

Iran's Global War Curriculum

ARNON GROISS

Introduction

Recent developments in and around Iran, and the accompanying contradictory declarations and messages emanating from it, have puzzled a great number of people who are genuinely interested in that country's political vision. Caught between fiery statements by current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and former President Mohammad Khatami's milder tone, they wonder what Iran really aspires to in this world.

The following is an attempt to present an outline of the Iranian worldview and agenda, based on a study of 95 school textbooks of all grades published in 2004 and 20 teacher's guides published mostly since 2000. This research, commissioned by the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) – a non-profit organization committed to investigating school books of Middle Eastern nations – focused on two main fields: the attitude to 'the other' and issues of peace and war.¹ The thousand or so pieces of text, maps, photographs and illustrations in these two fields, which were found in the books, surely represent the values and ideals Iran holds to more than other sources of information, since textbooks and teachers' guides in general provide a very clear idea of what an education system in any place would try to instil in the minds of the younger generations. The full report on the Iranian school books, with all the quoted references, is available on the organization's website: <<http://www.edume.org>>.

The general picture reflected by the Iranian school books does not bode well. The books reveal an uncompromisingly hostile attitude towards the West, especially the United States and Israel. In fact, the curriculum's declared goal is to prepare the students for a global struggle against the West² which bears alarming Messianic-like features to the point of self-destruction (see below).

This line of indoctrination, which is most apparent in the higher grades, is not a product of recent years. It was designed and developed by the founder of Revolutionary Iran, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, and has been implemented since the very beginning of the new regime, including during the term of

former President Mohammad Khatami whose moderate appearance and pronouncements led people in the West to believe otherwise. One should bear in mind that, with one exception, the books and teachers' guides studied in this research were all issued under his presidency.³

Iran's war curriculum may be roughly divided into two main categories. One is the overall rationale presented in the textbooks. It shapes the students' perception of the world, of Iran's role within it and of the nature of the war to be fought. The other category is the actual preparation of the students for participation in this war, which involves hate indoctrination against the West, development of the spirit of military preparedness and, finally, encouragement of self-sacrifice.

Iran and the World

One can safely define the Islamic Revolution as the primary cause of Iran's war curriculum, for it was this Revolution which made Iran historically unique, imposed on it a unique mission, and also gave it a unique perception of the world. In this respect, Revolutionary Iran appears to be ideologically similar to the former Soviet Union.

As stated in one of the textbooks, the Islamic Revolution in Iran has created a peculiar phenomenon in history – the first Islamic rule in 14 centuries,⁴ that is, since the Prophet Muhammad. As such, Iran's priorities should reflect Islamic goals, namely, pleasing God, leading the people to the real benefits of the Hereafter rather than to false mundane ones, propagating the religion of Islam in the world, and so on. One such goal set by Ayatollah Khomeini as a religious precept is fighting oppression:

The martyrdom of the Commander of the Faithful [Ali] and also of Imam Hussein, and the imprisonment, torture, expulsion and poisoning of the [Shiite] Imams, have all been part of the political struggle of the Shiites against the oppressors. In one word, struggle and political activity are an important part of the religious responsibilities.

(Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 8 (2004), p. 96)

Indeed, the Islamic Revolution in Iran is seen as the culmination of the struggle against local oppression – the monarchy, which was supported by world oppression – the United States and the other powers. But victory in Iran is not enough. Islamic Iran has a religious obligation to globalize the Islamic Revolution against oppression and make the local victory universal:

IRAN'S GLOBAL WAR CURRICULUM

5

Now, in order to continue the Islamic Revolution, it is our duty to continue with all [our] power our revolt against the Arrogant Ones [a term mostly used now in reference to the United States, see below] and the oppressors, and not cease until all Islam's commandments and the spread of the redeeming message of 'there is no god except Allah' are realized in the whole world.

(Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 7 (2004), p. 29)

In accordance with this pattern of thinking, Iran views the world as comprising two opposed poles: the dominant and the dominated,⁵ or the oppressors on the one hand and the oppressed on the other. This world dichotomy between 'good' and 'evil' is prevalent in the books.

While the oppressors in the historical period of the Shiite Imams were usually the Sunni caliphs, today's oppressors are the West in general, with the United States at its head, and all other powers and governments connected to it, such as Israel, the former Apartheid regime of South Africa, the Bosnian Serbs, the former Shah's government in Iran, Saddam's Iraq, etc. Czarist Russia and the former Soviet Union are also included in the oppressive West, but the Soviets look somewhat peripheral in the light of the huge number of references to the West's other components. Israel is referred to in the Iranian school textbooks far more extensively than Saddam's Iraq, which probably indicates its relatively higher position on the scale of 'oppressiveness'.

The oppressors' goal is 'to plunder the property of weak nations and enslave them'. They further 'make use of all the means they possess in order to demote the nations and make themselves the world's [sole] wielders of authority'. In order to strengthen their own rule, they use various ways – military, political, economic and cultural.⁶

The cultural dimension of the struggle against the West is emphasized a great deal in the textbooks. It is not Western culture itself which is rejected, though criticism of some of its aspects does exist, such as, for example, heedlessness of the otherworld and excessive concentration on mundane pleasures,⁷ or permissiveness in the field of relations between the sexes.⁸ Rather, it is the role played by Western culture against the oppressed which causes alarm. Western moral corruption, which is the result of the emphasis on material progress and mundane pleasures, has penetrated the Third World nations and caused social damage such as massive trade in narcotics and slave women and children, immoral behavior, and the like.⁹ Western culture is also responsible, at least partially, for the UN's failure to protect human rights, because of the inadequate definition of such rights the West has imposed on that organization.¹⁰

In the Iranian school textbooks, special emphasis is given to the danger posed by Western culture to Islam. According to the books, Western culture aims at misrepresenting Islam as illogical and as a factor of Muslim backwardness;¹¹ Western culture also endeavours to develop pessimism among Muslim women regarding their status in society and to draw them towards immorality,¹² tries to undermine the Muslim penal code,¹³ etc. *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie is seen as part of 'a calculated plot on the part of the enemies of Islam'.¹⁴ According to Ayatollah Khomeini, Western culture has even created a distorted kind of Islam which he styled 'American Islam' as opposed to 'Mohammedan Islam'. 'American Islam' is any kind of Islam influenced by Western culture which is rejected and considered totally negative in Khomeini's view: 'the capitalists' Islam, the Islam of the Arrogant Ones, the Islam of the untroubled well-to-do, the hypocrites' Islam, the Islam of the comfort-seekers, the opportunists' Islam and – in one word – American Islam...'.¹⁵

Moreover, Western culture is used as a tool in the hands of the oppressors to obliterate local cultures around the world which has negative implications on the local people's identity and consequently weakens their resistance to the Westerners' domineering efforts. Westernization, or 'Westoxication' [*Gharbzadegi*] – as it is called in the books, is a professed enemy of the Revolution.¹⁶ Westernization is sometimes positioned as negating Muslim identity altogether. One of the accusations against the Shah's government is that it propagated Westernization and wiped out Islam,¹⁷ and Ayatollah Khomeini attributes such an intention to the Great Powers of his time: 'The West and the East [he refers here to the Soviet Union] will not sit quietly, until they move you out of your Muslim identity.'¹⁸

On the other side of the global front stand the oppressed. They include the vast majority of the world's nations, adherents of various religions. But other than briefly mentioning them several times, the Iranian textbooks do not specifically define or describe the oppressed of other religions in any way, focusing solely on the Muslims among them. It is Muslims who are destined to bear the brunt of the war against the oppressors, saving the others from the oppressors' hold, and bringing about Islam's rule throughout the world. Muslims' special status among the oppressed stems from the fact that they are bound by their faith to fight oppression and – more importantly – from the fact that Islam gives them the power to do so. The Islamic Revolution is said to have made the Muslims in general aware of the power of Islam in this context, thus endangering the oppressive powers' interests in many places in the world.¹⁹

Calls urging Muslims everywhere to rise and fight the West appear in the textbooks several times,²⁰ the most dramatic being Ayatollah Khomeini's following call:

IRAN'S GLOBAL WAR CURRICULUM

7

O Muslims of all countries of the world! Since under the foreigners' dominance gradual death has been inflicted on you, you should overcome the fear of death and make use of the existence of the passionate and the martyrdom-seeking youths, who are ready to smash the borders of unbelief. Do not think of keeping the status quo. Rather, think of escape from captivity, of deliverance from slavery, and of attack against the enemies of Islam. Glory and life are in fighting, and the first step of fighting is [the existence of] will. After that, there is the decision that you forbid yourselves to [submit to] the supremacy of world unbelief and polytheism, especially America.

(Islamic Viewpoint, Grade 11 (2004), p. 29)

Joining forces against the West requires unity, and the books try to spread the spirit of Muslim 'ecumenism' in this respect.²¹ One reference by Khomeini states that more explicitly: 'The Muslims of the world, together with the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, should resolve to shatter the teeth in America's mouth to pieces.'²²

It is obvious from the various references to this issue in the Iranian textbooks that Iran does not openly claim leadership of the Muslims in the global struggle against the West, probably because of the minority status of Shiites within the Muslim world. But it certainly emphasizes its unique position among the Muslims as far as the relations with the West are concerned. First of all, the Shiites are 'the oppressed' *par excellence*, as implied in a reference by Khomeini²³ who goes on to say: 'We are the permanent oppressed in history, deprived and barefoot. Other than God we have no one.'²⁴ Second, thanks to the Islamic Revolution under Khomeini's leadership, Iran has become relatively free of the phenomenon of Westernization²⁵ and that has made it more fit than others for the task of waging the war against the West. Third, Iran has already made the first steps on the road to war, by changing its status from a country cooperating with the West under the Shah to the West's fierce foe which found its expression in the occupation of the American embassy in Tehran in 1979²⁶ and the eight-year war with the West's ally, Saddam Hussein. With such arguments, Iran establishes in the eyes of school students its leadership role in the world's struggle against Western oppression.

The Global War

As already mentioned, world war against oppression is a religious obligation and an inevitable continuation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.²⁷ In religious

terms it is an 'initiative Jihad' [*Jihad-e Ebtedayi*] which is explained in the following way:

If people are ignorant, live in poverty and deprivation, and the oppressors and the Arrogant Ones²⁸ plunder the product of their labour, the army of Islam knows its duty, which is to help the deprived and save them from the claws of the Arrogant Ones ... Initiative Jihad, then, is a kind of defence as well, defence of the deprived people's rights, defence of the people's honour, and defence of the rights of the oppressed.

(Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 8 (2004), pp. 69–70)

Being a form of jihad, the war should culminate in Islam's victory all over the world. The war's goals, as stated in one of the books, are: 'complete victory over the world of unbelief and arrogance, the eradication of any oppression, the appearance of the Master of the Age [the Shiite Hidden Imam], and the realization of the world government of Islam'.²⁹

The inclusion of the Shiite Messianic idea of the reappearance of the Hidden Imam³⁰ in the list of the war's goals gives it an eschatological colouring, and makes of it a kind of Shiite Armageddon between the forces of good and evil. This notion is further emphasized by Ayatollah Khomeini's declarations which present the struggle as an all-out war of life or death to both parties.

Against this background it is quite astonishing to realize that the outcome of the perceived global war is uncertain. World victory of Islam is by no means guaranteed. It is Muslims' religious duty to fight oppression, but it is God's decision whether to grant them victory or martyrdom. In either case, they believe, victory is theirs. In Ayatollah Khomeini's words:

I am decisively announcing to the whole world that if the World Devourers³¹ wish to stand against our religion, we will stand against their whole world and will not cease until the annihilation of all of them. Either we all become free, or we all go to the greater liberty which is martyrdom ... Either we shake one another's hand in joy at the victory of Islam in the world, or all of us will turn to eternal life and martyrdom. In both cases, victory and success are ours.

(Islamic Viewpoint, Grade 11 (2004), p. 29)

And again, on another occasion:

If we are wiped out of the world's surface by the criminal hands of America and the Soviet Union and meet our God honourably and with

[our] red blood, it would be better than living a nobleman's comfortable life under the flag of the Red Army of the East and the black [flag] of the West.'

(*Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 26)

This ambivalent vision of the war's result is hardly encountered in similar historical cases, certainly not in the case of the Soviet Union which always showed its confidence in world victory for Socialism.

Although religiously based, the war against oppression does not target non-Muslims as such. Islam's victory does not necessarily mean the eradication of other religions, especially monotheistic ones. Islam has always been content throughout history with political dominance and did not usually impose itself on non-Muslims. The Iranian textbooks do not attack other religions – with the exception of Bahaism, which is considered a heretical offshoot of Shiite Islam nurtured by Western colonialism in order to shatter the unity of Iran's Muslims.³² It is not that rivalries between Muslims and non-Muslims are not discussed, but the latter are not automatically regarded as enemies on account of their religion.

This is also the case with other cultures, including Western culture – as already mentioned.³³ In fact, there was an attempt by the former President Mohammad Khatami to introduce into the Iranian curriculum a new subject called 'Dialogue of Civilizations' in which an effort was made to reconcile between Western and Islamic civilizations on the basis of political and economic equality.³⁴ However, it is doubtful whether this subject with its accompanying textbook and teacher's guide is still taught in schools today, following the changing of the guard in the Iranian regime. In any case, the war on the West includes a cultural front against Westernization and other forms of attack by Western culture on Islam. One of the actions on this battlefield was Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncement of the death sentence against the British writer Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses*, a work which was regarded as an attack against Islamic beliefs.

Having analysed the overall rationale of the global war against oppression as it appears in the Iranian school textbooks, let us now turn to the actual preparation of school students for participating in this war, starting with the manner in which Iranian educators instil hatred for the enemy in the students' souls.

Hate Indoctrination

Hate indoctrination is a professed goal in the Iranian curriculum: 'The students should have a heart overflowing with hatred towards Arrogance,' says

one of the textbooks.³⁵ Actually, one can discern three elements used in the Iranian school books as means for developing hatred towards the West, the United States and Israel: they are presented as *inherently evil*, as *enemies of Muslims* in general, and as direct *enemies of the people of Iran* themselves.

Inherent Evil

In the case of the West in general it is colonialism which serves to emphasize its evil nature, much the same as it is done in Marxist literature. Surprisingly, Czarist Russian and Soviet colonialism in Muslim Central Asia – an area in immediate proximity to Iran – is not discussed, while Western ‘traditional’ colonialism which never subjugated Iran is heavily emphasized. The conclusion one can draw is that Iranian educators do not really aim at Russia today and focus solely on the geographically ‘Western’ part of the West, though Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union feature to a certain extent as enemies of Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini sometimes mentions the Soviet Union as an enemy alongside the United States.

Colonialism is wholly evil:

The plunder of the colonies, maritime piracy, the plunder of the natives, the establishment of completely unjust commercial relations with the people of the colonies, and [other] measures of this kind, enabled the European colonialist countries to enrich and strengthen themselves at the price of impoverishing others.

(History of Iran and the World (Humanities), Grade 11 (2004), p. 20)

Having explained that colonialism emerged in Europe under specific economic and technological circumstances, a guiding question is inserted: ‘Was the phenomenon of Colonialism a unique product of Western civilization and culture?’³⁶ In the framework of this kind of indoctrination the same history textbook provides the student with abundant incriminating material about Western colonialism in various parts of the world.

Since the United States hardly has a colonialist past, the books concentrate, instead, on the attitude to Native Americans and African Americans in the past and at present.³⁷ But America has more evil to offer in world affairs:

America is known as an Imperialist country, which embarks on military intervention wherever it sees that its interests are in danger. It does not refrain from massacring people, burying alive the soldiers of the opposite side and using weapons of mass destruction (as it did in Iraq). It makes use of atomic bombs (the bombardment of Japan). It

IRAN'S GLOBAL WAR CURRICULUM

11

uses the weapon of human rights in order to suppress the justice seekers (as it does in its abuses against Islamic Iran). It creates the greatest dictatorships and the most violent and torturing security-oriented regimes, and defends them. Nor does it feel uncomfortable at all while human rights are violated (Iran at the time of the Shah after 1953). Its security system runs the largest smuggling networks, but it makes use of the pretext of drug smuggling in order to arrest those who oppose its policies in other countries (the case of Panama).

Such being the case, what would, and should, be your reaction to America?

(*Sociology (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 20)

As the leader of evil forces in the world today, America is given specific epithets, sometimes shared with other oppressors, such as 'World Devourers' [*Jehan Kharan*] and 'the Arrogant Ones' [*Mostakberan*], while the epithet 'the Great Satan' [*Shbeytan-e Bozorg*] is restricted to the United States alone. In an assignment in a language textbook the students are required to write down an interpretation for some words, including the name 'America'.³⁸ The answer, given in the teacher's guide is: 'America – the Great Satan'.³⁹ Hatred for America is further enhanced by the slogan often heard in public events in Iran – 'Death to America', as seen in the following photograph of a demonstration.⁴⁰



Iranian textbooks also include material intended to create feelings of antipathy towards ordinary American individuals and families, who are presented as a burden on world resources, compared to their Third World counterparts:

The birth of one baby in the United States of America puts 100 times more pressure on the Earth's resources, and on the natural environment, than the birth of a baby in Bangladesh. Because the living of one American individual is linked to the consumption of more food and clothing, the possession of a private car, more communication and transportation, and the generation of more refuse and pollution, while the lifestyle in Bangladesh is such that it does not require great quantities of mineral resources and energy.

One American family has an impact on the natural environment 40 times more than an Indian family, and 100 times more than a Kenyan family.

(Geography {Humanities & Islamic Sciences}, Grade 10 (2004), p. 133; Geography {General}, Grade 10 (2004), p. 130)

In the case of Israel, hate indoctrination relies on three different foundations. First, there are the Jews. Although not considered an official enemy in Iran, they are never portrayed in positive ways. On the contrary, most references to Jews in the Iranian textbooks relate to their conflict with the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia in Islam's early years. One encounters in this context phrases such as 'confronting the Jews' plots', 'the Jews' pretext-seeking, hostility and treachery were exposed', 'a profit-seeking ethnic group'.⁴¹ One can hardly expect school students of any age to easily differentiate between the Jews of Arabia in the seventh century CE and their modern co-religionists, especially when the latter are depicted as usurpers of Palestine.⁴²

The second foundation is the Jews' national movement in modern times – Zionism, which is portrayed as a world organization with a great deal of influence in the West, America in particular. In addition to the establishment of 'the Jews' greater homeland' in Palestine, Zionism is said to aspire to the Jews' dominance over the world, very much in line with traditional anti-Semitic propaganda.⁴³ Zionism is accused of coveting all the Arab lands and of controlling most of Western news media.⁴⁴ The Iranian textbooks studied for the purpose of the present research do not contain many references to Zionism and the students are referred to the Persian translation of the pamphlet 'Caution, Zionism!' by the Soviet propagandist Yuri Ivanov. Recently released news refers to the introduction of a new program in Iranian schools in which special teams of instructors will teach the students about Zionism. In other words, intensification of anti-Israeli hate indoctrination is to be expected.

The third and mostly utilized foundation of anti-Israeli hate indoctrination is Israel itself. Israel is demonized in various ways: it is 'a base of America and other aggressive powers with the aim of taking over Muslim lands',⁴⁵ it turned the people of Palestine into refugees,⁴⁶ it occupies Jerusalem and the Muslim holy place of the al-Aqsa Mosque⁴⁷ and it oppresses and kills Palestinians under its occupation, including children.⁴⁸ Iranian textbooks contain literary material such as stories and poems which present this demonizing picture of Israel quite vividly:

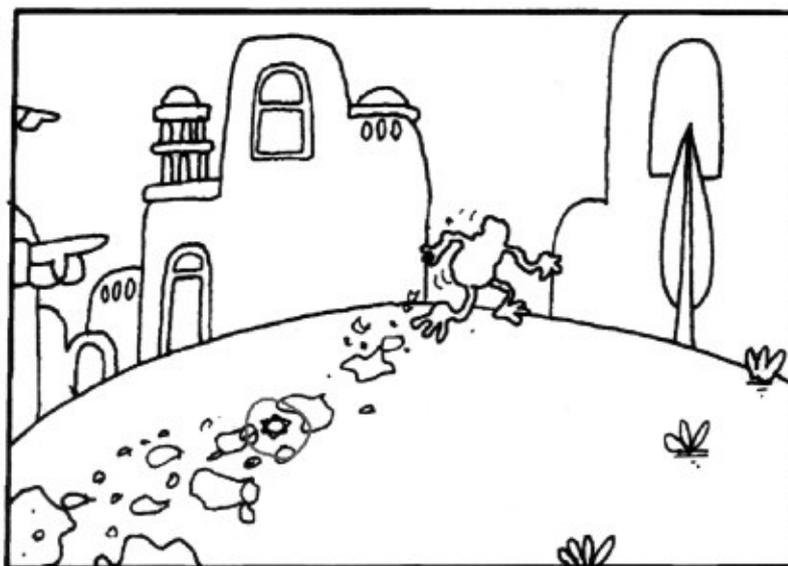
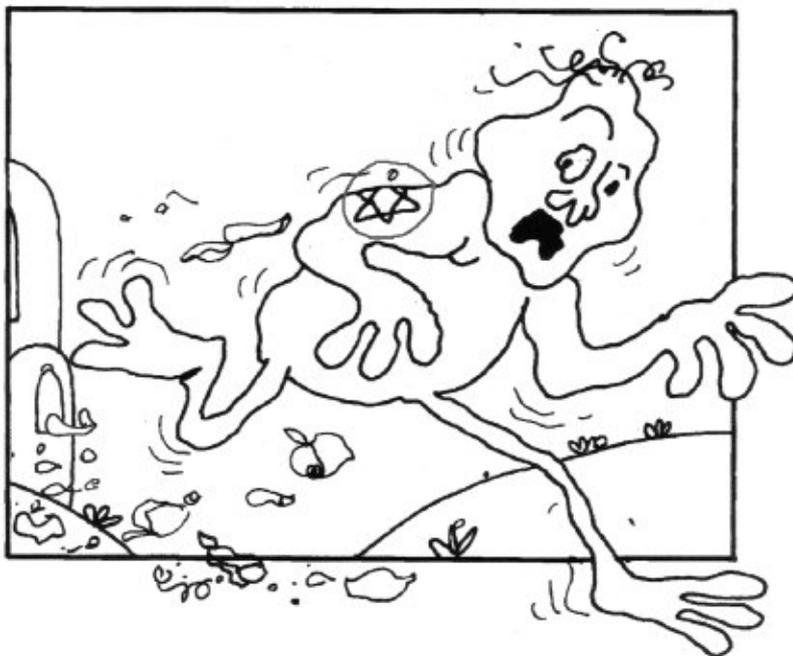
... Then the Israeli officer pounded [three-year-old] Muhammad's head with his rifle butt and his warm blood was sprinkled upon [his six-year-old brother] Khaled's hands.

(Persian: Let's Read, Grade 3 (2004), p. 113)

There is one instance where Israel, or the Jews, or both, are equated with garbage that should be removed. A picture story for third-grade students presents a clean and tidy town where the inhabitants suddenly discover a trail of garbage. They trace the contaminator who turns out to be a repugnant creature spreading garbage wherever he goes. They chase him away and clean up after him. In one of the pictures the Jewish-Israeli symbol of the Star of David is depicted as part of the garbage and in two other pictures this symbol is drawn on the creature's right arm.⁴⁹

Enemies of the Muslims

Besides their inherent evil, all three entities are portrayed as enemies of Islam and the Muslims. Western colonialism in Egypt and Algeria, for example, is described in more detail than elsewhere in Africa. But the West's most dangerous attack on Islam is cultural, as already discussed. The United States is positioned in Khomeini's statements as the Muslims' arch-enemy,⁵⁰ and he further coined the term 'American Islam' for the non-revolutionary type of Islam he resisted. Israel's hostility to the Muslims is obvious due to the mere fact that the Palestinians are mostly Muslim. But the Iranian school books add the theme of the occupied al-Aqsa Mosque, in line with the importance accorded to this issue by Khomeini who introduced the annual 'Jerusalem Day' commemorating the occupation of that city by Israel.⁵¹ In fact, the religious aspect of the conflict is emphasized in the Iranian school textbooks to such a degree that Israel is often mentioned by a specific epithet: 'the regime which occupies Jerusalem'.⁵²



IRAN'S GLOBAL WAR CURRICULUM

15

Enemies of the People of Iran

An obvious step in any effort of hate indoctrination would be to present the object as a direct enemy of the country the students belong to. Iran's modern history provides two such enemies: Czarist Russia and its Soviet successor on the one hand, and the British Empire during its presence in India and the Gulf on the other. Both are treated as such, but the emphasis in the books is on Britain, even though in certain periods Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union were in fact far more dangerous to Iran's territorial integrity. Britain is accused of having imposed the Pahlavi dynasty on Iran,⁵³ though at least some historians believe that this is not historically the case.

In contrast to Britain and Iran's northern neighbour, the United States has a record of friendly relations with pre-Revolutionary Iran. It is therefore presented as hostile to the Iranian nation on account of supporting the atrocities against the people attributed to the Shah's regime.⁵⁴ Later, when the Revolutionary regime took over – say the books – America came to the fore as Iran's primary enemy: it supported the armed opposition groups against the regime and, when they failed, incited Saddam Hussein to invade Iran.⁵⁵ When the Iraqis also failed, the United States saved them from military defeat by using its force against Iran, including a ferocious attack on an Iranian civil aircraft.⁵⁶

The same approach is adopted regarding Israel, which also had good relations with Iran during the Shah's reign. Israel is accused of having helped to establish the Shah's secret services⁵⁷ and of sending torturers to Iran to teach torture techniques.⁵⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini presented Israel as an enemy of the Iranian nation from the early 1960s, completely demonizing it:

Israel does not want the Koran to be in this state [Iran]. Israel does not want the Muslim clergymen to be in this state. Israel does not want the Islamic law to be in this state. Israel does not want scholars to be in this state. Israel pounded the Feyziyyeh [religious] College with the hand of its black agents. It pounds us. It pounds you, the nation. It wants to take possession of your economy. It wants to eliminate your commerce and agriculture. It wants to take possession of your wealth. Israel wants these things that are an obstacle to it, these things that are a barrier in its way, to be removed by the hand of its agents.

(*History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 76)⁵⁹

Fighting Israel is thus given legitimacy in the framework of the general war against oppressors, for which Iranian school students are being prepared.

Military Preparedness

'The best form of defence is attack' says the proverb. In the case of the Iranian war curriculum the opposite is the motto. With a view to enhancing a sense of self-defence, students are presented with an array of dangers from enemies threatening Revolutionary Iran.⁶⁰ But a closer look at the arguments accompanying this thesis reveals the logic for this situation: it was Iran which started the offensive against world oppression and that triggered a counter-offensive. The Islamic Revolution 'shook the palaces of the Arrogant Ones and for this reason it became ... the target of the superpowers' hostility and conspiracy'.⁶¹ 'The young Islamic Revolution', says another textbook, 'is never safe from ... the enemies ... because they see the life of the Revolution as their own death.'⁶² This is, then, a struggle of life or death between Revolutionary Iran and world oppression headed by the United States.

Against such a formidable enemy a country like Iran should thoroughly prepare itself and muster all forces available. Ayatollah Khomeini had the idea of a general mobilization and military training for millions of men and women capable of carrying arms. That force, the nucleus of the planned 'army of twenty millions' was called 'the Mobilization of the Oppressed' [*Basij-e Mostaz'afan*]⁶³ which now constitutes the regime's popular armed support within the Revolutionary Guards. Khomeini saw in this several-million-strong force the ultimate shield against any attack by the United States: 'If the agreeable melody of *Basij* thinking rings in a country, the coveting eye of the enemies and the "World Devourers" will stay away from it.'⁶⁴ According to one of the textbooks, the *Basij* is divided into sectorial units across the country such as that of physicians and engineers, trade unions, university and religious college students, city and town neighbourhoods, nomadic tribes, women, etc. One distinct unit is that of school students.⁶⁵ The *Basij* bases are usually situated in or near the mosques.⁶⁶

School students of various ages are approached in this regard as follows:

Boys and youth enrol in the Mosque *Basij*, and go through military training, so that they will be prepared for the defence of the Muslim country of Iran.

(*Social Studies*, Grade 4 (2004), p. 119)

In the light of Islam's directives and guidance, every Muslim youth should cast fear into the heart of the enemies of God and of His creatures with his own combat efficiency, and skilful shooting. He should always be ready to defend his country, his honour and his belief,

and employ all his ability and power in this direction. Are you also ready to acquire combat arts in the *Basij* [units]?

(Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 7 (2004), p. 60)



(Defense Readiness, Grade 8 (2004), p. 74)

As part of their military preparation, and alongside the actual training in the *Basij* units, a subject titled 'Defence Readiness' is taught to school students beginning in grade 8 (that is, 13–14 years old). The textbook for this subject teaches basic military drills such as camouflaging, movement in battle conditions, acquaintance with various kinds of weaponry and explosives, as well as principles of civil defence, first aid, etc. The introduction in the book for eighth-graders reads: "This year, by reading the lessons of Defence Readiness, you will become acquainted with the necessary preliminaries for the acquisition of the techniques of defence and combat. In the coming years in high school, you will learn... more comprehensive subjects in this regard."⁶⁷

In addition, the textbooks of this subject include warnings of the imminent danger of attack by the enemies⁶⁸ and also verses from the Koran which urge Muslims to be always on their guard and prepared for war.⁶⁹

Within this context, the traditional Islamic ideal of jihad is utilized too. Although jihad is also referred to by Khomeini and in the Iranian textbooks

as a spiritual effort,⁷⁰ or even used as a title for constructive projects in Iran,⁷¹ a great deal is said in the books about jihad as a military effort. In this context, jihad is said to have been exercised by the early Muslims in order to preserve Islam and it is now 'our turn to fight the Jihad and make a sacrifice in the cause of religion. How are we to cope with the commitment to fulfil this great responsibility?'⁷²

And again:

Jihad and defence is an indispensable religious duty in Muslim society, and all should defend their country, dignity and belief with all [their] might. Therefore, we should always be ready to face the enemies.

(Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 7 (2004), p. 58)

Self-Sacrifice (Martyrdom)

Jihad and martyrdom go hand-in-hand in Islam, as any jihad fighter is a potential martyr. Hence, the need arises not just to educate the school student to participate in jihad but also to prepare him for martyrdom, or, more correctly, to make him aspire to martyrdom as an integral part of his military training. This is done both directly and indirectly. The direct approach involves presenting to the students the value of martyrdom, supported by the relevant Koranic verses. A passage in one of the textbooks reads:

Exalted God orders the Believers in many verses in the Holy Koran to fight the Jihad in the cause of God and kill the oppressors. He gives the glad tidings of forgiveness and eternal Paradise to anyone who becomes a martyr in the cause of God. He considers martyrdom a great victory.

(Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, Grade 8 (2004), p. 72)

Developing this theme, the textbooks provide the students with sayings by martyr Shiite Imams, such as Hussein and Sajjad, describing death as a bridge leading from the miseries and unpleasantness of this world to the eternal life and happiness in the next. A guiding question is then inserted in the text: 'In the light of the words of Imam Hussein and Imam Sajjad about death, who is the good-doing Believer who would fear death and martyrdom and accept disgrace and humiliation?'⁷³

Thus, welcoming death in God's cause, or martyrdom-seeking [*Sbabadat-talabi*], in battle becomes a value: 'For those who believe in the Eternal World, life in this world has no value in itself. Its [real] value is dependent on the

eternal life. Therefore, if a day arrives, on which the preservation of this life is nothing but disgrace, they return this Divine trust with utmost enthusiasm, and perform their duty before God.⁷⁴

The teachers on their part are encouraged to nurture in the students' souls the spirit of martyrdom-seeking through a variety of educational means. The following is a text taken from a teacher's guide which refers to a certain means for that purpose (the specific means could not be identified, as the student's textbook was not available to us):

Suggestion

This suggestion is intended to show the influence which the Divine insight regarding Paradise has on the creation of a martyrdom-seeking spirit and spiritual courage. It would be good for the teacher to stress the [necessity of] complying with this suggestion, encourage the students to [do] so, and to set up in class the assembled collection [of martyrs' wills, etc.].

(Religion and Life – Teacher's Guide, Grade 10, Part 1 (2004), p. 162)

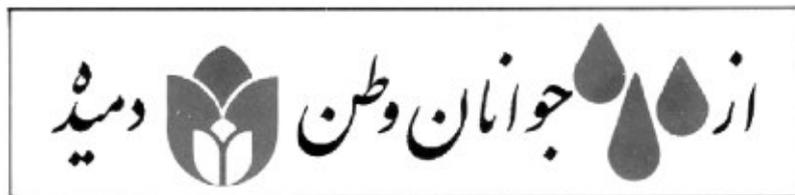
As for the indirect approach encouraging self-sacrifice, the Iranian curriculum deals with the issue of martyrdom to such an extent that the student may be said to be wrapped in an atmosphere of martyrdom glorification. 'Being immersed in the culture of martyrdom and martyrs'⁷⁵ seems to be the motto here. Indeed, the Shiite Imams who were mostly martyred by the Sunni caliphs in medieval times, as well as hundreds of thousands of martyrs in Iran's modern history – in the context of both the Revolution and the Iraq–Iran War – all provide the educational system with plenty of material to deal with in this framework, and so it does.

The culture of martyrdom and martyrs finds its expression in school through presenting the cases of selected martyrs, such as the Shiite Imams, anti-Shah activists, martyrs of the Islamic Revolution, leaders of the Islamic Revolution who were martyred by Iranian opposition groups and martyrs of the war with Iraq – chief among them being the school student Hossein Fahmideh who blew himself up under an Iraqi tank.⁷⁶ A related theme is the glorification of martyrdom and of martyrs. Poems equating the martyr with the sun, with a flower, a lamp, etc.,⁷⁷ or telling of the martyrs' voyage to God's presence⁷⁸ are found in the books, in addition to stories emphasizing their magnificence.⁷⁹ Wills of martyrs are reproduced in the books,⁸⁰ read in class and posted on the walls.⁸¹ Families of martyrs are visited or invited to school, and the students are given homework and assignments with a view to instilling this value in their minds. For example, the students are requested to practice writing letters to official departments. One of the letters is a request

to name a town square after one of the martyrs.⁸² Another writing exercise is a letter of condolence to a relative of a martyred soldier.⁸³ In a third exercise the students are required to complete a story of which the beginning is: 'He was dying, but not of the mine's explosion, or even of the coup-de-grace fire of the Iraqis, but, rather, of gladness...'⁸⁴ Students are also given the assignment to write down the names of martyrs of their own localities.⁸⁵ Exercises in mathematics mention schools named after martyrs.⁸⁶

A special item in the school books in this context is the martyrs' blood: 'It is you [that is, the teachers], who can rise to guard the blood of the martyrs', says an introductory note in one of the textbooks.⁸⁷ The city of Qom, where Khomeini's oppositionist activity began in the early 1960s, is called 'City of Blood and Uprising' [*Shahr-e Kbn va Qiyam*].⁸⁸ The black chadors of the martyr women massacred at the Zhaleh Square in Tehran on Black Friday during the Revolution were painted red by their blood.⁸⁹ An illustration of red drops of blood decorates a poem about martyrs in the war with Iraq.⁹⁰ A recurring motif in the books is the red tulip which symbolizes the martyrs' blood and is found on the Iranian flag too: 'I looked again at the [Iranian] flag and asked: "Dear father, what is the symbol in the middle of the flag?" My father said: "It is the word 'Allah' [God] ... in the form of a tulip. The tulip is the symbol of the martyrs' blood".'⁹¹

Red tulips appear with this meaning in poems⁹² and also in art works, such as the following one:



From the [drops of blood of] the homeland youth [tulips] sprout.
(*Art Instruction*, Grade 6 (2004), p. 68)

The result of this kind of education – as proudly presented in one textbook – is the following:

During the eight years of Holy Defence [that is, the war with Iraq] more than 500,000 school students were sent to the fronts. 36,000 martyrs, thousands of missing-in-action, invalids, and liberated [prisoners-of-war] of this sacrificing section were offered to the Islamic Revolution.

(*Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 11)⁹³

Conclusion

We have seen how the Iranian school curriculum instils in the souls of school students, especially in the higher grades, feelings of hatred towards the West in general and towards the United States in particular, and how it prepares the students for participation and self-sacrifice in a global war against these perceived enemies as a religious mission imposed on Revolutionary Iran by God Almighty in order to redeem the oppressed and bring about Islam's victory in this world. The books also emphasize the war's eschatological character as a life-and-death struggle between the forces of Good and Evil which is to culminate in the reappearance of the Shiite 'Messiah' (that is, the Hidden Imam). Such a curriculum presents a troubling picture of Iran's belligerent intentions which should sound the alarm to anyone who is committed to peace and stability in the world, first and foremost the international bodies, and also the countries and nations which might serve as targets for Iran's aspirations.

But this is not all. The core of this article started with a notion describing the Islamic Revolution as the primary cause of Iran's war curriculum and ended in a quoted sentence presenting it as a modern Moloch devouring its own children. Indeed, if one looks carefully into the curriculum of Revolutionary Iran one is struck by the systematic build-up of an educational environment leading the school students towards a violent future of which the result is bound to be disastrous for Iran itself in the first place. By sacrificing a very large number of school students and other young people in a planned world war, Iran is bound to lose its most important asset for future progress. It is one thing to encourage self-sacrifice in an ongoing struggle for existence, as was the case with the Iraq–Iran War. But preparing a whole generation for a global war of which the result might be – in Khomeini's own vision – collective martyrdom, is totally different and implies a dangerous inclination to self-destruction, not to mention the grave implications on the affected parts of the world. Even a professed religious country whose primary educational goal is 'pleasing God' should have some responsibility for its people's welfare in this world, and collective martyrdom is certainly not compatible with that. In short, this kind of curriculum, of which the logical foundations are questionable, poses a grave danger to the future of Iran itself.

What can one do about that? Not much, unfortunately. The Revolutionary regime in Iran appears to be confident enough to go on with such a curriculum which is further enhanced by other Iranian media of indoctrination such as the teachers in class, the state-controlled media – including politicised children's programs on television, religious sermons in local mosques all over the country, indoctrination practiced within the Basiji units which encompass thousands of children, etc. The change should come from the regime or

through a massive popular movement against it, but none of these appears very likely in the foreseeable future. Other than that, the only thing which can be done is a world-wide outcry against this kind of indoctrination. But even that might have very little, if any, effect. It is high time for the world to realize that it is facing an entity which considers itself God's own instrument on earth and acts accordingly, away from what others would regard as ordinary logic. This is the real danger signalled by the curriculum presented here.

Dr Arnon Groiss is the Director of Research with the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP). During the last seven years Dr Groiss authored eight reports issued by CMIP on school textbooks of Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority. The latest research on Iranian school books was co-authored with Mr Nethanel (Navid) Toobian.

NOTES

- 1 In all CMIP reports the same method of research is applied: any reference to the issues studied, whether text, photograph, map or illustration, is inserted in the report as is, in a specific chapter according to its subject, with minimum analysis – in order to let the material speak for itself. Clarifying comments are inserted in brackets within the quoted text or as footnotes. CMIP analysis is given in the conclusion of each report. CMIP's established method of research follows UNESCO's criteria for the content of textbooks (See: *A Handbook for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials as Aids to International Understanding* Paris: UNESCO, 1949). Eight criteria were adopted from the UNESCO report:
 - 1 Are all data given accurate and complete?
 - 2 Are illustrations, maps and graphs up-to-date and accurate?
 - 3 Are the achievements of others recognized?
 - 4 Are equal standards applied?
 - 5 Are political disputes presented objectively and honestly?
 - 6 Is wording likely to create prejudice, misapprehension and conflict avoided?
 - 7 Are ideals of freedom, dignity and fraternity being advocated?
 - 8 Is the need for international cooperation, for the formation of common human ideals and the advancement of the cause of peace, as well as for the enforcement of the law, emphasized?

Two additional criteria were added by CMIP:

- 1 Is the 'other' recognized and accepted as equal, or presented in a stereotyped and prejudiced way?
 - 2 Do the school textbooks foster peace and reconciliation?
- 2 Introduction, *Religious Instruction*, Grade 5 (2004), page not numbered.
 - 3 It might be true that a certain percentage of the school students, especially those who come from educated families of the higher classes in the large urban centers, are not totally affected by such indoctrination – as proven by the relatively large number of former school students who now form the core of the opposition to the regime in Iran. But they are still a minority compared to the rank and file of the student body who are influenced, as is the case with thousands of volunteers in the 'suicide bombing corps' against Israel.
 - 4 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 278–9.

IRAN'S GLOBAL WAR CURRICULUM

23

- 5 *Economics (Humanities)*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 100.
- 6 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 14–15.
- 7 *Religion and Life – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 10, Part 1 (2004), pp. 161–2.
- 8 *Sociology (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 25, and see lessons dedicated to criticism of Western culture in: *Religion and Life – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 10, Part 1 (2004), pp. 82, 161–2.
- 9 *Religion and Life – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 10, Part 2 (2004), p. 35.
- 10 *Acquaintance with Important Social Laws – Teacher's Guide*, High School Grades (2003), pp. 180–81.
- 11 *Lessons from the Koran*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 6.
- 12 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 37.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 14 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 292–3.
- 15 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 30.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
- 17 *History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 81.
- 18 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 28.
- 19 *History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 93.
- 20 See, for example, in *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 7 (2004), p. 65; *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 28.
- 21 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 8 (2004), pp. 99–100; *Defense Readiness 1 – Teacher's Guide*, High School Grades (2002), p. 3.
- 22 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 28.
- 23 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 96.
- 24 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 29 (though Khomeini does not explicitly refer to the Shiites here, one should bear in mind that relatively many references to the Sunnite caliphs' oppressiveness in history exist in the textbooks, which excludes the Sunnites from the title of the 'permanent oppressed').
- 25 And see the piece about the purification of Iranian universities in: *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 285.
- 26 See the references to this affair in: *History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 93; *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 282 and further.
- 27 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 7 (2004), p. 29.
- 28 A term referring today to the United States mostly and see below.
- 29 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 96 and see also p. 97.
- 30 The twelfth successor of Prophet Mohammad according to Shiite belief, Imam Mohammad al-Muntazar, who was born in 873 CE and disappeared at a young age to lead the Shiites from his hiding place throughout the centuries until his final return and triumph in the End of Days.
- 31 An epithet used by Ayatollah Khomeini to denote the United States and the former Soviet Union.
- 32 *History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 37.
- 33 See the discussion above on the attitude to Western culture. It is Western culture's hegemony which is fought, not its mere existence, although it has certain negative aspects in Iranian-Muslim eyes.
- 34 See the relevant chapter in the CMIP report.
- 35 *Defense Readiness 1 – Teacher's Guide*, High School Grades (2002), p. 3, and see below the discussion of the term 'Arrogance'.
- 36 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 70.
- 37 *Geography – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 7 (1999), p. 84; *Persian Literature*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 65, followed by excerpts from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, pp. 65–71.
- 38 *Persian*, Grade 7 (2004), p. 31.
- 39 *Persian – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 7 (2003), p. 76.
- 40 *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 7.
- 41 *History of Iran and the World*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 109.
- 42 *Geography (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 17.
- 43 *Social Studies (Humanities)*, Grade 12 (2004), pp. 41–2.

- 44 *History of Iranian and World Literature*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 206–207.
- 45 *Geography (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 25.
- 46 *History of Iranian and World Literature*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 195–6.
- 47 *Geography – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 7 (1999), p. 40.
- 48 *History of Iranian and World Literature*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 204, 207; *Koran Studies*, Grade 3 (2004), p. 73.
- 49 *Gifts of Heaven – Work Book*, Grade 3 (2004), pp. 13–15.
- 50 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004) pp. 28, 29.
- 51 See the references to this issue in: *Geography – Teacher's Guide*, Grade 7 (1999), p. 40; *Social Studies*, Grade 3 (2004), pp. 56–7; *Mathematics*, Grade 3 (2004), p. 40.
- 52 *Social Studies (Civics)*, Grade 9 (2004), p. 59; *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 282; *Geography (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 25.
- 53 *Persian*, Grade 8 (2004), pp. 6–7.
- 54 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 31.
- 55 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 286.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 296.
- 57 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 251.
- 58 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 32.
- 59 The massacre of Feyziyeh in 1963 by the Shah's security forces is referred to here. Khomeini tried to attribute that to Israel, though by proxy – the Shah's agents.
- 60 See, for example, the introduction in: *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), page not numbered.
- 61 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 280 and see also p. 286; *History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 93; *Defense Readiness*, Grade 8 (2004), page not numbered (Introduction); *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 3.
- 62 *Defense Readiness 1 – Teacher's Guide*, High School Grades (2002), p. 2.
- 63 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 7 (2004), pp. 60–61.
- 64 *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 6.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 66 *Social Studies (Civics)*, Grade 6 (2004), p. 66.
- 67 *Defense Readiness*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 3.
- 68 *Defense Readiness 1 – Teacher's Guide*, High School Grades (2002), p. 3.
- 69 *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), pp. 3–4.
- 70 *Religion and Life*, Grade 9 (2004), pp. 59–60.
- 71 *Social Studies*, Grade 3 (2004), p. 48.
- 72 *Persian*, Grade 5 (2004), p. 134.
- 73 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 6 (2004), pp. 20–22.
- 74 *Islamic Viewpoint*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 47.
- 75 *Defense Readiness 1, 2 – Teacher's Guide*, High School Grades (2002), p. 2.
- 76 There are plenty of references to these cases of martyrdom and the following are just representative examples: for the Imams – *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 95; for the anti-Shah activists – *History*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 63; for the Revolution martyrs – *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 266; for leaders assassinated by the opposition – *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), pp. 290–91; for martyrs of the war – *History*, Grade 8 (2004) p. 95; for Hossein Fahmideh – *Persian*, Grade 4 (2004), pp. 17–18.
- 77 *Persian*, Grade 7 (2004), p. 21.
- 78 *Religious Instruction*, Grade 5 (2004), p. 39.
- 79 See, for example, *Persian*, Grade 5 (2004), pp. 95–7.
- 80 *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 13; *Defense Readiness*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 12.
- 81 *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 6 (2004), p. 22.
- 82 *Crafts and Techniques Instruction*, Grade 8 (2004), p. 96.
- 83 *Persian Language*, Grade 9 (2004), p. 113.
- 84 *Persian Language*, Grade 10 (2004), p. 64.
- 85 *Persian*, Grade 6 (2004), p. 26.

IRAN'S GLOBAL WAR CURRICULUM

25

- 86 *Mathematics*, Grade 2 (2004), p. 156.
- 87 Introduction, *Religious Instruction*, Grade 5 (2004), pages not numbered.
- 88 *Social Studies*, Grade 3 (2004), p. 22.
- 89 *History of Iran and the World (Humanities)*, Grade 11 (2004), p. 266.
- 90 *Religious Instruction*, Grade 5 (2004), p. 39.
- 91 *Persian: Let's Read*, Grade 3 (2004), p. 98.
- 92 *Persian*, Grade 5 (2004), p. 42; *Persian: Let's Read*, Grade 3 (2004), p. 111; *Persian*, Grade 5 (2004), pp. 116–17.
- 93 According to testimonies from the battlefield, the children were given plastic keys symbolizing the keys to Paradise and sent to charge enemy positions through minefields in order to clear the way for regular forces.