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Palestinian Education and the Debate Over Textbooks

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Summary

Palestinian education reform is often seen as a key element in internal Palestinian reform and the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Many analysts frequently have expressed concern that the Palestinian Authority (PA) education curriculum incites a younger generation of Palestinians to reject Israel, Judaism, and the achievement of peace in the region. Furthermore, some policymakers maintain that Palestinian education reform is important not only for Israeli-Palestinian peace, but also for broader U.S. interests in the region. From their perspective, a diverse, balanced curriculum may serve as a benchmark toward greater peace, democratization, and the development of a vibrant civil society in the Palestinian Territories.

Concerns over PA textbooks often cite examples of anti-Jewish education materials and a lack of reference to or positive acknowledgment of the state of Israel. Overall, some analysts allege that PA textbooks spread a culture of violence, which prizes martyrdom and *jihad* (or struggle) over peace and recognition of Israel. Others contend that, although far from perfect, PA textbooks represent a step forward in the evolution and design of a school curriculum for Palestinians that is essential to the development of a national identity. These commentators assert that PA textbooks do not incite Palestinians toward anti-Jewish violence or constitute a “war curriculum.”

The sweeping victory of Hamas in the Palestinian parliament in January 2006 raises new concerns over whether the Palestinian curriculum will be re-formulated to present a more Islamist tone. Hamas, by virtue of winning 74 out of 132 parliamentary seats, may assume the ministries of education, culture, and religious affairs. Many experts see this development as natural given Hamas’ track record of social services, education, and Islamic focus.

Palestinian curriculum reform is an important element in the broader U.S. policy of promoting Middle East democracy and governance reforms. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other U.S. government programs, such as the State Department’s Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), help to fund education reform in the West Bank and Gaza. Also, U.S. contributions to the U.N.’s Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) help develop curriculum design programs for Palestinians. It remains unclear what lasting impact curriculum reform will have in the Palestinian Territories and peace between Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinian curriculum development, however, is relevant to congressional concerns about the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, levels of U.S. assistance to the Palestinians, U.N. reforms in the Palestinian Territories, and the broader U.S. promotion of democracy in the Middle East. This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Palestinian Education and the Debate Over Textbooks

Overview

The January 2005 election of Mahmoud Abbas as President of the Palestine Authority (PA), the election of Hamas into the Palestinian parliament in January 2006, and Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip have led many to contend that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has entered a new phase.¹ These developments, however, lead to different conclusions about this "new phase." The United States has pledged financial and technical assistance in support of the creation of a Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel and in support of viable, democratic institutions in the West Bank and Gaza. Though a Hamas-led PA may cause the U.S. to curtail its assistance to the PA, some believe that humanitarian aid (including education) to the Palestinians may continue.

Experts and policymakers often cite education as a key component in stabilizing post-conflict settings, noting that the establishment of a strong, civic-minded curriculum is often linked to tolerance, good citizenship, and mutual understanding. The 1993 Declaration of Principles, which laid the foundation for the 1995 Oslo II Agreement, specifically provides that:

Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) shall seek to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and shall accordingly abstain from incitement, including hostile propaganda against each other and shall take necessary measures to prevent such incitement by any organizations, groups or individuals within their jurisdiction.²

Opinion differs on the extent to which the Palestinian curriculum meets this goal. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated that "Palestinian education and propaganda are more dangerous to Israel than Palestinian weapons."³ Many analysts and policymakers contend that major reforms in education must accompany progress on the economic and political front, asserting that education is a key element in inciting Palestinian violence toward Israelis. Yet, others claim that the Palestinian

¹ For more on the challenges facing the Palestinian leadership, see CRS Report RL33269, *The Palestinian Elections*, by Aaron D. Pina.

² Oslo II Agreement, Article XII. Signed on September 28, 1995, Oslo II (or Taba) is the primary Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Agreement deals with security arrangements, elections, civil affairs, legal matters, economic relations, Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, and the release of prisoners.

³ "PM: PA Must End Anti-Israeli Propaganda Immediately," *Ha'aretz Daily Service*, November 18, 2004.

curriculum is moving away from anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish incitement. These observers maintain that PA textbooks conform to the highest international education standards and present well-functioning, quality material that promotes democratic values.

Some also emphasize the role international agencies play in Palestinian education. The PA issues textbooks only in the West Bank and Gaza. Since 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has provided relief and social services to Palestinian refugees.⁴ Serving Palestinians in the refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza, UNRWA also delivers refugee services in various “host” countries (Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria), where sizeable Palestinian refugee communities still temporarily reside. Generally, Palestinian students attend classes within UNRWA schools, but are issued textbooks by the host nation, due to the requirement that students take host-nation exams to continue their education and earn diplomas, which are crucial for finding employment. Critics charge that UNRWA indirectly supports an inciteful curriculum because host country textbooks are typically hostile toward Israel. Others highlight the fact that UNRWA’s mandate, which covers refugee and social services, places the organization in a difficult position, as its mandate does not extend to issues like textbook content or curriculum development.

This report reviews the nature and evolution of the Palestinian curriculum and the challenges that an unresolved Palestinian national identity poses in constructing a peaceful and tolerant education system. The analysis utilizes selected studies of Palestinian textbooks and international standards used to assess national education curricula. It briefly addresses the implications Palestinian education presents for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the broader U.S. policy of promoting reform in the Middle East.

Recent Developments

On January 25, 2006, Palestinians voted in a new parliament, and the Central Elections Commission reported that more than 77% (980,000 out of roughly 1.2 million eligible voters) took part in the election poll. The election was overseen by 17,268 domestic observers, complimented by 900 credentialed international monitors. Palestinians voted in 1,008 polling stations, and 132 seats were contested by 728 candidates (414 in districts and 314 on party slates).

In the short time period following the recent Palestinian legislative elections, Administration officials and some Members of Congress have warned the Hamas leadership that the United States will no longer provide assistance to a Hamas-led PA

⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 302 (IV) of December 8, 1949, recognized the need to address the humanitarian needs of Palestinian refugees; UNGAR 302, paragraph 7 authorized the creation of UNRWA to facilitate temporarily the distribution of foodstuffs, shelter, clothing, education, and medical treatment. See CRS Report RS21668, *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)*, by Rhoda Margesson.

government unless Hamas changes its charter to recognize Israel's right to exist and renounces the use of violence. On January 30, 2006, representatives of the Quartet (United States, European Union, United Nations, and Russia) conditioned future foreign assistance to the PA on the future government's commitment to nonviolence, recognition of the state of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements. If Hamas should resist such changes, Congress and the Administration could potentially alter or halt U.S. assistance to the Palestinians.

On November 8, 2005, the U.S. State Department released its annual Report on Religious Freedom. The report noted that although the PA has taken several steps to eliminate incitement in textbooks and teaching, there are reports that textbooks still de-legitimize Israel's historical connection to the land and that many teachers still use inflammatory anti-Israel rhetoric in the classroom.

On September 1, 2005, the Palestine Curriculum Development Center (PCDC) completed its overhaul of the Palestinian curriculum, which started in 2000. New textbooks will be revised every year for three years beginning in 2006.

Background: Palestinian Education and National Identity⁵

The Israeli occupation and continuing Palestinian violence against Israeli soldiers and civilians affect all spheres of Palestinian daily life, including education. Palestinian control over their education system is a relatively new occurrence; for over fifty years Palestinian education was externally overseen by multiple actors. After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Jordan annexed the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip fell under Egyptian administration. Accordingly, the West Bank followed a Jordanian education curriculum, and Gazan schools adhered to the Egyptian education system, leaving Palestinians with little control over education materials. From the 1967 Arab-Israeli War until the 1993 Declaration of Principles (the formal element of the Oslo Accord), Israel retained overall control over Palestinian education in the Occupied Territories, but maintained the Egyptian and Jordanian curriculum with minimal changes.

In 1986, the Lutheran-Anglican private schools of Ramallah initiated the development of the first Palestinian school curriculum, which formed the basis of future Palestinian national education programs. The all-Palestinian curriculum fulfilled Palestinian educators' desires to design, supervise, and implement a national curriculum aimed at representing Palestinian society. Beginning in 1987, the curriculum saw widespread use during the first *intifada* (or uprising) and provided a template for further Palestinian developments.⁶ In 1990, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) requested the assistance of the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in developing education strategies to formulate a national curriculum. The PA, established in 1993, recognizing the need for international assistance in education development, partnered with UNESCO to sponsor a workshop, which led to the establishment of the Palestinian Curriculum

⁵ For additional information on Palestinian identity, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, 1997.

⁶ Lisa Taraki, *The Palestinian Society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, 1990.

Development Center (PCDC) in 1994. The PCDC aimed to instill a Palestinian civic identity alongside respect for Palestinian institutions of authority. In 1995, the Palestinian Ministry of Education adopted the curriculum developed by the PCDC and UNESCO.⁷

The director of the PCDC, Ibrahim Abu Lughod, placed an emphasis on several aspects of Palestinian education reform, including changes in education practices, standards, and textbooks. Many experts note that the Palestinian curriculum is influenced by “progressive” educators who favor new subjects, like civics education, human rights, and democracy.⁸ They see this as a welcome departure from “traditional” Arab pedagogy, which stresses rote memorization and authoritarianism. For others, the PA curriculum still perpetuates anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli sentiment in its textbooks. Overall, as one observer notes, the PCDC’s attempt to reform traditional Palestinian education stressed national themes of Palestinian identity and respect for Palestinian authority and institutions, he states that:

In the 1990s, even before the construction of the Palestine National Authority (PNA), an alternative education vision, concentrating on ideal citizenship and democratic practices, arose within the Palestinian educational community. Deeply critical of existing educational practices, advocates of the new vision have provoked surprisingly little opposition and increasingly dominate public discussions of education.⁹

The PCDC’s educational focus on citizenship, authority, and alternative education practices reflects a common theme for many post-conflict areas. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, and South Africa often are cited as examples of post-conflict settings where education curriculum played a positive role in the construction of a national identity and the development of stable, democratic institutions.¹⁰

Some also note that, ultimately, Palestinian education reform is connected to internal political and educational shifts within Palestinian society and that Palestinian national identity, and the perception of that identity, undergird much of the textbook debate. Many observers contend that textbooks issued by governments reflect the official values policymakers wish to impart to its citizens and therefore maintain that the Palestinian curriculum espouses a national culture of incitement. Others claim that a “text book war” is being waged against the PA in an effort to undermine attempts at unifying a Palestinian national identity. The 1993 Oslo Accord called for

⁷ For a more detailed description of Palestinian and Israeli education see Falk Pingel, *Contested Past, Disputed Present: Curriculum and Teaching in Israeli and Palestinian Schools*, 2003.

⁸ Progressive education specialists include Ibrahim Abu Lughod, a Palestinian political scientist who taught in the United States; Nabil Sha’th, a PA negotiator and sponsor of general education reform; Ali Jarbawi, a professor at Bir Zeit University (West Bank) who focuses on human rights and democracy; and Maher Hashweh, an education specialist at Bir Zeit University who developed critical thinking models for classroom instruction.

⁹ Nathan J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords*, 2003.

¹⁰ UNESCO, *United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s Report on Education in Emergency, Crisis and Reconstruction*, 2004.

the creation of a Palestinian Ministry of Education. Since that time, Palestinian educators, and policymakers have grappled with the need to re-vamp Palestinian education in the face of increased PA autonomy and control over Palestinian educational affairs.

A 1994 PCDC questionnaire illustrates some of the challenges national identity poses when attempting promote reforms in Palestinian education. Survey questions asked Palestinian social science and history teachers about the type of Palestine to be taught, “historic” Palestine or the Palestine likely to emerge from negotiations? Other survey questions asked how Palestinians should view Israel — as an ordinary neighbor, or as a state that has arisen to the partial detriment of Palestinians?¹¹ Some observers indicate that such responses reveal the political, contested nature of education, and that the Palestinian education debate could bear real consequences for the peace process.

Since 1999, the Palestinian Ministry of Education has released two complete sets of textbooks per year. Although an entire national curriculum (grades 1-12) will not be available until 2006, most analysts agree that there is a large enough body of textbooks to analyze. **Table 1** (below) outlines the phased release of PA textbooks. The implementation of textbooks is phased over seven years because the PCDC takes one to two years to study the impact new textbooks have upon students and teachers.¹²

**Table 1. Palestine Ministry of Education
Textbook Release Dates**

Phase	Grade	Target completion date
1	Subjects syllabi (guidelines)	Completed - 1999
2	Textbooks for grades 1 and 6	Completed - 2000
3	Textbooks for grades 2 and 7	Completed - 2001
4	Textbooks for grades 3 and 8	Completed - 2002
5	Textbooks for grades 4 and 9	Completed - 2003
6	Textbooks for grades 5 and 10	Completed - 2004
7	Textbooks for grade 11	Completed - 2005
8	Textbooks for grade 12	Completed - 2006

Source: Palestine Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2004.

¹¹ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Palestinian Education: Historic, Current, and Future Needs*, 1997.

¹² Taken from the PCDC's, *Highlights of the Palestinian Experience in Curriculum Development*, May 2002. Online at [http://www.pcdc.edu.ps/clarificatiion_II.htm].

Allegations and Countervailing Themes

Allegations concerning the Palestinian curriculum tend to be on one end of the spectrum or the other. Statements that the PA curriculum incites students against Israel and counter-claims which argue that the Palestinian curriculum is reform-minded, are presented here in light of variable, comprehensive reports. Generally, all reports rely on UNESCO's *Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*, which offers a base-line of intentions and goals to guide countries when crafting a national education system. According to its charter, UNESCO, established in 1945, contributes to peace and security by collaborating with member-states in science, education, and the culture of ideas.¹³ Although UNESCO is widely recognized as a leading source of Middle East curriculum and textbook development, some claim that the organization lacks proper mechanisms to ensure adherence to its standards. Others state that UNESCO has instituted a wide array of internal reforms, which makes the agency a "success story" for wider U.N. reforms.¹⁴

This section surveys analyses of the Palestinian curriculum by three organizations and one noted scholar. The sources were chosen for their experience in international education and high degree of focus on Palestinian textbooks. Their analytical reports highlight the prominent allegations, countervailing themes, and challenges that exist within Palestinian education.

- *The Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP)*. Established in 1998, CMIP examines the content of school textbooks used in the Middle East to determine whether children are being taught to accept and recognize the right of the "other" (Israelis, Jews, Zionists) to exist. Since 2001, the CMIP has overseen several studies of Palestinian textbooks. Some suggest that the CMIP's analysis is overly critical and anti-Palestinian. Others assert that the CMIP's conclusions are an accurate reflection of PA textbooks.¹⁵
- *Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)*. IPCRI, founded in Jerusalem in 1988, is the only joint Palestinian-Israeli public policy organization devoted to developing practical solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Beginning in 2003, IPCRI drafted a series of policy papers on Palestinian textbook reform, partially supported by the USAID's Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC). Many believe that IPCRI takes a balanced, accurate approach in analyzing PA textbooks, although

¹³ UNESCO's education budget for 2004-2005 is \$300.42 million. Members annually pay the equivalent of 22% of UNESCO's budget. In 2004, the Administration pledged \$71.49 million in support of UNESCO.

¹⁴ Nile Gardiner and Jennifer A. Marshall, "Advancing U.S. Interests at UNESCO," *Heritage Foundation Executive Memorandum #919*, April 5, 2004. Available online at [<http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/em919.cfm>].

¹⁵ CMIP reports are available online at [<http://www.edume.org/>].

some contend that IPCRI does not go far enough in its conclusions in making policy recommendations.¹⁶

- *The Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research Project on Israeli-Palestinian Textbooks.* This Institute, established in 1975, organizes international conferences, offers advice to textbook publishers and authors, and writes opinions on various aspects of international textbook research. Beginning in 2001, the Institute began analyzing PA and Israeli textbooks. Although many experts agree that the Institute's analysis of PA textbooks are objective, some contend that the Institute is biased, due to its close affiliation with UNESCO.¹⁷
- *Nathan J. Brown.* A professor at the George Washington University, Nathan J. Brown has authored several articles on Palestinian education, as well as a book that covers the subject.¹⁸ Professor Brown served as an advisor to the PA constitutional assembly and the U.N. Development Program's (UNDP) Arab governance program. Many commentators support Professor Brown's analysis of PA textbooks, stating that his views are well informed and realistic. Others believe that Dr. Brown's analysis is overly sympathetic to Palestinians.

Allegation 1: Negative Depictions of the "Other" in PA Textbooks

Analysis. The Palestinian national curriculum frequently is criticized for what is termed a denial of the "other" (Israel/Israelis, Zionism/Zionist, and Jews/Judaism). Some observers note that the new textbooks "continue to make multiple references to Judaism, Israel, Israelis, Jews, Zionism, and Zionists."¹⁹ Others report a "lack of adequate information about the "other" [in Palestinian textbooks] that is not recognized and is stereotyped."²⁰ Overall, most observers agree that Palestinian textbooks continue to omit crucial elements in their description of Israel, Judaism, and Zionism. Yet, many also claim that, for the most part, when the "other" is presented, a neutral tone is taken.

¹⁶ IPCRI reports available online at [<http://www.ipcri.org>].

¹⁷ Project details available online at [<http://www.gei.de/english/projekte/israel.shtml>].

¹⁸ Nathan J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords*, 2003.

¹⁹ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *Report II: Analysis and Evaluation of the New Palestinian Curriculum*, 2004.

²⁰ Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *Jews, Israel, and Peace in the Palestinian Authority Textbooks*, 2004.

Table 2. Summary Findings on Negative Depiction of the “Other”

Project cited	Summary of project findings
Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Jews, Judaism, and Israel are hardly mentioned in PA textbooks. — Zionism is presented as a colonial movement and as a danger to Arabs.
Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — PA textbooks make multiple, neutral references to Judaism, Jews, Israel, and Zionism. — Israelis and Jews are presented as occupiers, invaders, and usurpers.
George Eckert Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — PA textbooks continue to omit crucial elements of the “other”. — The country is depicted without reference to Israel and Israelis. Acknowledgment of Israel is not expressly stated in PA textbooks.
Nathan J. Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Most PA textbooks go to considerable lengths to avoid saying anything about Israel at all and the few exceptions are not pejorative. — PA textbooks present the “other” in an awkward, reticent, and inconsistent manner.

“Israel & Israelis”. Palestinian textbook references to “Israel” and “Israelis” usually are drawn from official historical documents and excerpts from encyclopedias (such as the Balfour Declaration, and the Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism). Many other textbook references to the “other” are taken from modern Palestinian literature. According to one report, these depictions often “reflect pain, suffering, and bitterness experienced by Palestinians as a result of the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict.”²¹ Most experts agree that a sovereign state of Israel is mentioned inadequately in Palestinian textbooks, with Israel commonly associated with historical events (such as the Oslo Accord) or ethnicity (as a Jewish state).²² One study concluded that “calls for Israel’s destruction or anti-Jewish incitement likewise do not occur.”²³

Some note that “Israel” is implicitly referred to in non-specific terms such as “the Land outside the Green Line [the 1967 cease-fire line],” “the land of 1948,” or “the interior.” Towns with large Arab populations that lie within pre-1967 Israeli territory are sometimes termed “Historical Palestine” in many PA textbooks. A recent report claimed that “Palestine, not Israel, appears on all of the books’ maps,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, *From Peace Making to Peace Building: A Comparative Israeli-Palestinian Research Project on School Textbooks and Curriculum Plans in the Subjects of History and Civics*, 2003.

²³ Ibid.

and all the village, cities, and towns located in Israel are referred to by Arabic names.”²⁴

“Jews” & “Judaism”. There is broad consensus, among experts, that Palestinian textbooks primarily make mention of “Jews” in a religious-historical context. Palestinian textbook depictions of Jews typically place them among “Peoples of the Book,” a mainstream Islamic concept that all followers of monotheism are part of God’s chosen community. Yet, some report that Palestinian textbooks contain little reference to the Jewish presence in ancient Palestine, preferring instead to Arabize the past. These commentators claim that “the Jews are further referred to, in a more detailed description, as opponents of the Prophet Muhammad.”²⁵ However, others state that “there are no overt references to Jews as ‘the evil enemy’ or as being ‘treacherous’.”²⁶

“Zionist” & “Zionism”. According to the reports reviewed, there is agreement that Zionists and Zionism are portrayed in a negative light. At times, Zionism, the late 19th century movement that established a Jewish homeland in the region, is portrayed as a political movement. On other occasions, Zionism is attached to Israeli civil-military action against Palestinians.²⁷ Overall, most reports contend that both Zionism and Zionists are linked with key historical developments in modern Palestinian history. Textbooks frequently link Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza with Zionism. Some experts assert that Zionism and Zionists are frequently mentioned as “aggressive, dangerous infiltrators.”²⁸ One report notes that the “the Jewish national movement [Zionism] is presented as a colonialist movement.”²⁹

Allegation 2: Historical Inaccuracy in PA Textbooks

Analysis. Most of the reports surveyed in this report maintain that the Palestinian curriculum presents history and historical facts in a selective and exclusive manner. Some contend that historical selectivity is indeed the intention of Palestinian textbook authors, who aim at building a national identity. Experts sometimes classify the Palestinian approach to history as “Palestinian history as a history of constant threats.”³⁰

²⁴ Margot Dudkevitch, “PA Textbooks: Israel is Palestine,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 22, 2004.

²⁵ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *The History of the Arab World, Grade 9 Textbook*. “Zionist movement” (p. 73-74); “Zionist plans Under the Ottomans” (p. 32); “Zionist infiltration” (p. 32).

²⁸ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

²⁹ Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *op. cit.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Table 3. Summary Findings on Historical Inaccuracy

Project cited	Summary of project findings
Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace	— PA textbook discussions of history are incomplete and biased
Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information	— Coverage and presentation of history and historical facts continues to be selective and exclusive in nature
George Eckert Institute	— Historical facts in PA textbooks are not as problematic as is the appraisal of those facts, which tends to victimize Palestinians.
Nathan J. Brown	— A fairly coherent view of the past is presented that is generally not based on any active or hostile denial of other versions of history.

“Historical Palestine”. According to some, “Palestine” is used interchangeably in historical and political contexts, the former context representing Palestine in geo-historical terms, and the latter commonly referring to the future state of Palestine.³¹ Often, “Palestine” is equated with “Homeland,” “National soil,” or “Jerusalem.” Nathan Brown, however, takes a different perspective when analyzing history units in the Palestinian national curriculum, stating that:

The focus on the eternal nature of Arab and Palestinian identity, in both ethnic and geographic terms, is generally not based on any active or hostile denial of other versions of history. Alternative versions are not refuted but merely ignored; non-Arab populations generally receive almost no attention.³²

Still, others argue that Palestinian history textbooks take a dogmatic and monolithic approach to history, which represents Israel in a negative light.³³ These commentators allege that Palestinian “historical revisionism” is tantamount to a denial of a Jewish presence in the region.

Contemporary Palestinian History. Many observers note that recent Palestinian history is more contentious than older accounts due to the political nature of historically-based issues such as the causes of the 1948-1949 Palestinian diaspora, the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, and the causes of the 1987-1993 *intifada*. IPCRI approaches the treatment of history in Palestinian textbooks with a note of understanding, but also a caution:

It is understood that Palestine is in its formative stage of development regarding understanding history (this is not a negative statement or any form of judgement - it is descriptive). Therefore, there should not be any exaggerated expectations

³¹ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

³² Nathan J. Brown, “Democracy, History, and the Contests Over the Palestinian Curriculum,” Adam Institute Papers, 2001.

³³ Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *op. cit.*

regarding the willingness or ability of Palestinian textbooks to present alternative views or other voices. However, Palestinian educators should be aware that the Palestinian cause is significantly strengthened by not presenting a dogmatic monolithic approach to history.³⁴

Alternate viewpoints contend that PA textbook coverage of contemporary history continues to disregard the Jewish and Israeli presence in the region. These reports take note that contemporary historical themes in textbooks do not depict Israel as a legitimate state. Instead, these analysts allege that PA textbook representations of modern-day Israel are negative and inciteful.

Allegation 3: Geography and Non-Recognition of Israel

Analysis. The primary concern for many international education analysts is that non-recognition of the state of Israel, particularly in maps, continues in PA textbooks.³⁵ Moreover, nearly all reports agree that geographic and cartographic representations of the area contain little uniformity in Palestinian textbooks, and that the precise geographic definition of “Palestine” remains confusing.³⁶

Table 4. Summary Findings on Geography

Project cited	Summary of project findings
Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The state of Israel does not appear in any textbook map. — “Palestine” is represented as the sovereign state in the region, encompassing Israel’s territory in many cases.
Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Textbook maps generally indicate regional themes (such as the Middle East or Arab World). — The most conspicuous phenomenon in these maps is the absence of any reference on them to Israel (historically, politically, or demographically).
George Eckert Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Political motivations account for the near total absence of depictions of the state of Israel in maps. — Palestinian textbook maps generally employ Arab names in lieu of a final political solution to the conflict.
Nathan J. Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Historical or topographical maps are widely used in order to avoid drawing political boundaries. — Israel is not represented (nor are Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt). — Some maps clearly delineate the West Bank and Gaza but do not explain what these indications signify.

³⁴ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *op. cit.* Also see comments by Israeli Foreign Ambassador, Daniel Ayalon in “Strategic Challenges Facing Israel in the Middle East,” *C-SPAN*, October 10, 2004.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Maps. Nearly all commentators on education curriculum note that PA textbook maps are a primary concern. To date, Israel as a sovereign state within the pre-1967 cease-fire line does not appear on any maps, nor do any Israeli cities bear Jewish names (Tel Aviv, Netanya, Ramat Gan, etc.).³⁷

Generally, Palestinian textbook maps refer to the region as “Palestine,” with the West Bank and Gaza Strip distinguished from Israel — which is not named. In many cases, political maps contain no place names. Geographic, topographic, demographic, and border maps often label the region as “historical Palestine” or “Palestine.” Several regional and world maps continue to represent the West Bank and Gaza Strip as distinguished from the rest of the area, yet the remaining land is not labeled “Israel.”³⁸ Brown contends that the absence of a demarcated Israel in Palestinian textbooks represents unresolved political issues among Palestinians:

The failure to treat such pressing subjects, then, stemmed neither from political hostility to Israel nor from renunciation of nationalist Palestinian claims but from the desire not to move beyond a clear national consensus or the explicit policy of the leadership. Such an attitude meant that there was no guidance on how to teach Israel, Zionism, or the borders of Palestine. At some points, the texts seemed based on recognition of the fluidity and uncertainty of the present.³⁹

Nearly all agree that newer textbooks represent a modest improvement, with decreasing instances of the entire region depicted as “Palestine”. Some studies continue to state that textbooks ignore the geographic presence of the state of Israel.

Allegation 4: Palestinian Islamism and Inciting Violence

Analysis. Some commentators state that Palestinian textbooks manipulate the Islamic faith in an effort to incite Palestinian schoolchildren to anti-Jewish violence. Others argue that Palestinian religious education must inevitably cover Islamic doctrine, history, practice, ethics, and tradition, which conveys conservative Islamic values. However, the analytical reports cited agree that the religious component of Palestinian textbooks may advocate exceptions for violence, such as martyrdom, suggesting that these religiously sanctioned exceptions may lower a student’s threshold for engaging in anti-Israeli violent acts.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Nathan J. Brown, *op. cit.*

Table 5. Summary Findings on Islam and Violence

Project cited	Summary of project findings
Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Latest issue of PA textbooks features only a few brief references to violence and <i>jihad</i>. — Terrorist activity against Israel is not openly supported or discussed. Individuals who were killed as a result of such activity are referred to as martyrs.
Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The concepts of <i>jihad</i> and martyrdom appear in a religious context and does not target other religions. — Within the current political context clear inferences can be made by the pupils that texts are referring to <i>Jihad</i> against Jews and the state of Israel.
George Eckert Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — PA textbooks place a strong emphasis on political Islam. — PA textbooks attempt to convey Islam as a non-violent religion.
Nathan Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — The PA curriculum does not integrate religious education into the larger curriculum, allowing religious education to exist parallel to the national system. — Religious textbooks do not espouse violence but are not held to the same standards as the rest of PA textbooks.

Islamic Themes. The majority of Palestinian textbooks address Islam through four topical blocks (or units), each consisting of several lessons.⁴⁰ The religious curriculum units sanctioned by the Palestinian Ministry of Education include the following:

- **Qu’ran and its Interpretation.** Most Muslims believe that the *Qu’ran* is the final prophetic message of God spoken to the Prophet *Muhammad* in the early seventh century. Parallel to the *Qu’ran* is the *Hadith*, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which is a collection of statements and traditions attributed to Muhammad by his companions.
- **Islamic doctrine.** The Palestinian Ministry of Education notes Islam is a cultural value in Palestinian society. As such, Palestinian textbooks present key Islamic themes such as the foundations of faith, Islamic creeds, and correct Islamic practices for students.
- **Ethics, Thinking, and Education.** These lessons instruct students on Islamic rules of personal and communal conduct. Most of the lessons include sections on personal cleanliness, hygiene, and family relations.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

- **The Life of the Prophet.** This unit provides students with background on the life and works of Muhammad. Attention is given to the childhood of the Prophet, early mission, establishment of the first Islamic community, and relations with other co-religionists.

Violence. Observers studying the issue note that PA religious textbooks discuss potentially violent themes such as “*jihad*,” “sacrifice,” and “martyrdom”. However, many commentators emphasize that *jihad* is not one of the central themes PA textbooks and that *jihad* and martyrdom are commonly referred to in historical contexts.⁴¹ Reports generally agree the Palestinian Education Ministry does not openly support acts of violence or terrorism in the name of religion. Some note, however, that the Palestinian national curriculum “continues to embrace Palestinian individuals who participate in such activity and were killed or imprisoned and define such people as martyrs and prisoners-of-war, respectively.”⁴²

The Palestinian Education Ministry appears to recognize the potential for PA textbooks and schools contributing to anti-Jewish violence. Beginning in 2002, the PA Education Ministry banned schoolchildren from participating in demonstrations or any other activities related to violence. Furthermore, the Education Ministry prohibits schools from hanging posters of “martyrs” killed in the *intifada* on school buildings.⁴³ However, the Education Ministry and PCDC face multiple challenges in reforming the way Palestinian Islam is presented in PA textbooks. The shift from an authoritarian curriculum that emphasizes memorization, toward a curriculum that focuses on critical thinking, has fostered contentious debate amongst Palestinian educators, policymakers, and religious figures. Many people feel that the PA Ministry of Education, fearful of a negative public response, did not fully incorporate the PCDC’s standards of critical thinking in religious education units. Some feel that the decision to exclude Palestinian Islamic concepts from wider curriculum reform may be illustrative of the limits faced by the PA Education Ministry to fully implement a progressive agenda. Others feel that applying separate standards for teaching Islam increases the likelihood of continuing anti-Jewish sentiment and the glorification of violence.

⁴¹ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

⁴² Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *op. cit.*

⁴³ Khalid Abu-To’amah, “PA Education Ministry Bans ‘Martyr’ Worship,” *The Jerusalem Post*, September 3, 2003.

Allegation 5: Limited Value Placed on Peace in Palestinian Textbooks

Analysis. Many observers contend that Palestinian textbooks fall short of instituting a peace-promoting curriculum that values tolerance and diversity. Some contend that the PA curriculum does advocate peace, forgiveness, and tolerance, while others note that no education units are specifically dedicated to ending hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians.⁴⁴ Instead, PA textbook representations of peace and tolerance are general, and often exclude mention of Israel.⁴⁵

Table 6. Summary Findings on Peace and Tolerance

Project cited	Summary of project findings
Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Since 2000, political and religious tolerance has been an important theme in textbooks. — Not a single reference to tolerating Jews or Israelis exists in PA textbooks.
Israeli/Palestine Center for Research and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — PA textbooks contain examples that value peace, pluralism, forgiveness, integrity, and tolerance in historical and present-day contexts. — No references are made to these values regarding Jews, Judaism, or the state of Israel.
George Eckert Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Tolerance, peace, and pluralism are typically discussed in context of Islamic education. — PA textbooks advocate respect and tolerance, yet provide no lessons or assistance as to how tolerance and peace are learned.
Nathan J. Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — PA textbooks do little to support peace. — The Palestinian national curriculum avoids sensitive issues connected with peace.

Peace and Civics. Some reports note that peaceful values are transmitted through civics textbooks, which address ethical behavior and the creation and preservation of a Palestinian civil society. Still, most commentators conclude that civics education does not address possible co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. However, some contend that peace between Israel and Palestinians is addressed in newer Palestinian textbooks.⁴⁶ Students are typically presented with time-lines of the peace process and not lessons that promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians. One report noted that Palestinian textbooks do not “openly

⁴⁴ Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ IPCRI also notes that Israeli textbooks likewise omits substantial sections that deal with Palestinian experiences and perspectives.

⁴⁶ Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, *op. cit.*

advocate the ideal of peace with Israel.”⁴⁷ Others claim multiple passages generally extol the benefits of open and free dialogue between all peoples.

Outlook

Future prospects for Palestinian education reform will likely depend, in part, on broader developments in domestic Palestinian affairs and between Israel and the PA. For example, Palestinian political developments remain in flux. Palestinian President Abbas is now faced with a situation in which Hamas controls parliament. It remains unclear who the next education minister will be, although few doubt that a non-Hamas figure will take over Palestinian education. Also, the future of the newly created Palestinian curriculum is unknown. If Hamas does take responsibility for education, it may amend or dissolve the secular orientation of the national curriculum. Furthermore, *madrassahs* (Islamic schools), which are not currently widespread in the West Bank and Gaza, may gain new impetus under Hamas.

Positive gains in the peace process could also have an effect on education, especially if violence abates and mutual trust and cooperation rise. If the Palestinian and Israeli governments agree on “final status issues” (the return of Palestinian refugees, political borders, and the status of Jerusalem), UNRWA’s education mandate for refugees may expire. Overall, critics are skeptical as to whether the Palestinian education ministry is financially and technically equipped to assume responsibility for educating thousands of former pupils of UNRWA.⁴⁸ Others argue that the continuation of violence and lack of political solutions to the crisis contribute to antipathy and an un-balanced PA curriculum. Recent calls for U.N. reforms may also affect the Palestinian curriculum. While not directly affected, UNESCO may have to review its curriculum and textbook development strategies and guidelines in light of claims that UNESCO insufficiently oversees the implementation of curriculum reform.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ UNRWA provides education for over 450,000 school-aged children. Available online at [<http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/education.pdf>].

Issues for Congress

Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process

On April 30, 2003, the “Quartet” (the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations) announced an agreement on how best to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The “Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” foresees a Palestinian state by 2009, and Phase I calls on all official Palestinian and Israeli institutions to end all forms of violence.⁴⁹ Many observers and Members of Congress view this statement as an indication that the Palestinian Ministry of Education should end what they see as educational incitement against Israelis, Jews, and the peace process. Concerns about the Palestinian education curriculum are reflected in legislative recommendations that a Palestinian state should not be recognized by the United States until the Palestinian Authority (PA) “has taken effective steps to ensure that its education and communications systems promote the acceptance of Israel’s existence and of peace with Israel and actively discourage anti-Israeli incitement.”⁵⁰ It remains unclear, however, how curriculum reform will be measured and by what agency.

It is also unclear what impact Israel’s withdrawal will have on education in the Gaza Strip. Currently, lawlessness and the lack of a political presence affect daily life. Furthermore, given the widely reported financial woes of the PA, some doubt how effective the education ministry will be in bolstering a more tolerant curriculum for Palestinian schoolchildren.

U.S. Assistance to the West Bank and Gaza

A priority for some Members of Congress is that U.S. aid to the Palestinians, totaling \$1.4 billion since 1993, does not support an inciteful, anti-Israeli curriculum.⁵¹ Some legislators argue that U.S. financial assistance to UNRWA may, in fact, contribute to a continuation of an anti-Israeli curriculum. Although it is difficult to assess the degree to which U.S. assistance to UNRWA contributes to incitement, some Members and area experts often express concern over the lack of transparency in the disbursement and allocation of U.S. aid to the Palestinians. These concerns could potentially jeopardize sustained U.S. support for UNRWA. Roughly 80% of U.S. aid to the Palestinians is channeled through contractors and 20% is

⁴⁹ Available online at [<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/20062.htm>]. See CRS Issue Brief IB91137, *The Middle East Peace Talks*, by Carol Migdalovitz.

⁵⁰ See P.L 108-109, Section 1601, and H.R. 3814, the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Enhancement Act of 2004 (introduced in the 108th Congress).

⁵¹ For an overview on U.S. aid to Palestinians, see CRS Report RS22370, *U.S. Foreign Aid to the Palestinians*, by Jeremy M. Sharp; and CRS Report RL32260, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East: Historical Background, Recent Trends, and the FY2006 Request*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.

channeled through private voluntary organizations, and both groups are selected and monitored by USAID.⁵²

Following Hamas' strong showing in the Palestinian parliamentary elections, Administration officials and some Members of Congress have warned the Hamas leadership that the United States will no longer provide assistance to a Hamas-led PA government unless it changes its Covenant to recognize Israel's right to exist and renounces the use of violence. If Hamas should resist such changes, Congress and the Administration could move to alter or halt U.S. assistance altogether to the Palestinians by eliminating the presidential waiver authority to authorize direct aid to the PA or by tightening existing restrictions, including the oversight of Palestinian non governmental organizations working as subcontractors.⁵³

U.N. Reform

Many aspects of U.N. reform have been addressed by Congress. In a Senate hearing, some Members expressed concern that textbooks and educational materials used in UNRWA schools promote anti-Jewish sentiment and deny the existence of the state of Israel.⁵⁴ These concerns led some Members to urge the Secretary of State to make UNRWA reforms a priority at the United Nations by actively campaigning for comprehensive and independently verifiable economic audits of UNRWA activities, ensuring that U.S. funds do not assist in anti-Israeli incitement.⁵⁵ Several Members of Congress also sought to remove all elements from the Palestinian curriculum that promote hatred of Jews, Israel and a denial of Israel's right to exist. Moreover, some Members urged that these materials be replaced with texts that promote Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, accuracy, and tolerance.⁵⁶ Many observers note that UNRWA's mandate does not cover Palestinian curriculum development or drafting PA textbooks.

⁵² The President has requested \$150 million in FY2006 and an additional \$200 million in FY2005 supplemental aid for the Palestinians. Since 1993, U.S. assistance to the Palestinians has averaged \$85 million per year.

⁵³ Section 550 (b) of P.L. 109-102, the FY2006 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, states that the President may use this waiver if providing direct aid to the PA is important to the national security interests of the United States. By law, the waiver must be accompanied by a report to Congress detailing the steps the Palestinian Authority has taken to arrest terrorists, confiscate weapons and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. The report also must include a description of how funds will be spent and the accounting procedures in place to ensure that they are properly disbursed.

⁵⁴ *Palestinian Education — Teaching Peace or War?* Special Hearing before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate, 108th Congress, 1st sess., October 30, 2003, S.Hrg. 108-290.

⁵⁵ U.S. contributions for FY2005 totaled \$88 million. From U.S. Department of State.

⁵⁶ H.R. 1950 (P.L. 108-109), Millennium Challenge Account, Peace Corps Expansion, and Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 2004.

Promoting Reform in the Arab World

For some time education reform has been increasingly tied to U.S. promotion of democracy in the Middle East and winning the war against global terrorism. The recommendations of the *9/11 Commission Report* bolster claims that “soft” diplomacy measures (such as supporting education reform) are key elements in both the U.S. global war on terrorism and promoting democracy in the Middle East.⁵⁷ Several U.S.-funded programs address education reform in the Palestinian Territories. MEPI education reform projects in the Palestinian Territories enable Palestinians to acquire the skills necessary to compete in today’s economy and improve the quality of their lives and that of their families.⁵⁸ To accomplish this, MEPI’s education pillar focuses on the quality of education by improving basic and post-secondary education, teacher training, and curriculum content.

A second array of U.S.-sponsored education reform projects in the Palestinian Territories are supervised by USAID. Since 2001, the Agency has allocated over \$10 million toward education development programs in the West Bank and Gaza. The contracting organization, the Academy for Education Development (AED), provides technical assistance to Palestinian education reform, including training future Palestinian teachers, who many contend are crucial to any lasting changes in Palestinian education.

Recent Legislation

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern about Palestinian education. Legislation has been introduced to pressure the PA to adopt a more peace-oriented Palestinian educational curriculum.

H.R. 2601, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007, resolves, among other things, that the Secretary of State should express in the strongest possible terms U.S. opposition to the inclusion in Palestinian textbooks of materials that foster anti-Semitism and rejection of peace with Israel, and to express the unwillingness of the United States to continue to support educational programs of the PA, whether directly or indirectly, should the PA continue to include material that does not foster tolerance and peace. Introduced in the House International Relations Committee May 24, 2005.

⁵⁷ *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 378.

⁵⁸ The FY2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act provided \$75 million for MEPI. For FY2006, and the Bush Administration is seeking \$120 million in support of the initiative. For additional detail on MEPI, see CRS Report RS21457, *The Middle East Partnership Initiative: An Overview*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.