

# JEWES, ZIONISM AND ISRAEL IN SYRIAN SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS JUNE 2001

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## Executive Summary

Peace has become Syria's declared strategic choice since the Madrid Conference of 1991. The present survey, initiated by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP), has undertaken to determine the extent to which the idea of peace with Israel has become part of Syria's official curriculum. Sixty-eight textbooks for grades 1-12 in various subjects, all having been part of the Syrian curriculum during the year 2000, were examined within this survey. The findings are as follows:

- The Arab-Israeli conflict is a major theme in the Syrian curriculum and is dealt with in most textbooks. The essence of the conflict is Israel's right to existence, not its borders. In fact, the conflict is portrayed as a fateful struggle for existence between the whole Arab nation and a Zionist-Jewish entity that has established itself in Palestine.
- Not a single word in favor of the Jews is to be found in the Syrian textbooks. The Jews are denied the characteristics of a nation, they are detached from their ancestors and from the land of Palestine, and their religion is racist. They are portrayed as enemies of the Arabs since antiquity, of Islam since its inception, of all mankind, of the prophets and of God himself. The hatred of the nations of the world towards them is justified. The Holocaust is justified, though its magnitude is exaggerated by the Jews. There is one passage in the textbooks that calls for their elimination.
- Zionism is depicted as a racist and aggressive movement based on false assumptions that the Jews are one people connected to Palestine. Zionism exploits the Jewish religion in order to exercise control over vast areas of the Arab homeland.
- Israel is portrayed as an alien and artificial entity and is not recognized as a legitimate state. Its place on the map is always referred to as Palestine. Israel is wholly evil. It resembles a spreading cancer and is also the source of innumerable troubles that have befallen the Arabs, beginning with the usurping of Palestine, through preventing the realization of Arab unity and hindering Arab economic progress, and ending with the attempt to erase Palestinian and Arab national identity. Israeli society is full of malice towards the Arabs and Israeli soldiers are demonized.
- Jerusalem is, and has always been, an Arab city. The Jews are not mentioned as its inhabitants, neither in the past nor in present times. Their holy places in the city are not mentioned alongside those of Muslims and Christians. The Jews' presence in Jerusalem is that of foreign occupiers whom Arabs and Muslims should evict. Such an operation assumes the

characteristics of purification, since the Jews defile the place by their mere presence there.

- Making peace with Israel means surrender and is rejected as a treacherous act. On the other hand, participating in the current peace process is presented as a continuation of the old struggle against Zionism and Israel by other means. In no place does the phrase "peace with Israel" appear and Syria is not referred to as committed to recognizing Israel's right to exist within its pre-1967 borders.
- The liberation of Palestine is portrayed as a major goal of Syria, as well as an all-Arab and all-Muslim duty. The Syrian textbooks do not conceal the fact that full liberation of Palestine is synonymous with the liquidation of Israel, which is mentioned as one of the goals of the ruling Ba'ath Party. It is also an act of purification, that is, purifying Palestine of the Zionist "filth", and a means to reasserting Arab and Muslim dignity.
- The struggle against Israel is a "holy war" - Jihad, which is the duty of every Muslim.
- Within this context, Martyrdom is an exalted value in the Syrian textbooks propagated by President Hafez Assad himself and inculcated in the minds of students in various ways.
- Finally, embracing and supporting terrorist activities against Israel is a common theme. Though the term "terror" itself is never used in this context and such activities are described as operations against military targets, the cases brought to the student's attention in the textbooks refer to actual or imagined attacks on civilians.