoing article 13 of the Hamas charter. In a column dedicated to Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the most prominent Palestinian leader in the 1930s and 1940s and a Nazi collaborator, *Al-Fateh* republishes his admonition for its student readers: "If you don't succeed in liberating Palestine, I am warning you not to conclude a peace agreement with the Jews, whatever the situation will be."[36] Turning to more contemporary leadership, the website quotes Abd al-Aziz Rantisi (1947-2004), Hamas's cofounder, one of its principal leaders in Gaza, and a staunch opponent of the Oslo accords, who referred to Palestinian anti-negotiation demonstrators as those who "left their homes in order to tell the negotiators: 'No to this ridiculous negotiation! Yes to continuing resistance. Yes to the gun!'"

**Demonization of Jews**

*Al-Fateh* takes every opportunity to promote demonization of the Jews, described as "the lowest of the human race."[37] Jews are regularly accused of being enemies of Islam, inherent tricksters, and treaty violators, for whom there is no place in Palestine:

> Tell them about your forefathers and about the 'Jews' forefathers and explain the difference between them. For they [the Jews' forefathers] violated [their] treaties, killed the innocent ones, and transformed falsity into truth and truth into falsity through their trickery … Talk to them about the Jews' trickery against our Messenger al-Mustafa [Muhammad] and [tell them] that this trickery will continue until the hour of judgment.[38]

Stories and articles on the website portray Israel and the Jews as thirsty for Palestinian blood and lusting to commit
murder and acts of cruelty for the sake of their own pleasure.[39] A prime example of such demonization can be found in the following excerpt from a story told by a grandmother about Muhammad al-Dura. Dura, a Palestinian child allegedly killed in a gun battle by Israeli troops in September 2000,[40] became the poster boy for the second intifada and has been idealized as a shahid (martyr):

He and his father arrived at the roadblock guarded by the criminal Jewish soldiers, the car was not allowed to pass, and Muhammad went by foot with his father … [T]he soldiers descended on them as the wolves descend on their prey, and began to fire around them first without hitting them. Muhammad stood by his father and said: "Do not worry, their bullets will not hurt us, we have done nothing to them, why should they kill us?" His father responded: "They are Jews, Muhammad." … Muhammad was hit by shrapnel … Muhammad's father began to shout in the direction of the ambulance (which could not move forward due to the fire): "The boy is dead! The boy is dead! Help us!" One of the sniper soldiers laughed in scorn at this father … [and] said in his criminal mind: The solution is to rid him of his son, then aimed the sniper rifle at Muhammad's chest, smiled and began to shoot. The bullets pierced Muhammad's heart … The soldiers' teeth … stuck out like the fangs of wolves … their hearts were like the hearts of wolves that have no human emotion in them.[41]

The wolf imagery also appears in other editions: Jews are "wolves whose eyes blaze with evil, evil fills their hearts … They are indeed the murderers of the prophets."[42] The latter accusation harks back to a common interpretation of the Qur'an[43] giving these efforts at demonization a religious dimension. Similarly, Jews are slurred many times on the website[44] as descendents of apes and pigs, a terrible insult in Islam, with its origins in the Qur'an.[45]

Educating Future Suicide Bombers

At times it seems as if Al-Fateh's educational mission is the single-minded creation of the next generation of suicide bombers. Demonizing and dehumanizing the Jews prepares young readers for future action. However, Al-Fateh does not merely exhort children to take up arms to kill Israelis and become jihad fighters, it indoctrinates them to seek shahada or martyrdom. Suicide bombings are idealized as an expression of devotion to Islam and as a sought-after pleasure, enabling the shahid to ascend immediately to paradise. Terrorist attacks and suicide bombings are highly praised and their perpetrators glorified.[46]

To overcome the youngsters' natural reservations about committing suicide, the site also systematically and cynically exposes the readers to graphic images of torn limbs and dead bodies in order to desensitize them to violence and death.[47] Similarly, the last wills and testaments of suicide bombers are used to sway youngsters and prepare them psychologically to "follow in the footsteps of the fighters in order to liberate this land from the impurity of the contemptible Jews … know[ing] clearly that my blood will be shed and my organs scattered."[48]

Al-Fateh publishes scores of jihadist testimonies[49] such as this from the will of suicide bomber Isma’il al-Ma'aswabi, who detonated a car bomb killing two Israeli soldiers:

love of jihad and martyrdom rules my life, my soul, my feelings and my heart … It is difficult for the soul that has tasted the sweet taste of jihad, the suffering in which is delicious … to rest anywhere else than Paradise … Whereas I am living in Paradise … do not be sad my brothers as I am a shahid in Paradise … and I will see you there with God's help.[50]

The religious justification for this act of self-destruction is made explicit for young readers in the following passage:
Muslims who have been slain are in Paradise, and [the Jews] who have been slain are in Hell. They [the Muslims who were killed] have been granted martyrdom, which is the Muslims' hope and goal in this world. They died because their time had come, and had the Jews not killed them, they would have died [anyway]. But God wanted Paradise for them, so He granted them martyrdom … Be reassured my beloved one, that at the moment of their martyrdom they do not feel pain at all. They feel as if they are only pricked by a needle. [51]

Glimpse of the Future?

Both Al-Fateh and its parent organization Hamas have on rare occasions displayed some sensitivity to intra-Palestinian debates about peace and sometimes have noted popular aspirations for a peace settlement if only to show their futility. Thus the story of 13-year-old Yasmin Shamalawi:

Yasmin Shamalawi rejects violence as a means of confronting the other, believes in peace as a means of achieving the goals of the Palestinian people and rejects the killing of Israeli children just as she categorically rejects the killing of the children of Palestine. And she goes on to say: "I don't carry a rifle as the singer Umm Kulthum once sang: 'I now have a rifle in my hands, take me with you to Palestine …' All I will make is a sincere and true call on behalf of the children of Palestine to the rulers of Israel, so that they may look at us and their own children through the perspective of childhood and the future … and let us live together, as there is room for all in the land and in the heavens." [52]

Unfortunately, this is an exception to the rule. Al-Fateh and Hamas's radical, hard-line, rejectionist stance are not compatible with a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. More typical of Al-Fateh's viewpoint is the republished last will and testament of suicide bomber Ahmad Marmash, who murdered five and wounded more than 100 civilians at a shopping mall in Netanya in 2001:

many of the sons of this nation are killed, and they [the leaders] are waiting and standing idly by, claiming that the solution of the problem is the solution of peace. Do you think that the Zionist enemy understands the message of peace and the peaceful solution? [53]

In another posting, a young girl recounts her response to an official from the Israeli Ministry of Education, who visited her school to speak of peace:

Do you expect peace between the wolf and the lamb? … The wolf wants to devour the poor, weak lamb because it drank from a brook … peace, honorable sir, with the wolf of occupation which took everything from us … imprisons our youths? Our warriors will pursue them and kill them. The pupils applauded me and whispered … "the occupation will fall … no peace with the enemies." [54]

Yasmin Shamalawi's statement may offer some a glimmer of hope and may even indicate an ability to listen and take into account some Palestinians' aspirations for a normal life and even for a peace settlement. In light of the preponderance of evidence to the contrary, however, it seems unlikely that Al-Fateh and Hamas are considering adopting such an approach. Hamas would lose its raison d'être, and Al-Fateh, its youth mouthpiece, would be abandoning the principles of hatred and rejection that are the essence of its religio-political philosophy.

Al-Fateh's doctrinal and educational approach is in clear violation of international educational standards based on various U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization resolutions. [55] By instructing its young audience in hatred and demonization and inciting them to shed blood and commit suicide, Al-Fateh and Hamas trample upon
the fundamental rights of children as formulated in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically article 6, which recognizes that every child has the "inherent right to life."[56] Regardless of the U.N.'s tarnished reputation regarding human rights overall, the protection of children from indoctrination into a life of hatred and violence should be supported by all those who claim to advocate for human and children's rights.

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[40] See "Philippe Karsenty: 'We Need to Expose the Muhammad al-Dura Hoax,'" Middle East Quarterly, Fall 2008, pp. 57-65.