

Translation of the Lebanese *Al-Akhbar* article on IMPACT-se's Influence on School Textbooks in Arab World

Syrian Curriculum Troubles Israel!

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Beirut Hammoud

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How does Israel interfere and influence the contents of textbooks in the Arab countries? And most importantly, do they always succeed? The answer will be negative for a country like Syria, which basically does not recognize the legitimacy of the Zionist Entity. Today, the educational curriculum in Damascus is the focus of interest and concern in Tel Aviv, to the extent that it prompted an Israeli institute to prepare a lengthy study, released to the media, for discussion and expression of anger: "Damascus is still clinging to its principles and hostility to us."

It is true that in Israel, as in many countries in the world, there are research institutes in different fields. But it seems that one of them is more interesting than others. Not only because of its field of studies, but because its recommendations affect the decisions of international organizations concerned with culture and education. The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se), formerly known as the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP), is located in occupied Jerusalem. The organization's profile page reads: "It is an Israeli non-profit organization that monitors the content of textbooks and examines curricula throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, to determine whether the school material complies with international standards and whether teaching is based on recognition of the Other and its acceptance."

In order to understand the impact of this institute on the decisions of international organizations, it is possible to go back to a report by the Jerusalem Post on the fourth of last April, about the EU cutting aid to the Palestinian Authority, requesting it to review the curriculum because it does not meet European Union and UNESCO recommendations.

This is just a simple example ... What is new is what the institute is now pursuing; a new study sheds light on different aspects of the curriculum in Syria and the repercussions of the war that broke out seven years ago. The newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* published a report on the study, in which it considers that Syrian students are studying "contents that carry anti-Semitism, falsification of history, and hostility to Iran. In exchange, Russia is considered a permanent ally; since the students learn the Russian language."

This claim comes against the background that Syria does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel—like Egypt and Jordan, for example—as it is named in the Syrian curriculum "the Zionist Entity, and Palestine is the State of Palestine, or Occupied Palestine. As for the geographical maps, the Arab region stretching from the *Bilad al-Sham* [Levant or Greater Syria] to the east to the Arab Maghreb to the west is still named the Arab Homeland. The Arab countries are known as the seven regions. The Golan is the Syrian Heights occupied by Israel in order to falsify its history and steal its Arab monuments. In addition, the Zionists aimed to destroy the natural environment of the Golan and exploit the economic and touristic potential of the region." The author of the [newspaper] report, Daniel Salameh, may well conduct a quick tour of the occupied Golan and realize the validity of what the Syrians are

studying. Israel has adopted their plateau for touristic uses due to its geographical environment and nature, and occupied it also for expansionist and political reasons.

The study, prepared by authors Eldad Pardo and Maya Jacobi, deals with the official Syrian textbooks from elementary to high school for the academic year 2017–18, which are taught in areas that were recently liberated from the hands of armed groups. This study considers that "one of the most serious accusations against Israel," repeated several times in various school textbooks, is "the imposition of the identity of the Zionist Entity on the population of the occupied Golan, including the Judaization of the region. The Zionists also imposed the Hebrew language on the Syrian Arab population and planned to replace the Syrian curriculum with another of the Zionist Terrorist Entity, in order to leave the Syrian Arab citizens in the dark."

As to the point that has aroused Israeli interest, it is that the Syrians are studying the Russian language (!). According to the report, "in 2014, the Russian language was introduced into the curriculum of compulsory education of the Syrian schools. It presents Russia as a scientific and technological power. The program's teachers are expanding on influential Russian personalities such as Yuri Gagarin (the first Russian cosmonaut)." On the other hand, the curriculum "displays a certain animosity towards Iran (only because the Ahwaz [Iran's Khuzestan province] and the three [Gulf] islands are considered Arab lands, and because Persian is not taught like the Russian language)." From the Israeli point of view, too, [the curriculum] is "anti-Semitic" because it "ignores the Holocaust against the Jews."

The Israeli study claims that the Syrian curriculum "reflects a disturbing picture, where Syrian students are exposed to contents that are anti-Semitic and encouraging *jihād*, terrorist acts and violence against Israel, and hatred and hostility toward the West." The study interprets the principles of Arab pan-nationalism and adherence to the Syrian identity in the curriculum as "a reflection of rejection of Iranian hegemony and the Khomeinist political culture, except for the common hostility against Israel and the West. And the reason for that is that the Syrian regime is secular, unlike the Iranian one."

In an interview with Ynet, [in] the newspaper's [TV] studio, IMPACT-se's CEO Marcus Sheff stated: "Although the Syrians see daily the devastation caused by the war in their surroundings, there is no mention of this war and its consequences ... But the principles and values that Syrian governments have adopted toward Israel never change. In the view of the Syrian Republic, Israel is a terrorist entity, and therefore all means available to resist and fight it are legitimate means, including martyrdom operations. Anti-Israelism has gained a large share in history textbooks within the curriculum."

However, a careful examination the 104-page study reveals that Israeli anger stems from the fact that this curriculum, unlike the Egyptian for example, gives a central place to loyalty to the homeland and the land, to the Syrian Arab identity and to resistance to occupation and colonialism. It teaches the students that resistance to occupation is essentially a right recognized by the whole world.