

IMPACT-se

**Syrian National Identity**  
**REFORMULATING SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS**  
**DURING THE CIVIL WAR**



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## Executive Summary

This study of the Syrian curriculum examines the updated 2017–18 education contents in the areas controlled by the Assad regime while the civil war continues to rage. It offers a unique look at a people in the midst of a mortal crisis.

The most surprising findings lie within the realm of international relations.

### **International and Regional Positioning**

#### **Russia, Iran, Turkey**

**The Russian Federation** and the Soviet Union that came before, are viewed approvingly, especially in relation to modernity and technology.

Significantly, since 2014, foreign language studies include the Russian language. Russian studies textbooks abundantly feature Russian cultural elements. Overall, The Russian Federation and Syria appear in the curriculum as modern, powerful, scientific, secular and friendly.

Russia is presented positively in the curriculum—there are no territorial or other disputes with Syria. The textbooks advance a Syrian political culture of modern authoritarian ethno-linguistic nationalism that is fully compatible with that of the Russian Federation. Syria's ambitions of creating an "Arab Homeland" stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf and covering large swaths of Asia and Africa do not culturally contradict a Russia playing the role of a world power. Unlike Islamism, pan-Arabism has no global ambitions.

**Iran:** The historical presentation of Iran and the ancient Persian Empire is mostly negative. Though the "Arab Homeland" and Iran share a long history, it has not always been smooth. One issue involves the Iranian province of Khuzestan which the curriculum maintains belongs to Arabs. Yet, the Khomeini revolution itself is presented as positive because of its revolutionary and militant nature toward Israel and the West. The Persian, Greek and Roman empires, on the other hand, are depicted as greedy foreign "occupiers." There is no acknowledgement of Iranian cultural heritage and contributions over millennia. No Persian language courses are offered.

Iran is shown to be advanced technologically and economically (automobiles, ships, armament, space and the nuclear realm). The main common denominator is the revolutionary dimension and the struggle against Israel and the West. Reviewing IMPACT-se's Iranian textbook research reveals two ideological fault lines between the two countries:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eldad J. Pardo, "Iranian Education: The Continuous Revolution," IMPACT-se, 2016.  
[http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Iranian-Education\\_The-Continuous-Revolution-2016.pdf](http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Iranian-Education_The-Continuous-Revolution-2016.pdf);

- Pan-Arab and Syrian nationalism reject Persian-Iranian hegemony and any leadership role in Greater Syria and the "Arab Homeland."
- Espousing ethnically centered Arabism and secularism, the worldview taught in Syrian textbooks is incompatible with the regional ambitions of Iran's Supreme Leader. Iran's Islamist-Khomeinist political culture and way of life, as presented in the Iranian curriculum, is flatly rejected by the Syrian curriculum (excepting mutual antagonism toward Israel and the West).

Strategic interests and pragmatic considerations may lead to a continuation of the decades-long Iranian-Syrian alliance. On the national and cultural levels, however, there is no genuine synergy between the two countries.

**Turkey:** The potential friction with Turkey is even greater than that with Iran. The Syrian curriculum continues to showcase Syrian-Turkish territorial disputes centered on Alexandretta and beyond. Turkey's Ottomanism and pan-Turkic imperial drive directly threatens Syrian pan-Arab ideology.<sup>2</sup> Turkey's approach to Islamism and the Islamic way of life is incompatible with the Syrian worldview as presented in the curriculum. No Turkish language courses are offered.

### **Syria and the "Arab Homeland"**

Syria's pan-Arabism questions the independence and separate existence of any Arab country. The Syrian ideology opposes the status quo and considers all borders in the region to be artificial.

The textbooks still present an implicit recognition of other Arab countries, but only as part of the "Arab Homeland." Strong Syrian national foundations are cherished.

Somewhat ominous is the perception of dividing the entire Arab world into "regions," one of which is "Greater Syria" [*Bilad al-Sham*]: replacing current-day Syria, Jordan, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Lebanon.

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Arnon Groiss and Nethanel (Navid) Toobian, "The Attitude to "The Other" and to Peace in Iranian School Books and Teacher's Guides," October 2006.

<http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Iran2006.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Eldad J. Pardo and Mehmet Ekinici, "Neighbors and Rivals: China in Turkey's Educational System," IMPACT-se, February 2017.

<http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/NEIGHBORS-AND-RIVALS-China-in-Turkeys-Educational-System.pdf>;

Eldad Pardo and Marcus Sheff, "Turkey's School Curriculum Crossroads," IMPACT-se, Jan 29, 2017.

<http://www.impact-se.org/turkeys-school-curriculum-crossroads/>;

Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, "Turkey's Curriculum Under Erdoğan: The Evolution of Turkish Identity", eds. Eldad J. Pardo and David Byer, IMPACT-se, November 2016.

[http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Turkey-Interim-Report\\_IMPACT-se.pdf](http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Turkey-Interim-Report_IMPACT-se.pdf).

**Egypt:** Ancient empires within the "Arab Homeland"—particularly Egyptian-Syrian and Syrian-Egyptian—are presented in a positive light. Ancient Egyptian culture is stressed (as is Mesopotamian). The spirit of Arab unity, especially with Egypt, is paramount. The ancient cultures of Iran, Turkey and Israel are disregarded.

While such unity remains in the realm of nostalgic imagination and the "Arab Homeland" is yet to appear, it makes territorial demands on non-Arab countries and may lead to the emergence of new axes in the region, just beyond the horizon.

### **Israel and the West**

**Israel:** Syrian education presents a pan-Arab revolutionary-imperialist worldview. There is no room for Israel—dubbed the "Racist/Terrorist/Zionist Entity." Anti-Semitic motifs such as stereotypical references to the character of Shylock from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* are to be found. The Holocaust is ignored.

The textbooks teach that Israel is a terrorist state and therefore all means are legitimate in the war against it, including terrorism and suicide attacks. Syria is proud of its support of terrorism in Lebanon, Iraq and Israel, described by the curriculum as armed struggle or "resistance."

Still, the option of land for peace within the framework of a comprehensive agreement is preserved, but hidden. The Agreement on Disengagement (1974) between Israel and Syria is portrayed as valid to this day.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to Israel, which has no right to exist, the textbooks feature territorial demands Syria holds on other countries: Iran (Khuzestan province and the Gulf islands); Turkey (mainly Alexandretta but also Cilicia); and Spain (areas outside the Iberian Peninsula). The memory of the Arab conquest of Spain is cherished.

**The West:** The attitude toward the West is largely negative, with stress on the evils of colonialism and imperialism.

## **The Home Front**

### **Civil War, Minorities, Gender**

The curriculum's attitude toward the traumatic civil war in Syria ranges from denial of its existence to encouragement of volunteering and assistance to victims of the disaster. There are references to the destruction, poverty, sexual and economic harm to women, as well as to issues of emigration and displacement, but mostly these subjects are glossed over or referred to indirectly.

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<sup>3</sup> *History of the Modern and Contemporary Arab Homeland*, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 56.

The textbooks disregard and deny the complex ethno-religious makeup in Syria. There are no Kurdish language studies or references to the heritage and identity of the Kurdish, Alawite, Druze, Shiite and various Sunni groups. The collective identity presented is monolithic, combining the pan-Arab and Arab-Syrian.

An exception is the presentation of the small Christian minority, for whom special textbooks are published. Religious tolerance exists, yet we found hints of suspicion toward Christians.

The army is prominent throughout the curriculum, with motifs emphasizing loyalty and commitment.

Gender equality is featured, while a rigid modernism, expressed in family planning, seems somewhat outdated. There is sensitivity to traditional values. LGBTQ education does not exist.

## **Political Culture**

The textbooks promote respect and total commitment to Bashar Al-Assad and his father Hafez. There is no excessive personality cult as compared with Iranian education, but despite talk of elections and democracy, the curriculum remains indoctrinating and authoritarian. The army plays a central role in the national identity.

The curriculum is secular, encourages independent thinking and a spirit of problem solving, volunteerism and religious openness.

While religious tolerance is a general principle, only one government-chartered form of Sunni-Islam is taught. Other religions or religious streams—except for Christianity—are ignored. State-approved Islam forms part of the pan-Arab cultural identity.

## **Worldview, Identity and Ideology**

The Syrian curriculum bases Syrian national identity on the principles of a continued struggle to realize one Arab Nation that includes all Arab states, constituting one country, the "Arab Homeland."

The textbooks present the borders dividing the Arab states as artificial, having been imposed by European colonialism.

## **International Norms**

### **Warfare, Genocide and International Norms**

The curriculum features ambiguous criticism of the use of nuclear and chemical weapons. It openly and fully supports "resistance" (guerilla-terrorism) and applying "all available means" to destroy the Other. There is an assumption that international organizations such as the UN are

supportive of such actions. Expressions such as "the Zionist presence in Palestine is a momentary presence," "insistence on purifying the land and all of humanity from the Zionists," and "Zionist Entity" are used in concert with anti-Semitic messages.

### **International Standards on Peace and Tolerance**

The Syrian curriculum does not meet IMPACT-se's UNESCO-derived standards on Peace and Tolerance, with the exception of gender equality and tolerance toward the Christian minority.

It professes an ideology that is exclusionary, militaristic, narrow-minded and authoritarian. It does, however, encourage free thinking and ingenuity within proscribed boundaries.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This IMPACT-se report further supports the assumption that there is a direct connection between violence and the lack of peace and tolerance education within a given society.

We demonstrate that at least part of the motivation and explanation of the civil war in Syria may be attributed to a faulty curriculum. Hate and militarism ultimately cannot be controlled. A culture of peace and tolerance must be taught and fostered.

The curriculum encourages and teaches dialogue, while ignoring the 2011 uprising and dreams for democracy and freedom—which ultimately led to civil war. Rather, it ignores atrocities committed by the regime and denies any non-Arab national aspirations or group identities in the region.

While alternatives for policy changes are briefly mentioned, the Assad curriculum does not engage in self-doubt, let alone self-reflection on such topics as peace at home or in the region. The curriculum teaches students that all means are justified to destroy the Other (as exhibited in reality by the use of WMDs).

Looking forward, we see a continued alliance with Russia, at the expense of other allies and partners, with gradual but sustained efforts to rebuild bridges toward the Arab world, mainly through Egypt.

If there is any policy recommendation from this research, it is that the international community should not compromise on meaningful peace education in Syria. The ruthless and rampant violence is the result of a faulty worldview which cannot be resolved without tackling the issue of education.

## **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks to IMPACT-se's COO, Arik Agassi for initiating and supervising this research; to CEO Marcus Sheff for his usual insightful comments; to Bat Chen Druyan Feldman for her meticulous work researching the Russian language books; and to IMPACT's editor, David Byer, for guiding the editorial process to its successful conclusion.

The contents of this researched report are the sole responsibility of the authors.



## Preface

A national curriculum is the main tool with which a nation prepares its young generation for the future. Steady, systematic and authoritative education along a clearly charted line for twelve consecutive years imprints an indelible worldview on the new generation.

There are consequences to what children learn in school. If a curriculum teaches hate and violence toward a demonized Other, a culture of hate and violence is likely to ensue, as shown by a recent research project on the Nazi curriculum during the 1930s (Tamar Ketko, *Ice Creatures*, 2016). But accumulated hate may take unexpected directions. The Iraqi curriculum during the 1990s featured Islamization, hate and militarism. The emergence of the ISIS horrors in Iraq a decade later should not be viewed as unrelated to that curriculum. Similarly, the pre-civil war Syrian curriculum taught hate against Israel and the West, but the violence unleashed inside Syria surpassed anything inflicted on either Israel or the West.

In Turkey and Egypt, Islamization of their curricula began in the 1980s under secular regimes. In both countries, anti-democratic Islamist leadership later emerged. The Iranian curriculum's "imperial dreams" anticipated the accelerated expansionism and internal oppression that followed the 2015 Nuclear Deal. As Iranian politicians were smiling to the cameras, hate was being inculcated into the classrooms. The failed transition to democracy in Egypt and Syria and the great obstacles facing the peace process with the Palestinians are largely the result of "resistance" and/or radical Islamic education.

Tunisia, under a secular, authoritarian regime, educated for tolerance and secularism and is thus far the only Arab country in which transition to democracy has been successful. Again, the role of education cannot be overlooked.

The Syrian curriculum includes good elements, mainly secularism, multi-cultural heritage, equality for women and encouragement of independent thinking and dialogue. Russia is depicted as a close ally while Islamist Iran is not. Regarding the liberal and Islamist opposition groups, there is an effort to pave the way for a future reconciliation after the civil war. However this is not spelled out in the curriculum, which treats the civil war's disaster only indirectly. As such, the disconnection between the horrors perpetrated by the regime and what is taught in the curriculum is remarkable. Since the opposition does not exist there is neither hatred nor understanding toward the non-existent Other.

However, hate is widespread throughout the curriculum when it comes to radical pan-Arab nationalism, which considers the eradication of Israel an ideological mainstay.

With respect to the civil war, the current curriculum does not concern itself with morality, introspection, or peace education. Rather, it holds on to a militaristic worldview and radical pan-

Arabism. It teaches that the international community justifies "resistance" (guerilla-terrorism) while using "all available means" to destroy the Other.

What the curriculum ultimately fails to teach is that long bloody wars often lead to the next war, which begs the question: Will the lingering lesson of the Assad regime be that more war is inevitable?

Eldad J. Pardo, Director of Research

## Introduction

For seven consecutive years a ferocious civil war has been raging in Syria. From a comparatively stable, secular and authoritarian Arab country, Syria has turned into one of the cruelest and most violent flashpoints on earth. The majority of the atrocities and destruction have been perpetrated by the Assad regime. Hundreds of thousands are dead, with many more injured, maimed and traumatized; millions are displaced from their homes in Syria or are in exile in the region and around the world.

This project is the first research that examines the curriculum of Bashar Al-Assad's Syria. In 2001, IMPACT-se first published a report on Syrian textbooks.<sup>4</sup> While the question of education in Syria during the civil war has been addressed, no research, before now, has been conducted on the contents of the current curriculum.

Considering the exceptional circumstances of the situation in Syria, our efforts revolve around three axes. The first is to examine the curriculum against the background of IMPACT-se's standards for peace and tolerance. More specifically, and for future reference, the project examines the textbook contents while trying to speculate what, if anything within the texts, contributed toward the perpetuation of such horror.

Secondly is to examine through education a society in major crisis as it tries to hold on to its basic beliefs—ideological and otherwise.

The final part of our investigation looks at the region and the world at large, together with Syria's young generation, and efforts to grapple with the results of the civil war.

To accomplish this we have looked closely at the curriculum and endeavored to gauge where the Assad regime is heading. The questions are many: How are Syria's youth being educated to participate in possible future political scenarios? Who will ultimately be its friends—and enemies? What hope for peace is envisioned in Syria by the curriculum? Is stability even in Syria's future?

The first section: "Syrian Civil War: Normalcy Amid Catastrophe" asks how a people strives to find balance from a structured evolutionary education system, while struggling with continuous tragic circumstances. Although much that relates to the war is ignored, images of horror inevitably find their way into the curriculum. The ethos is of natural disaster that demands mobilization and individual contribution. Sensitive issues as regards displaced families and emigrants are dealt with in an indirect manner, as is the unspeakable destruction which is everywhere apparent.

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<sup>4</sup>Arnon Groiss, "Jews, Zionism and Israel in Syrian School Textbooks," June 2001, IMPACT-se.  
<http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Syria2001.pdf>.

"Syrian Identity: Radical Arabism" describes the Syrian collective worldview and national identity. Assad's Syria remains committed to its pan-Arab ideology, which places secular nationalism and devotion to a radical struggle at the forefront of an agenda to unite the Arab world—to the exclusion of non-Arab actors in the Arab domain. Syria proper—and the Assad father-son dynasty—remain at the center of the collective's identity. The army continues to have a special role while a new constitution and belief in dialogue are also featured.

Sections three and four are an overview of how this authoritarian and monochromatic identity charts an imaginary wish list of Syria's *friends*, its natural *competitors*, and those allotted the role of sworn *enemies*. Educationally and culturally, the Assad regime is more comfortable with Russia and Egypt, while non-Arab partners—mainly Iran and Turkey—are not trusted. The US and Israel are unquestionably in the category of enemy. "Freedom: Islam, Christianity, Gender" reexamines Syrian identity more deeply, as it explores the limits of collective identity and freedom in the secular authoritarian state, granting many rights to some groups, excluding others, while maintaining tight controls.

The research exposes what is typically obscured. While the Assad regime and Iran's "Holy Regime" are allies, their worldviews and ambitions stand in sharp opposition. Syrian Arabism aims at uniting the "Arab Homeland" within a secular ethno-linguistic republican framework. No non-Arab should rule the Arab, especially not an Islamist of the Khomeinist-Shiite Persian variety. The name "Hezbollah" is not in textbooks.

The Syrian curriculum praises some previous empires, such as the Egyptian or Mesopotamian but not others, including the Persian. (When the Persian empire stretched over Syria, it was considered a "Persian Occupation.") Furthermore, modern Iran—according to the Syrian curriculum—still "occupies" Arab lands such as Khuzestan in mainland Iran as well as the Gulf islands.

There is a dramatic distinction drawn between the antagonism exhibited toward Iran and the extreme friendliness toward the Russian Federation. "The largest country in the world," is openly a close ideological and cultural friend. Russian language is taught. All things Russian are imitated. As such, Russia is perhaps Syria's quintessential role model. Iran and its revolution are acknowledged but Syria's attitude toward them, as expressed in its curriculum, is lukewarm at best. The Persian language is not taught. Iran's export of its Islamist-Khomeinist revolution is an embarrassment that the curriculum ignores.

Finally, we explore the dichotomy of how a regime that practices and preaches radical violence also educates to cherish international organizations promoting peace (albeit as an abstract idea). The curriculum sheds some light on how organizations like the UN are perceived by an educational system that remains single-minded in its determination to continue along its current trajectory.

It demonstrates to us that the civil war—with all its horrors—has not softened Syria's radical national identity, which the authors of this curriculum seem to view as commensurate with international norms.

## Syrian Civil War: Normalcy Amid Catastrophe

Seven years into the Syrian Civil War, it is impossible to deny the harsh realities of life in Syria. However, from more than fifty examined textbooks from the 2017–18 state curriculum, the war is mentioned in very few books. One, the seventh-grade textbook, *National Education*, does not deny the difficulties Syria faces, but tries to present the war as a challenge that requires Syrian citizens to show civic responsibility, solidarity and a volunteer spirit. The focus is on what the curriculum's authors perceive as positive developments (elections, constitution) toward Syria's prosperity over the past few years. However, given the regime's concerns about emigration of its citizens resulting from the war, as well as the image of Syria worldwide, the curriculum educates students to work toward changing this reality, as we will later learn.

### Rising to the Challenge: Horror, Destruction, Displacement

Within the above-mentioned textbook, there are explicit references to the civil war, and the implications it has had on life in Syria. Civilians are encouraged to assist one another in such times, to create a more caring society. Thus, the curriculum uses the war as a means to an end: to demonstrate desirable civil behavior. There are no references to the different sides fighting the war or why, other than being a crisis forced on Syria by external sources.

The following entry from the text accurately reports an achievement of the Syrian team in the World Robot Olympiad,<sup>5</sup> portraying a feeling of normalcy and hope during difficult times. There is a recognition of the war's destructive reality, yet, no blame is assigned to any specific actor, including any responsibility for the regime's atrocities and destruction. No justice, sorrow, revenge or reconciliation is mentioned or apparently needed. Hope is based on the talent displayed for rebuilding the country. Thus the post-war period is envisaged to be a united, back-to-normal process.

The Syrian team won second place in the World Robot Olympiad held in India, for presenting a project to recycle the debris and rubble of destroyed buildings solely using robots. The goal is to contribute to the reconstruction of what was left behind by the war in Syria, by reusing cement and metal-building materials.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 18.*

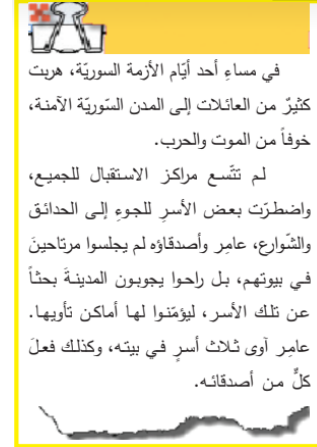


Another passage talks about the "Syrian crisis," people fleeing, fear, death and war. Families have become displaced and urgently need shelter from the elements. The youth are encouraged to volunteer.

During one evening of the Syrian crisis, many families fled to safe Syrian cities, fearing death and war.

The absorption centers weren't able to hold everyone, and some families were forced to take refuge in parks and streets. Amer and his friends didn't sit comfortably in their homes, but rather they wandered around the city in search of these families, to secure places of shelter for them. Amer accommodated three families in his home, and so did all his friends.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 68.*



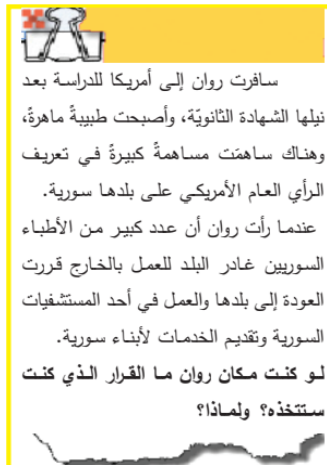
The textbooks do not discuss the Iranian-Syrian project of Sunni ethnic cleansing and repopulation by Shia Muslims.

But the curriculum does not completely ignore Syria's demographic disaster. Emigration is a serious concern and is dealt with in numerous textbooks.

### **National Challenge: Emigration**

Although the reasons for this are not spelled out explicitly, Syrian textbooks show awareness of the increasing numbers of emigrants from the war and the substantial fear left in its wake.

Students are asked to address this issue, and write to their friends or family members who have left Syria, urging them to return to their homeland.



Rawan traveled to America to study after receiving her high school diploma and became a skilled doctor. She contributed greatly to informing the American public about her

country Syria. When Rawan realized that many Syrian doctors were leaving the country to work abroad, she decided to return to her country and work in a Syrian hospital, providing service to the Syrian people.

**If you were in Rawan's place, what decision would you make, and why?**

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 71.*

After Othman traveled with his family to settle in another country, he wrote a letter to his relative in the fifth grade, saying:

'I didn't think that I would long for my dear homeland this much. I find myself today counting the days waiting for my return to my beloved country, to hurry back so I can offer it and its citizens every good deed I can. My brother, I know that a person's dignity can be achieved only by his homeland's dignity, and no security can be assured to him without the security of his homeland. If someone does not wish good for his country, do not expect any good from him at all.'

*Islamic Education, Grade 5, 2017–18, p. 84.*



\* فَكَّرَ أَحَدُ أَقْرَابِي بِالِاسْتِقْرَارِ خَارِجَ الْوَطَنِ بَعْدَ إِنْهَاءِ دِرَاسَتِهِ الْجَامِعِيَّةِ.

أَكْتُبُ رِسَالَةً أَحْتَهُ فِيهَا عَلَى الْعَوْدَةِ، مَبْرُزًا حَاجَةَ الْوَطَنِ إِلَى أَوْلَادِهِ الْمَغْتَرِبِينَ، مَبِينًا الْآثَارَ السَّلْبِيَّةَ لِغِيَابِ الْإِبْنَاءِ عَنِ أَوْطَانِهِمْ.

One of my family members contemplated settling abroad after finishing his university studies.

I will write a letter encouraging him to return, emphasizing the homeland's need for its expatriated sons, and presenting the negative effects of the sons' absence from their homeland.

*Arabic Language, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 31.*

### Women and Children as Victims of War

The following text describes, indirectly, one of the most painful dimensions of the war: prostitution and sexual slavery, by women whose husbands had died or who otherwise lost their source of livelihood, or daughters sold by their parents. The item describes efforts by a group of women to help others overcome their appalling circumstances through meaningful work.





During the war, a group of women established a team to assist the wives and daughters of the martyrs and wounded and displaced women who had not surrendered to their economic and living conditions. [The team] trained them for free in artisanal skills and crafts to enable them to feed their families and meet the difficult life through productive work. . .

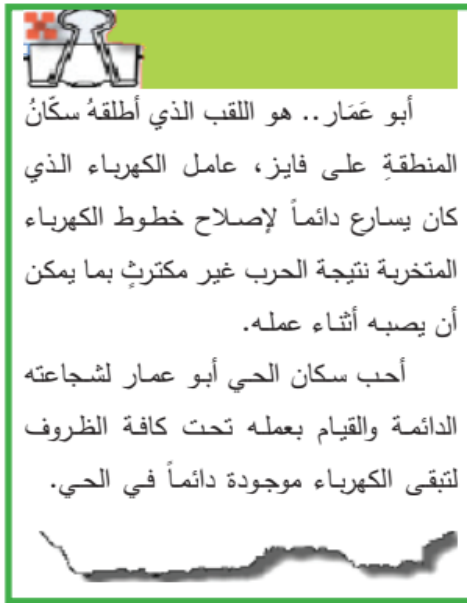
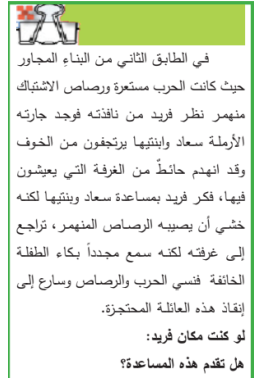
*National Education, Grade 7, 2017-18, p. 68.*

Stories of heroism and dedication during the trying circumstances of the war are featured.

As the war was raging and a hail of bullets from the clashes was coming down, Farid looked out of his window. In the second floor of the next building, he saw his widowed neighbor, Su'ad, and her two daughters trembling in fear. One of the walls of the room, in which they had been living, collapsed. Farid thought about helping Su'ad and her daughters, but he feared that the bullets would hit him. He returned to his room, but then heard again the cry of the frightened girl. He forgot about the war and the bullets and hurried to save this trapped family.

**If you were in Farid's place, would you offer this kind of assistance?**

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 71.*



Abu-Amar is the nickname given by the residents of the area to Fayeze, the electrician. He always hurries to fix the electric wires destroyed as a result of the war, indifferent about getting hurt while he works.

The residents of the neighborhood loved Abu-Amar for his everlasting courage and persistence in working under any circumstances, in order to keep electricity going in the neighborhood at all times.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 72.*



After Wisam graduated from the High Institute for Performing Arts, he volunteered, aside from his work, at the National Theater, so he could take advantage of his competence in providing social-psychological assistance to children affected by the war. He trained several of them and established a theater group, which performed in shows at the temporary residence centers for the victims of war. The shows were interactive and raised awareness, promoting high humanistic and nationalist values.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 81.*

As will be discussed in a later section,<sup>6</sup> Christian Education textbooks remind non-Muslim students of their obligation to join the military. The dangers to Christians and others from the [civil] war are clearly displayed.

**التقويم:**

١- الصور تظهر ما تخلفه الحرب !!  
اكتب تعليقاً تحت كل صورة.




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Evaluation:

1. The pictures display the consequences of war!!

Write a comment under each image

*Christian Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 116.*

<sup>6</sup> *Christian Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 114; (see also Christianity, p. 89)*

While some horrors are alluded to, the war's details remain officially hidden from students, particularly regarding rebels' suffering and losses.



Not in the curriculum: A neighborhood in Damascus' Eastern Ghouta (opposition areas during the bombing) -AFP<sup>7</sup>

### Business as Usual: Normalcy and Stability

The main thrust of the Syrian curriculum seems neither to present the horrors of the civil war nor to encourage grappling with its challenges. Instead, "normalcy" and the creation of an environment of "business as usual" appear to be the primary concern for the curriculum's authors. The elections which were held three years into the civil war are conveyed as a symbol of the thriving Syrian democracy.



Syria votes—June 3, 2014.

*National Education, Grade 8*, 2017–18, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Leila Sibai, "Ghouta and Systematic Forced Eviction: A Strategy of Demographic Change, Stories" (SOAS's alternative news magazine), March 9, 2018.

Accessed June 7, 2018. <https://medium.com/stories-soas/ghouta-and-systematic-forced-eviction-a-strategy-of-demographic-change-4e1334be2a0d>.

As support for the election's validity, the current Syrian constitution (revised February 2012) is depicted as proof of the democratic principle, "Rule of the People."

حَدَّدَ الدُّسْتُورُ سِمَاتَ نِظَامِ الحِكمِ فِي سِوْرِيَّةَ بِأَنَّهُ  
جُمْهُورِيٌّ، وَأَنَّ السِّيَادَةَ لِلشَّعْبِ وَلَا يَجُوزُ لِفَرْدٍ أَوْ  
جَمَاعَةٍ ادْعَاؤُهَا، وَتَقُومُ عَلَى مَبْدَأِ حِكمِ الشَّعْبِ  
بِالشَّعْبِ وَالشَّعْبِ.  
وَتُعَدُّ أَيُّهُ سُلْطَةٌ لَا تَصْدُرُ عَنِ الشَّعْبِ غَيْرُ  
شَرِيعَةٍ.

بَعْدَ قِرَائَتِكَ النِّصِّ وَالْمُسْتَنَدِ :

- عُلِّلَ عَدَمَ شَرِيعَةِ أَيِّ سُلْطَةٍ لَا تَصْدُرُ عَنِ الشَّعْبِ.
- اسْتَنْتَجَ المِهَامَ المَقَاةَ عَلَى عَاتِقِ رَئِيسِ الجُمْهُورِيَّةِ.

The constitution determines the characteristics of the regime in Syria—a republic; sovereignty belongs to the people; no person or group can claim it; and is based on the principle of the rule of the people, by the people and for the people.

Any authority which does not emanate from the people is considered illegal.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 48.*

The curriculum points to the illegality of non-regime authorities while stressing the responsibilities of President Assad.

After reading the text and the document:

- Explain the illegality of any authority not emanating from the people
- Discuss the tasks assigned to the president of the republic.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 48.*

The curriculum portrays Syria as a nation with various democratic components, while explaining the challenges of the civil war.



A democratic country with full sovereignty, indivisible and unwilling to concede any part of its lands, as part of the Arab Homeland.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 57.*

Other Syrian systems and institutions are emphasized for their democracy, including the presidency.

He is elected directly by the people for a term of four years. He works tirelessly to guard the constitution, to protect national unity and the country's survival.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 57.*

A quote from President Al-Assad's speech on the Syrian army holiday in 2013 is presented, showing the partnership between the military and the president every step of the way. In this same speech, Al-Assad also addressed the difficulties of the war and the achievements of his military, but these elements were not included in the textbook. Note the three heroic characters of Yusuf Azma, Hafez Al-Assad, and his son Bashar.



كان يوسف العظمة أول وزير للدفاع في الجمهورية العربية السورية منذ ١٩٢٠/٥/٣م ولغاية استشهاده في معركة ميسلون دفاعاً عن سورية من المستعمر الفرنسي في ١٩٢٠/٧/٢٤م.

حرب تشرين التحريرية عام ١٩٧٣م التي خاضها الجيش العربي السوري مع القوات المصرية لتحرير الأراضي العربية المحتلة في سورية ومصر وفلسطين أعادت للعرب كرامتهم ورفع فيها الفريق حافظ الأسد القائد العام للجيش والقوات المسلحة علم الجمهورية العربية السورية في سماء القنيطرة المحررة.

يقود الجيش والقوات المسلحة منذ عام ٢٠٠٠م رئيس الجمهورية العربية السورية الفريق بشار الأسد الذي خاطب جنوده بالوسائل بقوله: "بطلانكم تكتبون حروف النصر، وتعتبرون عن وجدان الشعب، وتحمون قيمه وتطلعاته، وتتضحياتكم تحافظون على وحدة الوطن وتصونون تراثه الطاهر، وتبذلون الغالي والنفيس كي تبقى رايته خفاقة عالية".

أكتب موضوعاً عن حرب تشرين التحريرية. 🗒️

57

The President of the Arab Syrian Republic, Field Marshal Bashar Al-Assad has commanded the Army and Armed Forces since the year 2000. He addressed his brave soldiers declaring: 'With your heroism, you write the letters of victory, embody the conscience of the people, protect the people's values and aspirations, and with your sacrifices, you safeguard our homeland's unity and pure soil, and sacrifice all that is precious and dear to keep the homeland flag flying high.'

*Social Studies, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 57.*



In a chapter dedicated to the "Problems Arab-Syrian Society Faces," students learn about air pollution, population density causing heavy traffic and high percentage of unemployment. However, there is no mention of any internal crisis or conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the difficulties in preparing new material in the midst of such conflict, there is an attempt throughout to introduce "normalcy." Data provided in the textbooks, such as population growth in Syria, avoid showing what is known about Syria's reality over the past few years,<sup>9</sup> and present a distorted image. The following disregards the millions of dead or displaced Syrian citizens.

قُدِّر عددُ سكَانِ سورِيَةِ عامِ 2012 بنحو 23 مليون نسمة وفق  
معدَّل نموٍّ يُقدَّر بنحو 27,5 بالألف سنوياً، ويُعدُّ ارتفاعُ نسبة  
الولادات (32 بالألف) وتدنِّي نسبة الوفيات (4,5 بالألف)  
سببَيْن رئيسيَّين في هذا النموِّ . حاول أن تفسِّر تدنِّي نسبة الوفيات.

The number of residents in Syria was estimated in 2012 to be approximately 23 million, according to the average growth percentage, estimated to be approximately 2.75 percent each year. The two main reasons for this growth are the rise of births to 3.2 percent and the decline of deaths to 0.45 percent. **Try to explain the decline in the percentage of deaths.**

*Geography, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 97.*

### Non-Conventional Weapons

Chemical weapons are mentioned in the textbooks without any consideration of relevance to current events. Ignoring the use of chemical weapons during the Syrian Civil War,<sup>10</sup> the subject is presented in a text about international norms with allusions to supposed Israeli war crimes.

ب - تُحظَرُ الأسلحةُ الكيماويَّةُ أو الهجماتُ التي تستهدفُ الأهدافَ المدنيَّةَ والعسكريَّةَ والأشخاصَ  
المدنيَّينَ والعسكريَّينَ من دونِ تَمييزٍ، ويَنجُمُ عنها إصاباتٌ ومُعاناةٌ بالغةٌ.

<sup>8</sup> *National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 29.*

<sup>9</sup> "Syria Population 2018," *World Population Review*.

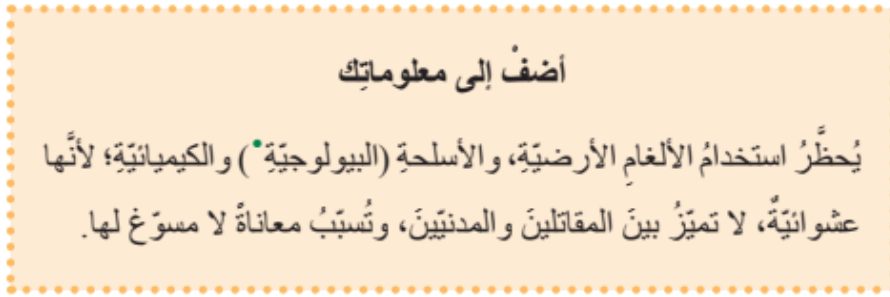
Accessed May 28, 2018. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/syria-population/>.

The population quoted for 2018 is 18,281,935, as compared to 21,018,834 in 2010. According to this source, there are now *nine* million Syrians who have fled *the country* and 6.5 million who have been displaced but *remain* in *Syria*. There are now 4.5 million refugees from the country in nearby countries: 117,658 in Egypt; 245,022 in Iraq; 635,324 in Jordan; 1.1 million in Lebanon; and 2.5 million in Turkey. In 2016, one estimate placed the number of dead at 470,000 although *estimates vary widely*.

<sup>10</sup> Daryl Kimball and Kelsey Davenport, et al., "Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012–2018," *Arms Control Association (ACA)*, updated May 2018.

Accessed June 6, 2018. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity>.

Banned are chemical weapons or [any] attacks indiscriminately directed at civilian and military targets, civilian and military persons, which cause injuries and extreme suffering.  
*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 100.*



### Add to Your Knowledge

The use of landmines, "biological" and chemical weapons is prohibited, because they are random, do not distinguish between fighters and civilians, and cause unwarranted suffering.

*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 101.*

There is no mention of nuclear weapons, prohibited or otherwise within the curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

### **Soft Power: Defending Syria's Honor Worldwide**

It is clear throughout the curriculum that the Syrian regime is fully aware of its reputation in the world, especially the way it is perceived and presented by global media. Students are encouraged to prove the world wrong, and show the real Syria which the world fails to see.

#### **رسالة إلى أطفال العالم**

أتعاونُ مع مجموعتي في الطلائع وأكتبُ رسالةً من أطفال الجمهورية العربية السورية إلى أطفال العالم، نعرّفهم من خلالها عن وطننا (طبيعته - آثاره - رموزه)

#### **A Message to the Children of the World**

I will collaborate with my group in the *Pioneers*<sup>12</sup> and write a message from the children of the Syrian Arab Republic to the children of the world, informing them about our homeland (its nature, antiquities, symbols).

*Social Studies, Grade 5, Vol. 2, p. 70.*

<sup>11</sup> "Syria, Nuclear," *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*, updated April, 2018.

Accessed June 6, 2018. <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/syria/nuclear/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ba'ath Party Pioneers Organization (*munazzamat tala'i' al-ba'ath*), originally the Pioneers of the Ba'ath and the Future Generation (*tala'i' al'ba'ath wa jil al-mustaqbal*) is the party youth movement. Joseph Sassoon, *Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 45.

'How wonderful that my beloved country is discussed on world TV,' cried Walid happily, as he watched views and images of Damascus and Ugarit.

'What? It can't be!' shouted Walid in dismay, as he read a translation denying the Syrian origin of the first alphabet which Ugarit introduced to the world, and denying Damascus its ancient roots.

'Could it be that such a big media organization makes such a mistake? And distorts the image of my country like this? What are they trying to gain from this?'

Walid asked for help from his father, who advised him to do research using reliable books from the city's library, ascertain with evidence and proof and verification that Ugarit is the native land of the alphabet, and Damascus is the most ancient populated capital in history.

[Walid] decided to publish what he had found in the school's wall magazine, and send it via internet to that misleading media organization. He also posted it on Facebook pages and social media, so as to protect other people from falling into the trap of the media deception.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 48.*



A veneer of normalcy in a time of catastrophe is also evident in the presentation of tourism. Students learn about the beauty of the country and its attractions, but not about the crises and disasters. For example, Palmyra's antiquities are shown. The ravage and destruction of the ancient site by ISIS while using it for staged executions of Syrian soldiers and civilians, are not mentioned in the curriculum.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Patrick J. McDonnell, "ISIS Militants Battered Syria's Ancient Palmyra, but Signs of Splendor still Stand," *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 2017.

Accessed June 8, 2018. <http://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-syria-palmyra-ruins-2017-story.html>.





صورة ( 16 ) آثار تدمر

### Palmyra Antiquities

#### Tourism: Syria's Industry of the Future

Syria is blessed with beautiful and diverse nature – mountains, rivers, deserts, enchanting forests and dozens of mountainous summer resorts, a mild, wonderful climate, as well as archeological sites and cities. All these factors make it an important destination on the world map of tourism.

*Geography, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 173.*

#### الدرس السادس السياحة .. صناعة المستقبل في سورية

تتمتع سورية بطبيعتها الجميلة المتنوعة، ما بين جبال وأنهار وصحار و غابات، ساحرة وعشرات المصايف الجبلية، ومناخها المعتدل الرائع، و المواقع والمدن الأثرية؛ مما جعل منها بلداً مهماً على الخريطة السياحية العالمية.

#### Packaging Reality

The textbooks attempt to show that Syria has been walking down the path of progress and achievement over the past years, under the leadership of President Bashar Al-Assad.<sup>14</sup> The importance of national dialogue is particularly emphasized, showing just how much rhetoric and reality clash in times like this.

In the following quotation, "national dialogue" is a benign process. Yet issues such as "corruption" and "fanaticism" as well as facing "outside dangers" hint to the civil war conditions.

<sup>14</sup> *History, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 11, 34.*



الحوار الوطني:  
هو الحوار الذي يجري بين أبناء المجتمع لمناقشة قضايا وطنهم السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية من خلال المؤسسات العامة ومؤسسات المجتمع المدني، وهو ضرورة لكل المجتمعات؛ لأنه يقوي النسيج الوطني، ويخلق استجابة للتحديات التي تتهدد المناعة الوطنية كالفساد والتعصب و...، ومواجهة الأخطار الخارجية كالغزو الثقافي والإعلامي، الذي يهدف إلى تفتيت الوحدة الوطنية...، وهو يدعم

**National Dialogue:**

is the dialogue that occurs between the sons of a society to discuss the political, economic and social issues that pertain to their homeland. National Dialogue is conducted through public and civil society's institutions. Dialogue is essential for all societies, because it strengthens the national fabric. It creates a response to the challenges which threaten national resilience, such as corruption and fanaticism, among others. It guards against outside dangers, such as cultural and media attacks which attempt to destroy national unity.

*National Education, Grade 9, 2–18, p. 61.*



Not in the curriculum: The opposition's original 3-star flag. The armed opposition refused to participate in Russia-sponsored Congress of Syrian National Dialogue taking offence at the event logo, which used the flag of Bashar Al-Assad's regime in isolation.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Oliver Carroll, "Russian Syria Peace Talks Achieve Little," *The Independent*, January 30, 2018. Accessed June 8, 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/syria-civil-war-russia-sochi-talks-assad-lavrov-protests-boycott-a8186371.html>.

## Syrian Identity: Radical Arabism

The civil war exposed a major fault line in the functioning and solidarity of Syrian society. How did events combine and ultimately result in the deterioration of the structure of a society and ultimately a cruel civil war?

A hint can be found in Syria's school textbooks. In addition to a modern authoritarian worldview that embodies Syrian nationalism, one finds a radical pan-Arab ideology. Assad's Syria educates its children to live in a society that is essentially modern but based on Arab solidarity to the exclusion of other ethnic identities. Gender sensitivity is encouraged, religiosity is controlled and limited, and ethnic and confessional diversity are suppressed. The belief persists in a mandate to unite the Arab Homeland into a large and powerful state.

The following sections will include an overview of how this authoritarian and monochromatic identity dictates the view of Syria's friends and enemies. In the fifth section we will see how controlled religious and gender freedom at home is taught. The last section addresses the dichotomy of how a regime that practices and preaches radical ruthless violence also educates to cherish international organizations and love peace (as an abstract idea).

### **National Symbols**

National symbols are central to the definition of national identity in Syria, as seen in primary grade textbooks. The common symbols (flag, anthem, and crest<sup>16</sup>) are presented to children, and emphasized as a part of their everyday life (school, family, friends).

The Syrian flag (or the regime's flag)<sup>17</sup> is introduced using pictures and poems and is seen everywhere in the primary grade curriculum. No illustration of a school building can be found in any textbook without a Syrian flag flying over it.

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<sup>16</sup> *Social Studies*, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup> The flag used by the Syrian rebels is the original Syrian flag (1932–59; 1961–80). The current flag was first introduced as the flag of the 1958–61 United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria represented by the two stars) and later readopted by the Assad regime in 1980. Both flags are symbolically committed to pan-Arabism; colors denoting the Umayyad (white), Abbasid (black), Fatimid (green) and Hashemite (red) "pan-Arab" states. For the original/rebel flag see: "Free Syrian flag in Refugee Camp," PBS Learning Media, n.d.

Accessed May 25, 2018. <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/160326795-syria/free-syrian-flag-in-refugee-camp-conflicts-syria/#.WwfGAO6FPX4>.



*Social Studies, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2017-18, p. 14.*<sup>18</sup>

When children are taught about the five senses, the national flag is shown to illustrate the sense of sight.

With my two eyes, I see the flags fluttering safely and peacefully.

*Arabic is My Language, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017-18, p. 92.*



أرسمُ ماما أرسمُ بابا  
بالألوان  
أرسمُ علمي فوقَ القممِ  
أنا فنان  
أرسمُ أرسمُ قمةَ الجبلِ  
أرسمُ أرسمُ لونَ البحرِ  
أكتبُ ويقرأُ بالألوانِ  
أشياءَ عِزًّا أنا فنان  
شليليل العيني

The flag is considered a source of pride for children, encompassing their everyday life and expressed in their daily activities.

I draw mom, I draw dad  
In colors  
I draw my flag over the mountain tops  
I am an artist

<sup>18</sup> See more flags pp. 32-34.

Let me draw the light of the stars  
 Let me draw the color of vineyards  
 I write a poem in colors  
 I am free  
 I am an artist  
 Suleiman Issa

*My Beautiful Language: Arabic, Grade 1*, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 77.

An Arabic Language textbook begins with the Syrian National Anthem "Guardians of the Homeland" (*Humat ad-Diyar*) and teaches students how to behave in front of their flag.



I stand in respect and appreciation of the Syrian national flag and celebrate it.  
*Arabic is My Language, Grade 2*, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 7.

The spirit of "Guardians of the Homeland" can be appreciated from this partial loose translation:

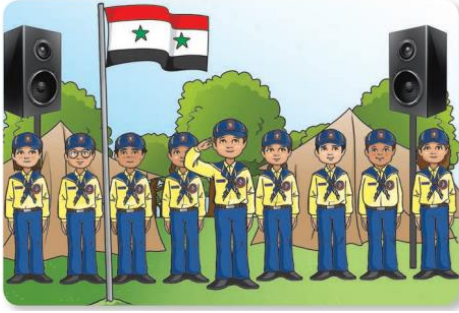
Defenders of our home,  
 Peace be upon you;  
 The proud spirits had  
 Refused to subdue.  
 The lion-abode of Arabism,  
 A hallowed sanctuary;  
 The seat of the stars,  
 An inviolable preserve.  
 Our hopes and our hearts,  
 Are entwined with the flag,  
 Which unites our country . . .<sup>19</sup>

The original Arabic-language anthem praises martyrdom and encourages giving one's blood and sacrifice in battle. While not elaborated in this grade 2 textbook, it is worth noting that the

<sup>19</sup> Pro-Assad's Syrian Friendship Association website, n.d.  
 Accessed May 24, 2018. [http://syrian-friendship-association.org/National\\_Anthem/National\\_Anthem.html](http://syrian-friendship-association.org/National_Anthem/National_Anthem.html).

wording of the Syrian anthem is pan-Arab. "The lion-abode of Arabism" is described as "holy house" (*bayt haram*), suggesting that secular Arabism leads over Islam, centered in Mecca (*al-bayt al-Haram*, the holy house). Two heroes are mentioned: the Umayyad Caliph (Al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik) and the Abbasid Caliph (Harun Al-Rashid), both symbols of Arab empires at their height.<sup>20</sup>

برأيك لماذا وقفت الأطفال المشاركين في المخيّم باحترام عند رفع العلم العربيّ السوريّ وسماع النشيد الوطنيّ للجمهورية العربية السورية.



In your opinion, why do the camp children stand respectfully as the Arab Syrian flag is raised and the national anthem of the Arab Syrian Republic is played?

**Social Studies, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 35.**

In a chapter entitled "Symbols of the Homeland Bring us Together," the first symbol presented is that of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad; his name is not given but students are expected to know it.



رئيس الجمهورية العربية السورية: هو مواطنٌ عربيٌّ سوريٌّ، ينتخبه الشعب، يسهر على تحقيق الأمن والاستقرار، ويضمن مصلحة الشعب والوطن.

رئيس الجمهورية العربية السورية هو من الرموز الوطنيّة. رئيسنا هو

<sup>20</sup> *Arabic is My Language, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 7.*



**The President of the Arab Syrian Republic** is an Arab-Syrian citizen, elected by the people, working day and night to ensure security and stability, safeguarding the interests of the people and the homeland.

The President of the Arab Syrian Republic is one of the national symbols. Our president is.....

*Social Studies, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 43.*

The current presidency, established through father-son succession, is depicted as a positive and necessary trend.

**التَّقْوِيمُ النَّهَائِي**



نحتفلُ يومَ السَّادِسِ عَشَرَ مِنْ تَشْرِينِ الثَّانِي بِذِكْرِ الحَرَكَةِ التَّصْحِيحِيَّةِ الَّتِي قَادَهَا القَائِدُ المَوْسِسُ حَافِظُ الأَسَدِ ليرسَمَ معالِمَ سوريَّةِ الحديثَةِ، فإذا نظرنا لحظةً أمامنا، فإننا نجدُ الكثيرَ مِنَ المَشروعاتِ الحَيَوِيَّةِ الَّتِي انتشرتْ فوقَ أرضِها شرقاً وغرباً، ولعلَّ التَّأمُلَ بُرْهَةً يجعلُنا نلحظُ ثمارَ مسيرةِ التَّطوِيرِ والتَّحديثِ بقيادةِ القَائِدِ المُفدَى بِشَارِ الأَسَدِ.

١- استخرجَ ظروفَ الزَّمانِ والمكانِ الواردةَ في الفِقْرَةِ السَّابِقَةِ، وصنَّفها في جدولٍ وفقِ الآتي:

### Final Evaluation

On November 16 we celebrate the anniversary of the Corrective Movement [the 1970 bloodless *coup d'état* and its aftermath], led by the founding leader Hafez Al-Assad, to chart the milestones of modern Syria. If we look ahead of us for a moment, we will find many vital projects, which have been spread across the country—east to west. Perhaps this short contemplation will enable us to notice the fruits of the march toward development and modernity, led by our beloved leader Bashar Al-Assad.

*Arabic is My Language, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 87.*

### **Syrian Army**

The Syrian Armed Forces, loyal to the Assad regime, are accorded much love and respect in the Syrian curriculum. A grade 3 social studies chapter entitled "My Homeland" begins with a full-page illustration of a soldier surrounded by hearts. The soldier, placing his hand over his heart, wears a badge shaped like the map of Syria.



*Social Studies, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 41.*

A similar grade 4 chapter begins with a lesson titled: "Guardians of the Homeland"—the name of the Syrian National Anthem often applied to the rank and file of the Syrian army in contexts such as Armed Forces Day.<sup>21</sup>



[Mazen, a boy:] 'Why is the plane dropping paper scraps?'

[Mazen's Father:] 'It is August 1, Guardians of my Homeland Holiday.'

Mazen picked up a paper scrap and read:

'We continue to be committed to the pledge, fully prepared to protect you,'

The Arab Syrian Army.

*Social Studies, Grade 4, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 46.*

<sup>21</sup> No Author, "Syria Celebrates the 70th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Army" (Arabic), *Al-Watan*, August 1, 2015. Accessed May 24, 2018. <http://alwatan.sy/archives/13600>.



This passage seems to suggest a distinction between those who remain loyal as opposed to those who deserted from the army to join the rebels, thus breaking their pledge of allegiance. The various branches of the army are presented, emphasizing the defensive nature of the Syrian military forces.



I will properly complete the blanks, to familiarize myself with the branches of the Arab Syrian Army:

Ground Forces—responsible for protecting land borders.

[Naval]..... Forces—responsible for protecting sea borders.

[Air]..... Forces—responsible for protecting the homeland's skies.

*Social Studies, Grade 4, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 47.*

An illustration entitled "Personalities from my Homeland" shows a boy sitting in front of a computer, thinking about Syria. On the screen: battle scenes and two national personalities, "The Immortal Leader" Hafez Al-Assad<sup>22</sup> (Bashar's father) and Yusuf Al-Azma, Minister of War who commanded Syrian forces against the French invasion in the 1920 Battle of Maysalun. The centrality of the armed forces and Assad dynasty is evident; it is the Assad dynasty—not the rebels—that is the legitimate inheritor of the genuine Syrian army and the heroic founding fathers of Syria. The war against the current uprising is not mentioned; but martyrdom and sacrifice are instilled in the context of the uprisings against the French and hope for taking back the Golan.

<sup>22</sup> *Arabic is My Language, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 28.*



*Arabic is My Language, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 59.*

Syria's Independence or Evacuation Day [the end of the French mandate on April 17, 1946] is presented to children, as portraits of President Bashar Al-Assad and flags of Syria and Palestine hang above their heads. The text (which follows the picture), includes:



*Arabic is My Language, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 27.*

You—my children—enjoy this country with safety and love; you live in the era of independence, the era of freedom, but your forefathers fought the colonizer, sacrificed their pure blood for the homeland, and offered martyrs to liberate it, so let us all greet the martyrs!

It was a marvelous day, a day we will never forget—April 17, the anniversary of the French colonialist evacuation from our country in 1946. Is there a day greater than this? We were so happy on that day! How I wish for the day when we will liberate our beloved Golan!

*Arabic is My Language, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, pp. 28.*

Defense is a priority since Syria is "a target of colonial powers in all their forms."<sup>23</sup> Students are called to individually participate in defending Syria (the regime). The Syrian army is central, legitimate and serving the people.

• لكل منا دوره في الدفاع عن سورية والحفاظ على أمنها واستقرارها.

• الجيش والقوات المسلحة مؤسسة وطنية مسؤولة عن الدفاع عن سلامة أرض الوطن وسيادته الإقليمية وهي في خدمة مصالح الشعب وحماية أهدافه وأمنه الوطني.

- Each of us has his role in defending Syria and guarding its security and stability.
- The army and armed forces are a national institution, responsible for defending the integrity and territorial sovereignty of the homeland; they serve the people's interests, protecting its goals and national security.

*Social Studies, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 54.*

### National Affiliation and Patriotism

Poems and school activities are presented and suggested, emphasizing the role of children in Syria's future. A poem and illustration opens the chapter "Children."



We have come, we have come  
We build the homeland.  
We are the next rising dawn  
We are the next splendid generation.

<sup>23</sup> *Social Studies, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 54.*

We build the homeland  
And it lives within us.

***My Beautiful Language: Arabic, Grade 1***, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 61.

Children are asked to create a group project which includes information they have learned about Syria. This image illustrates examples of such projects.



***Social Studies, Grade 1***, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 47.

A chapter entitled "Affiliation and Citizenship," which is divided into four chapters: "Beautiful Language," "My School," "My Homeland" and "Children," opens with the following image and explanation:



My home, my school, my country—all are my homeland.  
As I grow older, my love for my homeland grows more and more in my heart.

***My Beautiful Language: Arabic, Grade 1***, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 24.



National affiliation is considered more important than any other affiliation a Syrian may be committed to. The definition of national affiliation is accompanied by a photo of a military ceremony, emphasizing the importance of the Syrian army to this priority.



*National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 10.*

A wide range of social, political, intellectual and religious affiliations are formed in the life of the individual, affecting his path and behavior. The individual's sense of belonging begins with small circles that extend from the family and group of friends and colleagues at the school and local community—until it reaches wider circles such as national [*watani*] pan-Arab [*qawmi*] affiliations.

It is here that a bond is being formed between the citizen to his homeland, towering above clan and tribal relations. This bond is expressed in the commitment of the individual to the national values that he embraces, and that are appreciated by all sons of the homeland.

*National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 10.*

Syrian textbooks highlight the country's geographic importance, a source of pride, yet something which has always placed it in danger, over the course of history.

### الدرس الثاني : سورية أهمية الموقع، وعبقريته الإنسان

أعطى الموقع الجغرافي سورية أهمية حيوية منذ القدم؛ تمثلت في حضاراتها القديمة والأنشطة البشرية للشعوب التي سكنتها قديماً وحتى الوقت الحاضر، وقد أسهمت هذه الأهمية في جعلها مطمعا للغزاة والاستعمار .

### **Syria: Importance of Locale; Ingenuity of People**

Syria's geographic location has been of vital importance since ancient times, as reflected by its ancient civilization and activities of the peoples that dwelled throughout the land in ancient times until the present. This contributed to making Syria the coveted object of conquest to invaders and colonialism.

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 19.*

It is worth noting that Syria is seen as a land endowed with "special powers," making its inhabitants and peoples important and ingenious. There is no effort here to Arabize ancient peoples and civilizations. Nevertheless, as shown in the following segment, fervent Arabism or pan-Arabism is central to the Syrian identity.

### **Pan-Arabism**

While instilling a healthy sense of Syrian nationalism, the curriculum is totally committed to pan-Arabism, a worldview according to which all Arabs form one indivisible nation. According to this folkish (ethno-nationalistic) view, all Arab countries and other territories seen as "Arab," should have been—and will one day be—one territorial political unit. Current borders are artificial, a corollary of imperialistic schemes.

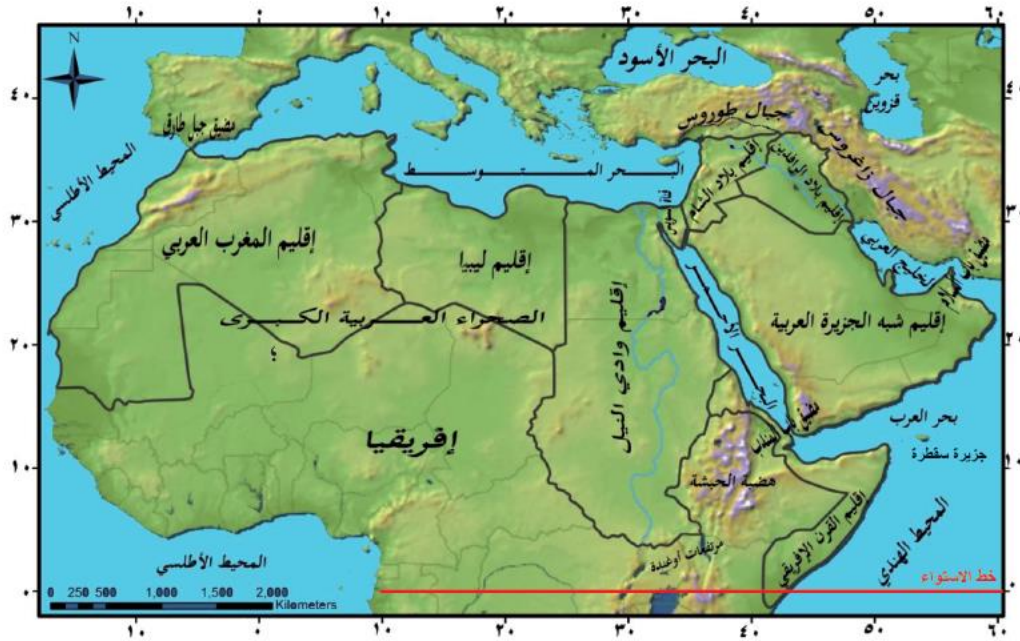
### **Colonial Greed has Changed the Borders and Fragmented the Arab Homeland**

The current political borders of the Arab Homeland do not match its natural borders. These borders sustained many excesses by neighboring countries, in addition to artificial borders charted by the colonial powers among the [Arab Homeland's existing] countries.

How do you think you [we] could get rid of these artificial borders?

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 19.*

The curriculum attempts to justify the unification of two contradictory concepts: that of Syria as one national entity and The "Arab Homeland" as another. One bridging scenario is the division of the "Arab Homeland" into seven regions (*aqalim*), in which a Greater Syria or the Levant (*Bilad al-Sham*) is evident. There is no room for non-Arab polities in Greater Syria or elsewhere in the "Arab Homeland." Israel and (Turkish) Alexandretta form part of this dream.

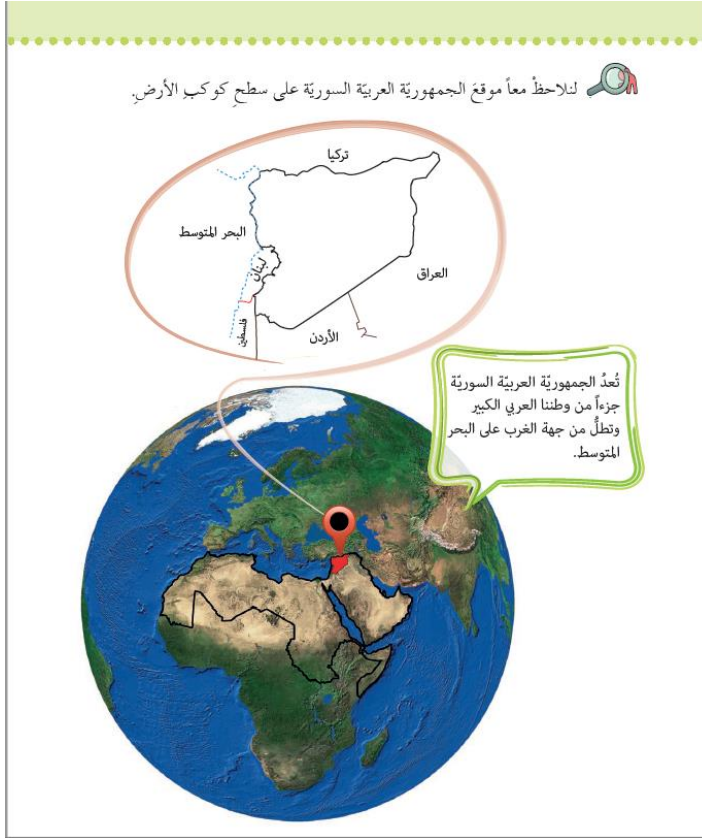


الخريطة رقم (5) الوطن العربي والأقاليم السبعة

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 24.*

Another way to square the circle is for Syrians to retain both imagined identities. The following textbook page for grade 1 features two combined maps. One, a somewhat larger "Syria Proper" (including Turkish Alexandretta and the Israeli Golan) within an "Arab Homeland" context; another, "Syria Proper" and neighboring countries: Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine (instead of Israel) and Lebanon. The implicit recognition of Lebanon in this map is not obvious.<sup>24</sup> There is no "Greater Syria" in this concept.

<sup>24</sup> Syria, which withdrew its forces from Lebanon after a 29-year presence in 2005, opened an embassy in Beirut only in 2008 without naming an ambassador. "Lebanon Opens Embassy in Syria," *The National*, Mar 16, 2009. Accessed May 28, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/lebanon-opens-embassy-in-syria-1.557337>.



The Arab Syrian Republic is considered part of our great "Arab Homeland," overlooking the Mediterranean Sea to the west.

**Social Studies, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 30.**

Determine the location of your homeland Syria, in relation to the Arab homeland and the world.

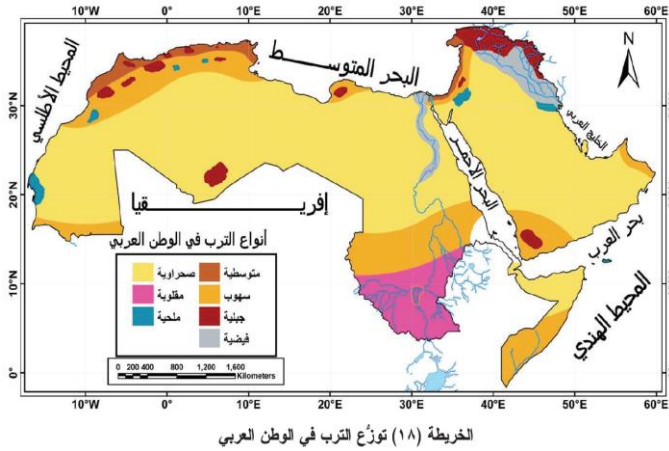


**Social Studies, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 63.**



Note that Spain, the former Arab-Islamic Al-Andalus, is not included in the "Arab Homeland," but Israel (Palestine) is represented, as is Turkey's Alexandretta.

Turkish areas and all of Israel are included in all "Arab Homeland" maps (see more in the next sections). It goes without saying that Kurdish or other non-Arab entities are not seen in the maps. In other cases, the larger Turkish areas are shown.



Map 18: Soil Spread in the Arab Homeland

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and the World, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 50.*

Sometimes, a smaller version including only Alexandretta, but not other Turkish areas, are shown as part of the imagined "Arab Homeland."



Map of Climate Areas in the Arab Homeland

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 36.*

The affiliation with the "Arab Homeland" is specific and widespread. Here images are presented as part of the "Arab Homeland" from a geography textbook:



الصورة (2) مضيق جبل طارق من الفضاء

*A View of Gibraltar Straits from Space (Jabal Tareq)*

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 16.*

Images of religious sites in the "Arab Homeland."



The Ka'ba in Saudi Arabia. The Holy Sepulcher and Al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestine (not Israel)

الصورة (3) الكعبة المشرفة في المملكة العربية السعودية      الصورة (4) كنيسة المهد في فلسطين



الصورة (5) المسجد الأقصى في فلسطين

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 16.*

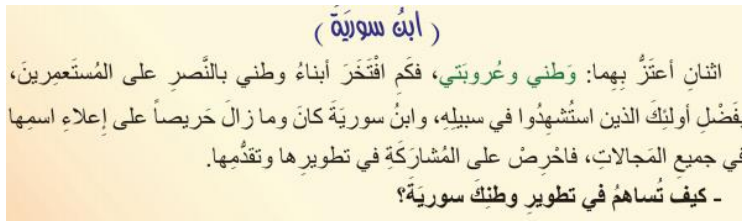
The people of Syria are part of the Arab Nation:



[The people] exercise sovereignty within the framework and limits stipulated by the constitution, and form part of the Arab Nation.

*National Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 57.*

Syrians are defined by the pride they take in their country and their pan-Arabism, as shown in the following example:



### The Son of Syria

Two things I cherish: my *homeland* and my *Arabism*. How proud were the sons of my homeland for their victory over the colonialists, thanks to those who had been martyred in its cause. The son of Syria was and still is ardent to promote its fame in every field. Be ardent to take part in its development and progress.

How will you contribute to the development of your homeland Syria?

*Arabic is My Language, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 87.*

The Syrian curriculum distinguishes between and simultaneously combines, Syrian country-centered nationalism and pan-Arabism. The cause of this unnatural duality according to the curriculum is colonialism.

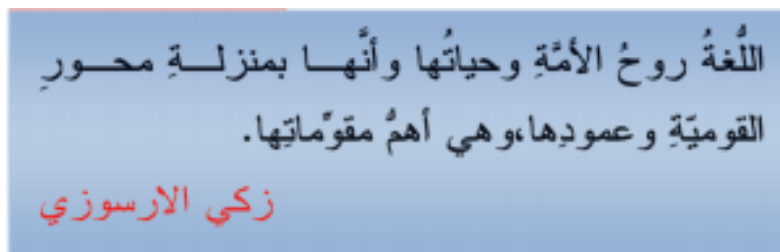


In natural conditions and historical development, a nation forms one national independent sovereign state, such as Germany or France. In these cases, nationalism and pan-nationalism are overlapping. There are many nations, however, that colonialism weakened by dividing them. So, petty states were formed; each independent of the other. The governments of [these petty states] enhanced their country-centered nationalism. This led to the rise of pan-national movements [in these nations], struggling for freedom from colonialism and to create one pan-national state, which would include the people of all these states in one united territory (as is the case of the Arab Homeland).

*National Education, Grade 9*, 2017–18, p. 37.

Arabic plays a key role in Syrian identity, a natural component of any segment of the Arab Nation. Syria has an overwhelming majority of Arabic speakers. We did not identify any Syrian Kurdish (Kurmanji), Turkish or Aramaic teaching, either as a first or second language, although the ethno-linguistic Kurdish minority is large—forming about 10 percent of the population. The numbers of Turkmen and Assyrians is also significant.<sup>25</sup>

Zaki Al-Arsuzi, one of the Ba'ath party founders, is quoted.



The language is the spirit and life of the [Arab] Nation. It maintains the position of the [Arab] Nation's axis and pillar, and forms its most important element.

*National Education, Grade 9*, 2017–18, p. 37.

Syria still sees itself as leader of the pan-Arab cause, fighting tirelessly for its realization, and considers former failed attempts as reasons to continue pursuing this goal.

<sup>25</sup> Syria's Kurds are estimated at two million, Turkmen at 0.75–1.5 million and Assyrians 0.9 to 1.2 million. "Syria Population 2018," *World Population Review*.

Accessed May 28, 2018. <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/syria-population/>.

The Assyrians' ethnic language is the Assyrian Neo-Aramaic dialect. Another Syrian dialect, the Western Neo-Aramaic, has been identified as the last of the Western Aramaic languages in use. It has speakers in the three Syrian villages of Ma'loula, Bakh'a, and Jubb'adin, located about thirty-five miles northeast of Damascus. Editor, "What Languages Are Spoken In Syria?" *World Atlas*, nd.

Accessed June 7, 2018. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-syria.html>.

دور سورية القيادي في تحقيق التضامن العربي:  
 أكدت سورية على السدوم ضرورة تحقيق  
 الوحدة العربية، وحققت أول تجربة وحدوية مع  
 مصر عام ١٩٥٨م، كما قامت محاولات  
 وحدوية مع بعض الأقطار العربية منها ميثاق  
 طرابلس عام ١٩٧٠م بين سورية ومصر وليبيا  
 والسودان، واتخاذ الجمهوريات العربية  
 ١٧ نيسان ١٩٧١م بين سورية ومصر وليبيا،  
 وميثاق العمل القومي بين سورية والعراق  
 عام ١٩٧٨م، ومشروع دولة الوحدة السورية الليبية عام ١٩٨٠م.  
 كما دعت سورية إلى تحقيق التضامن مع الأقطار العربية الذي تجسّد فعلياً في حرب تشرين  
 التحريرية، وتقديم كل أشكال الدعم للمقاومة العربية في لبنان وفلسطين والعراق، وتحمل  
 سورية أعباءً وضغوطات كبيرة بحكم مواقفها القومية.

### Syria's Leading Role in Achieving Arab Solidarity:

Syria has always emphasized the need for achieving Arab unity. It achieved its first unifying experiment with Egypt in 1958 [United Arab Republic], as well as additional attempts at uniting with a number of Arab countries: the Tripoli Charter of 1970 including Syria, Egypt, Libya and Sudan;<sup>26</sup> the Federation of Arab Republics [FAR] in April 18, 1971 with Syria, Egypt and Libya; the Charter for Joint National Action between Syria and Iraq in 1978; and the Syrian-Libyan Unity State Project in 1980. In addition, Syria called for solidarity with the Arab countries, which materialized on the ground in the Tishrin War of Liberation [Yom Kippur War, 1973], and provided every means of possible assistance to the Arab Resistance in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. Syria carries a great burden and faces many pressures in leading the pan-Arab positions.

*National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 68.*

The students learn to be proud of Syria's assistance to terror groups, dubbed here "Arab Resistance," in Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq.<sup>27</sup>

### Ancient Origins

The topic of the ancient origins of Syria is presented in a new 2017–18 history textbook entitled: *Ancient Syria*. The students are taught about the cultures which inhabited Syria in ancient times. These ancient cultures are considered to be the ancestors of the Syrian or pan-Arab people. Examples focus on contemporary Syria but also include Mesopotamia and Egypt.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The Tripoli Charter was signed December 27, 1969. Peter K. Bechtold, "New Attempts at Arab Cooperation: The Federation of Arab Republics, 1971-?" *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Spring, 1973), pp. 152–72; also p. 151.

<sup>27</sup> In Lebanon alone, Syria supported Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations, was involved in assassinations of Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt in 1977 and Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, as well as in the Tel Zaatar and other massacres.

<sup>28</sup> Comprising the Mari Kingdom, Yabrud cave dwellers, Mureybet culture, Tell Abu Hureyra (first agriculturalists), Urkesh, Ibla, Amorites, Palmyrenes, Arameans, people of Ugarit, Akkadians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Phoenicians-Canaanites; *Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, pp. 18–19, 43, 99–100, 104–07.*



While the text does refer to "our ancestors" and "our cultural origins,"<sup>29</sup> the methodology applied is advanced and scientific. Students learn how knowledge is gathered and reconstructed, the meaning of periodization, context, historical events, and a variety of sociological, cultural and anthropological considerations such as gender roles and the customs of various peoples and cultures. There is no overt effort toward Arabization of ancient cultures. Nevertheless, one can find current narratives disguised within the textbook, for example, discussing ancient cultures residing in the "Arab Homeland." Much emphasis is given to freedom for women in ancient, Syria and Egypt.<sup>30</sup>

The curriculum authors admit they "relied on the social and cultural constituents of the Syrian Arab Republic." The textbook "takes into account the participation of the local community and parents in its development."<sup>31</sup>

The added messaging appears to include two main layers. One relates to defining identity and political culture. The other reflects perhaps current thought as regards friends and foes in the post-civil war era.

The textbooks encourage dignity in being a Syrian; social activism such as mutual help and volunteering; pride in a tradition of equal rights for women in Syria as the land of religions and, as a corollary, religious tolerance; the importance of entertainment such as theater; and understanding ancient symbols now used as national symbols (e.g., the Syrian eagle).<sup>32</sup>

One should note the abundance of mythological, polytheistic and multi-cultural messaging within a general paradigm arguing that Syrian and other Middle Eastern cultures—particularly in Egypt—used to be open and liberal. This state of affairs took a turn for the worse with the Greek and Roman "occupation," but principles of equality and openness were reintroduced by the monotheistic religions, namely Christianity and Islam.<sup>33</sup>

This leads us to the second layer, projection from the past to the future. While as mentioned earlier, the text is generally high quality and instructive, some civilization/empires are good, but others bring unwanted "occupation." Then there are those civilizations which are completely (or almost completely) ignored.

Those considered good civilizations are part of the current Arab world, especially Syria, but with a great deal of positive attention given to ancient Egypt. The "evil" empires are the Persians, Greeks and Romans. Downplayed or ignored altogether are the cultures of Anatolia

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<sup>29</sup> "Who are our ancestors [*ajdaduna*]? i.e., our cultural origins;" *Ancient Syria: History*, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 15. This is a careful phrasing, which avoids Arabization of pre-Islamic civilizations, yet also creates region-based continuity.

<sup>30</sup> *Ancient Syria: History*, Grade 7, 2017–18, pp. 24–25, 27.

<sup>31</sup> *Ancient Syria: History*, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 5.

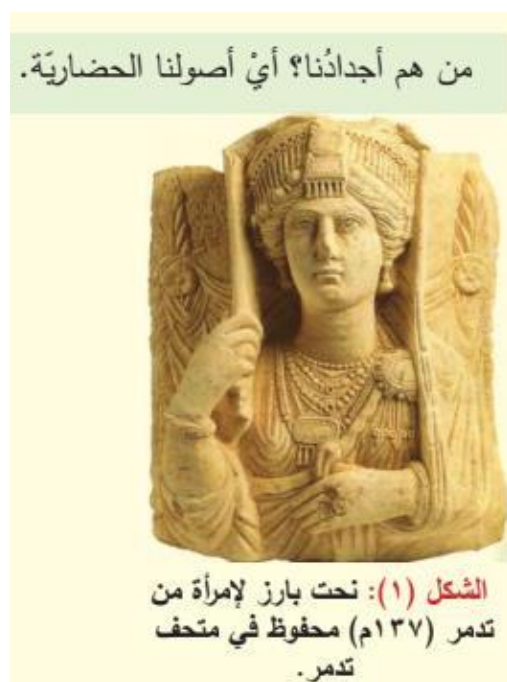
<sup>32</sup> *Ancient Syria: History*, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ancient Syria: History*, Grade 7, 2017–18, pp. 32–33, 100.

(contemporary Turkey) and the Israelites (contemporary Israel), with little attention given to the Canaanites forming part of the "Arab Homeland," and Greater Syria. The invention of the alphabet, for example, is accorded to the "purely-Syrian" Ugarit civilization, not Phoenicians in contact with Egypt, as scholars typically would have it.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, agriculture is taught to have begun in Syria, even though historical data are more nuanced.<sup>35</sup>

Most interesting is the favorite view of the Syrian-Egyptian and Egyptian-Syrian ancient empires, perhaps suggesting a hope for renewing the Syrian-Egyptian alliance of classical pan-Arabism.

### Who are our ancestors or our cultural origins?



Relief of a woman from Palmyra  
(137 CE—Palmyra Museum)

***Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7*, 2017–18, p. 15.**

<sup>34</sup>K. Lake, and R. Blake, "The Serabit Inscriptions: I. The Rediscovery of the Inscriptions", *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Jan. 1928): pp. 1–8; Frank M. Cross "The Evolution of the Proto-Canaanite Alphabet." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 134 (1954): pp. 15–24; Gordon J. Hamilton, *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts* (Washington DC, Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006): pp. 311-21; Orly Goldwasser, "How the Alphabet was Born from Hieroglyphs," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (2010).

<sup>35</sup> Rhitu Chatterjee, "Where Did Agriculture Begin? Oh Boy, It's Complicated," *NPR*, July 15, 2016.

Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/07/15/485722228/where-did-agriculture-begin-oh-boy-its-complicated>;

"The Development of Agriculture: The Farming Revolution," *National Geographic*, 2018.

Accessed June 1, 2018. <https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/development-of-agriculture/>.



Pre-Islamic civilizations are neither Arabized nor described as ignorant, primitive or barbaric. Yet ancient dwellers of Syria seem to automatically acquire the trait of "being Syrian." Syrian textbooks acknowledge the polytheistic nature of the people of those times, which later developed into monotheistic (or as in Arabic: "heavenly") religions.

### نشر الديانات السماوية:

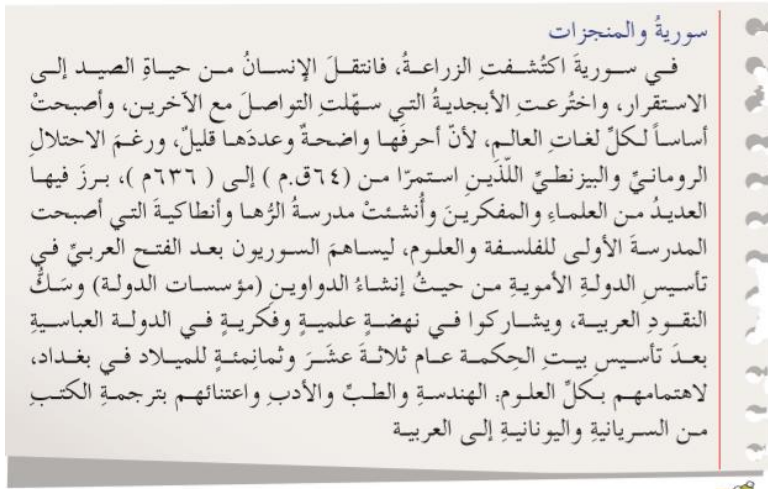
آمن السوريون بوجود كبير للآلهة مع وجود أربابٍ مساعدةٍ له، مهّد ذلك لتقبلهم فكرة التوحيد التي جاءت بها الديانات السماوية، وبسبب استمرار الاحتلال الروماني لسورية واضطهاده لسكانها

### Spread of the Heavenly Religions:

The Syrians believed in the existence of a chief god and other gods in his service. This belief established the foundation of their ultimate acceptance of monotheism, which was brought about by the heavenly religions.

*Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 33.*

The achievements of the people who inhabited Syria in ancient times are considered part of Syrian history. They later contributed to the advancement of the Islamic dynasties.



### Syria and its Achievements

Agriculture was discovered in Syria, as people shifted from a hunting life to stability. The alphabet was invented, which made communication with others easier and became the base of all languages of the world, because its letters are clear and their number is small. And despite the Roman and Byzantine occupations<sup>36</sup> from 64 BCE–636 CE, many Syrian scientists and thinkers excelled. The School of Edessa in Antakya [now in Turkey] was

<sup>36</sup> Note the juxtaposition of "Roman and Byzantine occupations" with the Arab "conquest." The positive word for conquest, *fath*, is typically applied to Islam, but here the conquest is ethnic Arab. Similarly, the translation movement was mainly Christian with some Jews and others also participating, but here it is described as Syrian. So, the curriculum combines the dual identity of belonging to the territory of Syria and belonging to the ethnic Arab affiliation.

established. Thus, after the Arab conquest, the Syrians contributed to the foundation of the Umayyad state by establishing the state's institutions, minting Arab coins and taking part in the scientific and intellectual renaissance of the Abbasid state. This was preceded by the establishment in Baghdad, of the House of Wisdom (*Bayt Al-Hikma*), in 813 CE, due to their interest in all intellectual domains: engineering, medicine and literature, and their translation of books from Syriac and Greek to Arabic.

*Social Studies, Grade 5*, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 61.

## Strategic Positioning: Friends and Competitors

This section will focus on Syria's future by learning how the next generation is taught about the country's friends and competitors, including those involved in the civil war who support the regime (Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, Egypt) and one that is clearly in opposition (Turkey).

We already know at this stage that Assad's Syrians are thoroughly educated in pan-Arabism, envisaging the unification of all Arab countries with one ethno-linguistic culture ruling supreme and with territory now comprising other countries. We also know that unlike Islamism, Syrian Arabism has limits. Not all the world should become Arabs. But no non-Arab should rule the Arab.

### Russia

The Russian Federation and the USSR that preceded it, has been Syria's most consistent and long-standing ally since its independence in 1944. In recent years, Russia, with Iran, has become a full partner of Bashar Al-Assad's regime in the civil war.

Syrian history textbooks feature pro-Soviet and pro-Russian historiography. In terms of gender, general culture, secularism and political culture, Assad's curriculum shares much in common with Russian goals. Assad's Arabism, like Putin's Russia, envisages one vast, powerful homeland connected by one language, heritage and scientific attitude to life and faith. Both cover about 10 percent of the globe, but not all of it. Both are authoritarian, but not totalitarian, intrusive and limitless. They do not aim at conquering the entire world and are therefore dramatically different from Islamism—of the Khomeinist-Shiite and the Sunni Muslim Brethren/Salafi-*jihadi* type—or, for that matter, of the Communist International (Comintern).

An indication of the growing Russian influence on the Syrian educational system is seen in the 2014–15 curriculum, when the Russian language was introduced to Syrian schools as a second foreign language from the seventh grade on, offering students a choice between French or Russian. Statistics show that over ten thousand students in more than one hundred schools have chosen to study Russian, and the numbers keep increasing. It is safe to say that there is more demand for the Russian language in Syria right now than ever; students who choose Russian can

continue studying at Damascus University and in Russia. The textbooks are a result of close cooperation between the universities of Moscow and Damascus where Russian native speakers also teach.<sup>37</sup>

First, it is interesting to see the Syrian presentation of the Soviet regime, and its tendency to cast a positive light on the Soviet era. These are conditions about which the Syrian curriculum usually expresses opposition, but not with Russia. The era of the USSR is presented as a time of total prosperity in all areas of life.

سنتعرّف واقعَ روسيا قبلَ الثورة الشيوعيّة، والعواملَ التي أدّت إلى قيام النهضة فيها على المستوى السياسي والاقتصادي والاجتماعي والفكريّ منذُ الحربِ العالميّة الأولى حتّى تفكُّك الاتحاد السوفييتي وقيام الاتحاد الروسيّ عام ١٩٩١م.

We shall become acquainted with the reality of Russia prior to the Communist Revolution, and the causes which led to its political, economic, social and intellectual renaissance, from World War I until the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Russian Federation in 1991.

قامت الثورة الاشتراكيّة في روسيا من أجل مواجهة النظام الإمبريالي، فأعلنت قيام أول دولة اشتراكيّة عام ١٩١٧م، اعتمدت على سلطة العمّال والفلاحين، وقد كان لها تأثيرٌ عالميٌ حيث أيدت حركات التحرّر الوطني.

*History, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 98.*

The Socialist Revolution in Russia broke out in order to confront the imperial regime. It declared the establishment of the first socialist country in 1917. [The Revolution] was based on the rule of the workers and the peasants, and it had a global impact, as it supported national liberation movements.

*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 168.*

<sup>37</sup> Svetlana Smetanina, "There is More Demand for the Russian Language in Syria Right Now than Ever Before," *Russkiy Mir*, June 22, 2017.

Accessed June 9, 2018. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/publications/226358/>;

"В Сирии настоящий бум на изучение русского языка," (In Syria, Real Boom in the Study of the Russian Language), *Russia 24*, May 4, 2014.

Accessed June 9, 2018. <https://rutube.ru/video/d552da658bf538502461a523958ff0cd/>;

Anti-Assad outlets confirm the information but criticize the Russianization of Syria. "Russian Language in the Schools of Syria: The Last Prostrating of the Assad's Regime," *Orient News*, (Arabic) January 1, 2014.

Accessed June 9, 2018. [http://www.orient-news.net/ar/news\\_show/7064](http://www.orient-news.net/ar/news_show/7064);

Omar al-Shaykh, "The Russian Language in its Syrian Home," *Al-Arabi Al-Jadid* (Arabic), August 21, 2016.

Accessed June 9, 2018. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/culture/2016/8/21/1-اللغة-الروسية-في-بيتها-السوري>.

Stalin is mentioned only once in Syrian history textbooks. He is presented as a controversial figure in Russian history, but without mentioning the reasons for this, nor any action ascribed to him.

حكَمَ جوزيف ستالين أكبرَ دولةٍ في العالمِ مدَّةَ ٣١ عاماً. ولا تزالُ الحقبةُ الستالينيةُ بعدَ مرورِ أكثرَ من نصفِ قرنٍ على نهايتها تثيرُ الكثيرَ من الجدلِ في المجتمعِ الروسيِّ، ولا تحظىُ بتقييمٍ قاطعٍ، ولدَ جوزيفُ ستالينَ في ٢١ كانونَ الأوَّلِ عام ١٨٧٩ في جورجيا لوالدينِ فلاحين. وعندَ بلوغه الخامسة عشرة من عمره، اتَّصلَ ستالينُ بالحلقاتِ الماركسيَّةِ السريَّةِ، وبعدَ أربعِ سنواتٍ انضمَّ إلى المنظمةِ الاشتراكيَّةِ الأولى في جورجيا، وفي تلكِ الفترةِ بدأ يقرأ المؤلَّفاتِ والكتاباتِ الأولى عن لينين. انتظمَ ستالينَ ولفترةٍ ١٠ سنواتٍ في العملِ السياسيِّ السريِّ، توفِّيَ عام ١٩٥٣م.


الموسوعة الحرة ص ٢٦٦

Joseph Stalin ruled the largest country in the world for thirty-one years, and the Stalinist era still arouses great controversy in Russian society, after more than half a century has passed since it ended. Joseph Stalin was born in December 21, 1879 in Georgia to peasant parents. When he reached the age of fifteen, Stalin came in contact with secret Marxist circles. After four years, he joined the first socialist organization in Georgia, and at that time started reading the first articles and essays about Lenin. Stalin participated in secret political work for ten years and died in 1953.

*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 171.*

The West is blamed for the USSR's fate, thwarting Gorbachev's plan to reconstruct the country. While Western countries are dubbed "imperialist" (or "colonialist"), the Soviets never receive this label.

تسلَّمَ غورباتشوفُ قيادةَ الدولة والحزبِ عام ١٩٨٨م، وأرادَ تطبيقَ مشروعِ إعادةِ البناءِ الاقتصاديِّ والاجتماعيِّ والفكريِّ، ولكنَّ تأمَّرَ الدولُ الاستعماريَّةُ على مصيرِ الاتِّحادِ



السوفييتيِّ واستغلال ما فيه من فسادٍ إداريٍّ وتعدُّدِ القومياتِ أدَّى إلى تفكُّكه عام ١٩٩١م، وقيامِ الاتِّحادِ الروسيِّ بدلاً عنه.

Gorbachev took over the leadership of the state and party in 1988, and aspired to implement a plan of economic, social and ideological reconstruction. However, the imperialistic countries conspired against the destiny of the Soviet Union and took advantage of the administrative corruption and the circumstances of multiple nationalities, leading to its dissolution in 1991 and the establishment of the Russian Federation in its place.

*History, Grade 8, 2017–18, pp. 99–100.*

The affinity for Russia may be seen geographically as well. Russia (comprising 11percent of the earth's landmass) and the (imagined) "Arab Homeland" (covering 10 percent) are viewed by the curriculum as the world's two largest countries.

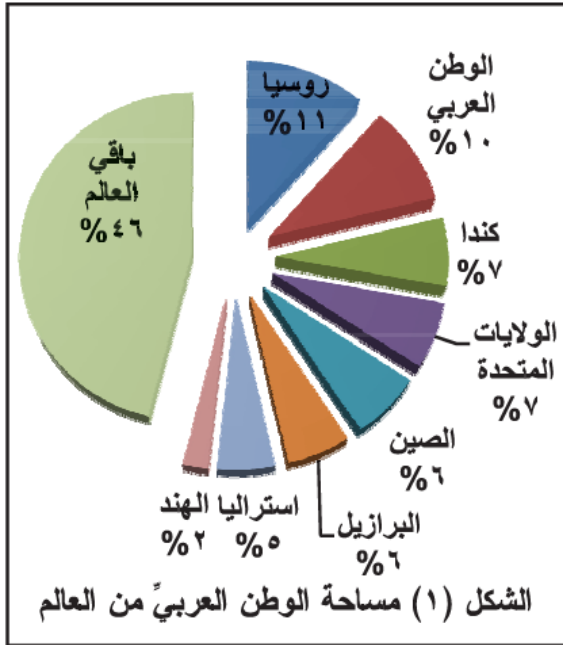


Chart 1: The Arab Homeland's Area in the World.<sup>38</sup>

The chart shows that the "Arab Homeland" is portrayed as a country. The European Union, for example, is not included in this chart; only countries, chief among them Russia (11 percent in blue) and the "Arab Homeland" (10 percent, in dark purple) followed by (clockwise) Canada, the US, China, Brazil, Australia, India and the rest of the world (46 percent).

The Russian language textbooks include many popular poems and short stories from the Soviet Union era. The curriculum offers comparisons with past and current Syrian frames of reference, like flags, crafts, folk history and values like gender equality.



*Russian Language, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 13.*

<sup>38</sup> *Geography of the Arab Homeland and the World, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 12.*



Typical Russian culture items are widespread.

Э́то матрёшка - известный  
ру́сский сувени́р.  
Мне нра́вится э́тот сувени́р.



This is *matryoshka*—a famous Russian souvenir. I love this souvenir.  
*Russian Language, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 50.*

And so are Russian role models, such as the first cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin.

Ю́рий Алексе́евич Гага́рин-  
(1934-1968)  
пе́рвый косми́а́вт.



Yuri Alekseyevich Gagarin (1934–68): the first cosmonaut.  
*Russian Language, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 83.*

There are exercises in which students are asked to write answers to the question of where he/she/they are going, such as to a movie theater, a sporting event or to a company. Other images include the Russian countryside or Russian flags.



Э́то кинотеа́тр.

**This is a movie theater.**



Э́то стадио́н.

**This is a [sports] stadium.**



Э́то компа́ния.

**This is a company.**

*Russian Language, Grade 8, 2017–18, pp. 65–66.*



Gender issues follow secular norms; women are shown wearing modern clothing and working in modern professions.



Журналист (صحفي) работает в газете.

экономист (اقتصادي) работает в банке.



Преподаватель (المُدْرَس) работает в университете.

*Russian Language, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 62.*

Apart from the Russian language curriculum and history textbooks, other activities such as that of the Ba'ath Party Pioneers Organization bear closeness to Soviet and Russian culture.<sup>39</sup>



Ba'ath Party Pioneers



Young Soviet Pioneers during Cold War era<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Screenshot from a Ba'ath Party Pioneers ceremony in a Syrian elementary school. Published by Anmar Chasib, Dec 4, 2014.

Accessed June 7, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3I-5jKx7HKA>.

<sup>40</sup> Voices from Russia (<https://02varvara.wordpress.com/?s=soviet+pioneers>), May 2014,

Russian, Soviet and Syrian flags in a drawing exhibition in Damascus.



Exhibition of Drawings by Syrian Students<sup>41</sup>

## Iran

The Syrian curriculum as a whole revolves around secular pan-Arabism—not Islam—with emphasis on Syria's independence. Although Islam is part of the culture, pan-Arabism is everything—leaving no room for compromise. The Islam being taught is based on the Sunni tradition, not Shiite or otherwise. While Islamist Iran and its subordinate Shiite militias are fighting alongside the regime in the civil war and while the Assad regime and Tehran's "Holy Regime" have been strong allies for four decades, the curriculum's treatment of Iran is lukewarm at best.

Revolutionary culture and enmity for the West and Israel present a partial common denominator, as does regime survival and strategic needs. But the thrust of Syrian education (i.e., secular pan-Arabism) leaves little room for a genuine affinity between the two regimes, let alone the two peoples.

## The Khomeini Revolution

The Iranian Revolution of 1979—the self-described Islamic Revolution—is seen by Islamists as an important and successful uprising of a people against an oppressive regime. The following

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Accessed June 8, 2018. <https://02varvara.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/00-soviet-pioneers-05-25-05-14.jpg>.

<sup>41</sup> Svetlana Smetanina, "There is More Demand for the Russian Language in Syria Right Now than Ever Before," *Russkiy Mir*, June 22, 2017.

Accessed June 9, 2018. <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/publications/226358/>.

paragraph is part of a four-page chapter on Iranian modern history revolving around the revolution; it is filled with anti-American and anti-Zionist hyperbole. The textbooks also highlight Iran's support of [certain] Arab countries and the Palestinian issue with virulent opposition to Israel. The Iranian regime is presented as one which brought a positive change to the Iranian people in terms of technology and industry, including "peaceful" nuclear capability.

### عزل الشاه وقيام الجمهورية في إيران

تعدُّ الثورةُ الإسلاميَّةُ الإيرانيَّةُ من الأحداثِ المهمَّةِ التي وقعت في النصفِ الثاني من القرنِ العشرين في منطقةٍ جنوبيِّ غربِ آسيا، حيثُ حرَّرتِ الشعبَ الإيرانيَّ من الطغيانِ والظلمِ والتبعيَّةِ للقوى الخارجِيَّةِ، وفتحت أمامه آفاقاً واسعةً نحوَ التطوُّرِ والتقدُّمِ، وأصبحت نقطةَ تحوُّلٍ على الصعيدِ الفكريِّ والسياسيِّ .

#### **The Removal of the Shah and the Emergence of the Republic in Iran**

The Islamic-Iranian Revolution is considered to be one of the most important events of the second half of the twentieth century in the Southwest Asia region. The [Revolution] freed the Iranian people from tyranny, oppression and subordination to foreign powers and opened for it broad horizons of development. This became a turning point on both ideological and political levels.

*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 206.*

The above text refers to the "Southwest Asia region," being directly impacted by the "Islamic-Iranian Revolution." It may be that this unfamiliar term is meant to barely place some distance between Iran and Syrian students. The map below is a world map with no particular relation between Iran and Syria (or the Arab world); no map of Southwest Asia is provided. Typically and extensively, the Syrian textbooks refer to Syria as part of the "Arab Homeland," which never includes Turkey and Iran. The rule is that Syria belongs with the purely Arab "Arab Homeland" region. However, what is commonly referred to as Southwest Asia appears once in a textbook under a different title: "Land of the Five Seas" This area, shared also by Turkey, Iran and the Southern Caucasus, serves as the exception to the rule, imparting Syria with Mediterranean and Southwest Asian commonalities that are apparent in the superimposed ellipses.





Map 2: Syria's Location within the Five Seas<sup>42</sup>

The Land of the Five Seas (the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Indian Ocean and Red Sea) encompasses the area known as Southwest Asia.



■ North Africa ■ Southwest Asia ■ Central Asia

Not from the Curriculum: Southwest Asia Region<sup>43</sup>

The Shah's regime is compared to Israel, as a means of showing how easy it can be to overthrow an oppressive regime.

<sup>42</sup> *Geography of the Arab Homeland and the World*, Grade 12, 2017-18, p. 138.

<sup>43</sup> "Southwest Asia and North Africa," *World Geography*.

Accessed June 11, 2018. <http://maxworldgeography.weebly.com/sw-asia--n-africa.html>.

على الصعيد الإقليمي والعالمي: بدأت إيران تُساهم في تنمية المنطقة اقتصادياً وسياسياً، وانضمت إلى منظمة شنغهاي للحد من القلق إزاء التهديدات الأمنية والعسكرية على المنطقة، وأصبحت بعد الثورة من أكبر الداعمين والمُساندين للشعب العربي الفلسطيني فعدت قضيته قضية مركزية بالنسبة لها ولكافة المسلمين، وأن وجود الكيان الصهيوني في فلسطين يُشكل خطراً على العرب والمسلمين. بعد قراءتك مربع النص ما الأهداف التي ركزت عليها الثورة؟

أكدت الثورة الإسلامية الإيرانية أن الشعوب إذا ما امتلكت إرادتها ونزلت إلى ساحات الجهاد مضحية بالأرواح فإنها دون شك منتصرة، وليس الكيان الصهيوني أكثر قوة من نظام الشاه، ومن الممكن جداً القضاء عليه.

**On the regional and global levels:** Iran began contributing to the economic and political development of the area, and joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to limit concerns regarding security and military threats in the region. After the revolution, Iran became one of the biggest supporters of the Arab Palestinian people and made their cause a central issue for Iran and for all Muslims. To Iran, the presence of the Zionist Entity in Palestine creates danger to Arabs and Muslims.

(In box): The Islamic-Iranian Revolution proved that if nations embrace their own will and enter the fields of *jihad*, sacrificing lives, they will undoubtedly be victorious. The Zionist Entity is not a larger force than the Shah's regime, so it is very possible to eliminate it.

*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 208.*

Iran is presented here as enabler of the destruction of Israel, and hence a welcome guest and partner. Yet, the meaning of the following may include a subversive message: "[Iran] joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to limit concerns regarding security and military threats in the region." The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is not part of the Middle East region (and Iran is only an observer state in that organization. So how does this "limit concerns regarding security and military threats in the [Middle East] region?" This may indicate careless writing or in fact could have been cleverly crafted: While Iran is a partner for *jihad* and harming Israel, essentially it belongs elsewhere and should not outstay its welcome.

The curriculum portrays Iran as powerful, advanced and having space and nuclear capabilities, but also enemies of its own.

المدن، وطوّرت العلوم الطبيعية، كما طوّرت صناعاتها الثقيلة (السيارات-السفن-الأسلحة...) ودخلت مجال الفضاء بإطلاقها أول قمر صناعي أميد Omid المصنوع محلياً. وطوّرت مفاعلات نووية للأغراض السلمية مما زاد حدة التوترات مع الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية وحلفائها، وبخاصة الكيان الصهيوني.

(Iran) developed its heavy industry (automobiles, ships, and weapons) and entered the realm of space technology when it launched its first locally made satellite "Omid." It developed nuclear reactors for peaceful objectives, which raised the intensity of tension with the US and its allies, particularly the Zionist Entity.

*History of the Modern and Contemporary World, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 209.*



The Syrian curriculum describes the *Shu'ubiyya* movement within Islam during the Abbasid era. The *Shu'ubiyya* was considered by Western scholars and Arab nationalists as a Persian movement within Islam having an ethno-cultural anti-Arab slant. This seems to be the attitude of the present curriculum. Recent research in both the West and the Muslim world question whether such a movement ever existed and if so, what were its true motivations. In other words, "the present manufactures the past." In this case, current attitudes toward Iran and other foreigners (Turkey, the West) are projected backward as part of history.<sup>44</sup>



#### Development of Cultural Attack:

In the second half of the Abbasid era, weakness began to penetrate the body of the Arab state, manifested in disputes and internal conflicts, which had been exploited by foreign powers in order to impose its domination in various ways.

These included cultural domination which started with the Persian and Turkish penetration of the body of the Arab-Islamic caliphate. Non-Arabs (*Mawali*) took administrative and military positions, and the *Shu'ubiyya* phenomenon appeared to malign the Arab's position and culture. Finally, [there was] the Crusader invasion, which was not limited to military invasion.

*National Education, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 75.*

It is worth noting that Iran has attempted educational forays in Syria, but these appear to remain ineffective and at times counter-productive. There is no trace of them in the curriculum. A renewed effort was observed recently.<sup>45</sup>

In the Syrian curriculum Persian incursions are not limited to cultural affairs and struggle over power inside the Arab Homeland, but also relate to actual conquests and territorial disputes.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Bowen Savant, "Naming Shu'ubism," in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. Alireza Korangy et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 66–184; quotation from page 180.

<sup>45</sup> Ahmad Majidiyar, "Iran's Soft power: Islamic Azad University Opening Branches in Major Syrian and Iraqi Cities," *The Middle East Institute*, January 17, 2018.

Accessed June 23, 2018. <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/io/iran-s-soft-power-islamic-azad-university-opening-branches-major-syrian-and-iraqi-cities>;

Gareth Smyth, "Iran's Failed Cultural Diplomacy in Syria," *The Guardian*, January 6, 2016.

Accessed June 23, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2016/jan/06/syria-iran-axis-nadia-von-maltzahn-cultural-diplomacy>.

## Persia as an Empire of "Greedy Occupiers"

The Persian Achaemenid Empire is one of three empires described in negative terms such as "colonial competition;" being one of the "foreign empires;" "occupation" suffered by the Arab region; and trade interests. Positioning the Persian Empire—about which no culturally positive information is given—on par with Western empires is telling. Description of Western empires oscillates between negative aspects to presentation of Arab achievements within them, as well as some cultural traits. The text also speaks directly about the "Greek occupation" and "Roman occupation," but not "Persian occupation." In the next page the term "Persian occupation" appears twice.<sup>46</sup> Overall, the Syrian curriculum has nothing positive to offer about the Persian Empire.

### تنافس استعماري

الدرس  
الرابع

عانت المنطقة العربية لمدة من الزمن من سيطرة الإمبراطوريات الأجنبية، والتي تسابقت لاحتلال المنطقة لأهميّة موقعها وتنوع خيراتها.

### إمبراطوريات وخرائط:



كوّنت الأسرة الأخمينية  
الفارسية إمبراطورية (٥٥٩-  
٣٣٠ ق.م) سيطرت من  
خلالها على جميع الطرق  
التجارية المؤدية الى البحر  
المتوسط.

الخريطة (٥): حدود الإمبراطورية الفارسية.

## Colonial Competition

The Arab region suffered for a time from the control of foreign empires that competed to occupy the region because of the importance of its location and the diversity of its resources.

**Empires and Maps** [followed by maps of the "greedy" Persian, Greek and Roman empires]

The Persian Achaemenid family created an empire (559–330 BCE) and controlled all the trade routes to the Mediterranean Sea.

Map 5: The boundaries of the Persian Empire.

*Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 85.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, pp. 85–86.*

But enmity to Iranian imperialism and cultural penetration in the Syrian textbooks goes beyond a projection of the present to the past. Syria—as representative of the Arab Homeland—has received tough territorial demands from Iran.

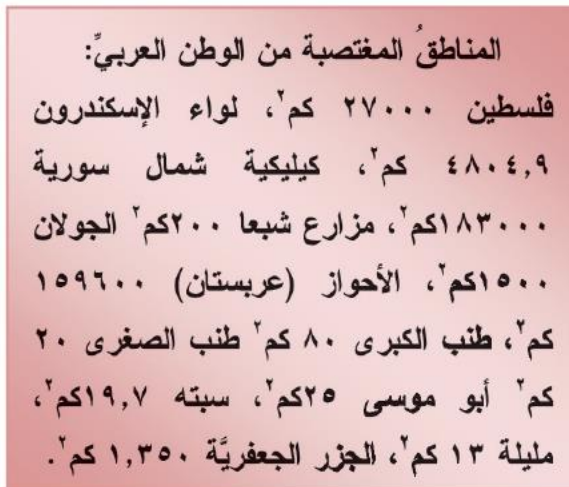
In Islamic studies, while Salman the Persian (Salman Al-Farisi), the Prophet's wise companion and adviser, is mentioned, the Persians remain the enemy.<sup>47</sup>

### Iran's Khuzestan: Occupied Territory

In the section on Syrian national identity and its radical Arabism we demonstrated that the imaginary "Arab Homeland" is far from being innocent. All the current Middle Eastern borders are seen as artificial, implicitly threatening all the "petty" Arab states. Less unspoken is the threat to a range of non-Arab countries.

The current borders are political ones, drawn through the policy of the colonial powers that had controlled the region, especially France and Britain. They do not overlap the natural borders that used to separate the Arab Homeland from the neighboring countries. So, important changes took place in these borders to the benefit of those countries and to the detriment of the Arab land.

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and the World, Grade 12, 2017–2018, p. 13.*



### The Usurped Areas of the Arab Homeland:<sup>48</sup>

Palestine 28,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Alexandretta province, Cilicia in Northern Syria 183,000 km<sup>2</sup>, the Sha'ba farms 200 km<sup>2</sup>, the Golan 1,500 km<sup>2</sup>, Ahwaz (Arabistan) [Iran's Khuzestan]

<sup>47</sup> See below, the next reference on the Battle of Tabuk; *Islamic Education, Grade 7, 2017–2018, p. 101.*

<sup>48</sup> Note that the territories "stolen" from the Arab Homeland include the usual suspects, Israel (stealing Palestine as well as the Golan and Sha'ba farms) and Turkey (stealing Alexandretta and Cilicia from Syria). Even more dramatic are thefts by Iran (its own large Khuzestan in mainland Iran as well as the Greater and Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa islands (claimed by the UAE). Finally, Spain, usurping Ceuta, Melilla and the Chafarinas Islands..

109,600 km<sup>2</sup>, Greater Tunb 80 km<sup>2</sup>, Lesser Tunb 20 km<sup>2</sup>, Abu Musa, Ceuta 19.7 km<sup>2</sup>, Melilla 13 km<sup>2</sup>, Chafarinas Islands 1,350 km<sup>2</sup>.

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and the World, Grade 12, 2017–2018, p. 13.*

The worldview is Arab and not Islamic. There are borders to this imagined empire, unlike the limitless Islamism, such as Iranian Khomeinism or Sunni Jihadi-Salafism and Muslim Brotherhood. The Persian Gulf, as noted in the curriculum's maps, is the Arab Gulf, but except for Iranian Khuzestan, the rest of Iran seems to be safe from Syrian expansionist imagination.

In another textbook, the Iranian province of Khuzestan—in the text, Ahwaz (Arabistan)—makes it to the short list of important usurped territories Ahwaz is the capital of the Arab-Iranian. Khuzestan, invaded by Saddam Hussein's Iraq at the beginning of the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq war.

أهم المناطق المغتصبة: دولة فلسطين،  
وأهم الأقاليم: لواء إسكندرون، والأهواز  
(عربستان).

The most important usurped area: the State of Palestine.

The most important usurped regions: Alexandretta province and Ahwaz (Arabistan).

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 14.*

The maps are not consistent. Indeed, as the previous quotations explain, there are "most important" usurped areas. While the Iranian Khuzestan is defined as the "most important" usurped region, we did not find a map that shows it within the boundaries of the "Arab Homeland," perhaps to not embarrass the regime's closest ally in the civil war. All of the territory of Israel (unnamed) and parts of Turkey are always included, in text and in maps.

### Lebanon and Hezbollah

We did not find any mention of Hezbollah in the Lebanese context or as an Iranian proxy among other Shiite militias in Syria and elsewhere. The textbooks discuss the Syrian responsibility toward their Lebanese neighbors, in terms of "resistance to Israel" and pan-Arab aspirations. It is not Hezbollah that helps Assad; it is Syria supporting the "resistance."

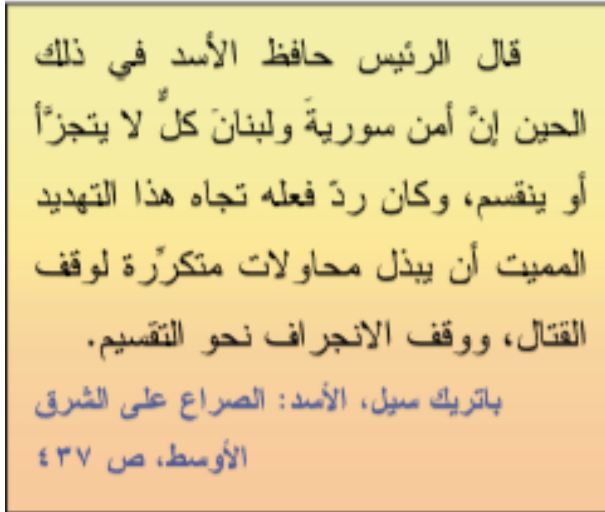
History textbooks emphasize Syrian intervention in the Lebanese Civil War which began in 1975, and present it as an act of brotherly assistance.

وقد أرسلت سورية قواتها إلى لبنان لوقف نزيف  
الدم بين الأخوة اللبنانيين، انطلاقاً من واجبها القومي  
وتلبية لطلب الحكومة اللبنانية، وقرار الجامعة العربية  
بإرسال قوات ردع عربية عمادها الجيش العربي  
السوري.

Syria sent its forces into Lebanon to stop the bloodshed between the Lebanese brothers, out of its [pan-Arab] national obligation and in response to the Lebanese government's request. [It did so after] the Arab League decided to send the Arab Deterrent Force, its mainstay being the Syrian Arab Army.

**History, Grade 12**, 2017–18, p. 64.

A quotation from Hafez Al-Assad's biography by Patrick Seal explains the special relationship of Syria and Lebanon.



President Hafez Al-Assad said at the time that Syria and Lebanon's security constitute one whole and are indivisible. His response to this lethal threat was to make many recurring attempts to stop the fighting, and stop the rush toward partition.

**History, Grade 12**, 2017–18, p. 64.

Syrian support of the "national resistance in Lebanon" in combatting Israel is provided in some detail. Syria's role in scuttling the Israeli-Lebanese 1983 Security Agreement is described as part of this support. [The agreement terminated the state of war between Israel and Lebanon].<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *History, Grade 9*, 2017–18, p. 42; *History, Grade 12*, 2017–18, p. 66.

## Egypt

Egypt, as an Arab Republic and partner to pan-Arabism, is depicted in a positive manner. As we have seen, the common experience of the two countries in unification efforts and in fighting together against Israel are cherished.<sup>50</sup>

The longing for unity with Egypt is especially emphasized. An example for this is the description of ancient empires. Unlike the "greedy," "occupying," and "intrusive" Persian, Greek, Roman and Ottoman empires, the ancient Syrian-Egyptian and Egyptian-Syrian states are presented positively in the Syrian textbooks. The curriculum teaches that the Syrian empire of Palmyra was about a struggle for independence against the background of competition between the Roman and Persian empires.

### Palmyra's Resistance

The location of Palmyra pushed it into the stage of international conflict between the Roman and Persian empires. This led one of its rulers, Othina and then his wife Zenobia, to try to establish a kingdom independent of Roman rule, unleashing a great conflict with the Romans.

*Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 87.*



**Map 8: Boundaries—Palmyra Empire of Queen Zenobia**

*Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 88.*

When describing the ancient Egyptian empire, the text uses positive wording such as spreading, unity and so on. An assortment of cultural achievements is enumerated. The Syrian empire, naturally, represents an effort to preserve Syria's independence from the Romans and Persians. Both in Egypt and Syria, women have prominent roles of leadership.

<sup>50</sup> *National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 68.*





**Map 4: Boundaries—Egyptian Empire of Emperor Thutmose III**  
*Ancient Syria: History, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 79.*

## Turkey

Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, Turkey has become one of the leading and most dangerous enemies of the Assad regime. The Syrian textbooks—perhaps looking far into the future—do not present Turkey as an enemy, but also not as a friend.

The Turkish Ottoman Empire is depicted negatively. Textbooks use wording like "occupation"<sup>51</sup> and "Turkification" to emphasize their adverse view of Turkey's imposed rule.

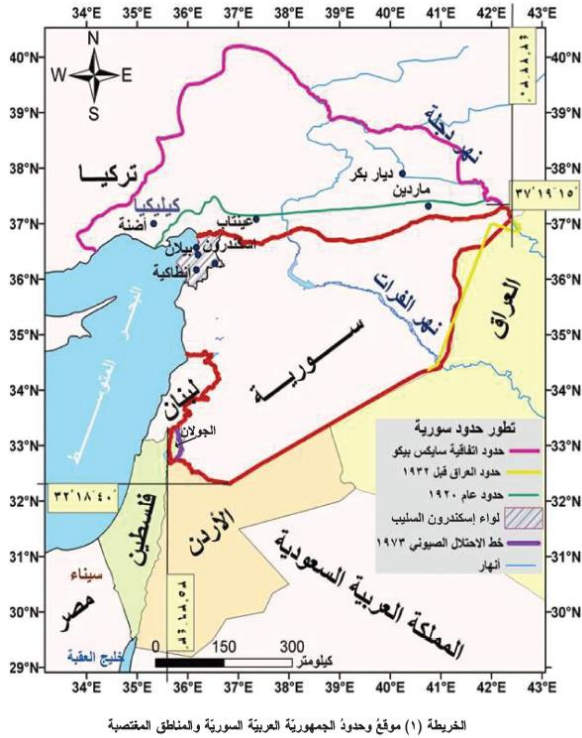
وجاء الاحتلال العثماني ليكرس هذا الغزو محاولاً طمس الثقافة واللغة العربية باتباع سياسة التتريك، ومع تراجع الدولة العثمانية وضعفها بدأ الاستعمار الأوروبي للوطن العربي بفرض

The Ottoman occupation dedicated this invasion in an attempt to eradicate Arab culture and language by pursuing its Turkification policy.

*National Education, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 75.*

The curriculum does not hide territorial disputes with Turkey, presenting them extensively through maps.

<sup>51</sup> *Social Studies, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18, pp.58–9.*



**Map 1: Location and Borders of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Usurped Areas**

*Geography of the Arab Homeland and the World, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 134.*

The above map, depicting the "Location and Borders of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Usurped Areas," sheds some light on Syrian priorities. Alexandretta and the Golan, annexed by Turkey and Israel, respectively, are clearly drawn inside the borders of Syria. Alexandretta is described in the map's legend as the "Robbed Iskenderun Province," and is colored with Syrian colors. The map also carves out another extremely large piece of Turkey as it draws two other lines inside Syria's neighbor to the north. These additional "Usurped Areas," represented by the 1916 "Sykes Picot Agreement" and the "1920 Borders," include the Cilicia area and the Turkish cities of Adana, Mardin, Gaziantep (Aintab) and Diyarbakır.

As for the Golan, the map's legend does not give it a title, but draws the "1973 Zionist Occupation Line" leaving the color equal to that of "Palestine," the country name written instead of Israel. Finally, the map also claims some Iraqi territory.

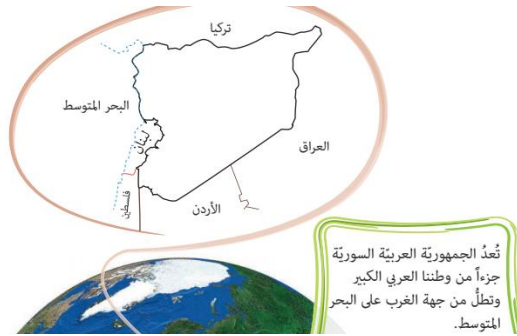
According to this map, Syria lays claims to large swaths of Turkey. The name of "Israel," is not on the map at all.

## Strategic Positioning: Foes

In this section, we will see how those dubbed as the worst enemies are described and demonized.

### Israel

Israel is consistently referred to as the "Zionist Entity," as opposed to a legitimate country. Israeli territory is labeled "Palestine" or "Occupied Palestine" and the entire geographical area as the "Arab Homeland." As seen in the following example, first graders are shown the countries bordering Syria (including Palestine) and the geographical area in which Syria is situated: the "Arab Homeland":



The Arab Republic of Syria is considered part of our great Arab Homeland, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

*Social Studies, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 30.*

Lands taken from Syria in the past, such as the Golan Heights and returned to Syria such as the "freed city of Quneitra" are presented within the curriculum in various ways.

An eighth-grade textbook teaches children about the Syrian Revolutionary Youth Union, the youth organization of the ruling Ba'ath party, and declares that one of the union's objectives is to struggle against Israel.

أمامَ الشَّبَابِ، والتَّعَاوُنِ مَعَ مَنْظَمَاتِ الشَّبَابِ الْعَرَبِيِّ وَالْعَالَمِيِّ، وَتَعْرِيفِ الشَّبَابِ بِالْقَضَايَا الْعَرَبِيَّةِ الْعَادِلَةِ، وَدَفْعِهِمَ لِلنُّضَالِ ضِدَّ مُخْتَلَفِ أَشْكَالِ قُوَى الْإِحْتِلَالِ وَالصَّهْيُونِيَّةِ وَأَطْمَاعِهِمَا فِي بِلَادِنَا، وَالتَّعْرِيفِ بِالتُّرَاثِ الْعَرَبِيِّ الْإِنْسَانِيِّ، وَدَوْرِهِ فِي الْحَضَارَةِ الْعَالَمِيَّةِ الْمَعَاوِرَةِ.

Motivate the youth to struggle against all forms of the forces of occupation and Zionism forces and their greedy ambitions in our country.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 34.*

In a chapter about "Figures from my Homeland" in a second-grade textbook, former President Hafez Al-Assad is especially credited for his military achievement fighting Israel.

The eternal leader Hafez Al-Assad freed Quneitra from the Zionists (*sahayinah*) in the October War of Liberation and built modern Syria.

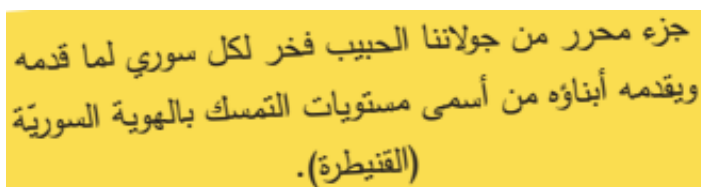
*Arabic is My Language, Grade 2*, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 60.

“Zionist” is an extremely pejorative term in Arabic. The strategy of the current president is described, however, as resistance.

The president has also worked to spread the use of technology, so as to keep abreast with progress, and stressed Syria's commitment to the choice of resistance<sup>52</sup> and taking back the occupied lands.

*History, Grade 9*, 2017–18, p. 34.

In textbook descriptions of the fourteen provinces of Syria, Quneitra is cited as a source of pride and part of Syrian identity.



Quneitra—a freed part of our beloved Golan. It is a source of pride to every Syrian, for the highest levels of devotion to Syrian identity, which were offered and are still offered by its sons.

*National Education, Grade 7*, 2017–18, p. 52.

As for the Golan Heights, it is referred to as: "An Arab-Syrian land situated in the far southwestern part of Syria, bordering Palestine and Lebanon."<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the "Zionist Entity" is blamed for "stealing and draining the Golan's water resources,"<sup>54</sup> as well as stealing archeological monuments, so as to "falsify Arab-Syrian history." The Zionists are blamed for destroying the Golan's natural environment and exploiting economic and tourist potential, preventing its residents from achieving their own economic prosperity.<sup>55</sup> The most severe

<sup>52</sup> "Resistance" (*muqawama*) is a euphemism for an all-out "people's war" applying all means—mainly a combination of terrorism/guerilla tactics with propaganda—to destroy one's enemy, in this case Israel. It is contrasted with regular war, abandoned after 1973. Michael Milstein, "The Challenge of *al-Muqawama* (Resistance) to Israel," *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 12 (4), Feb. 2010, pp. 57–71; Ehud Yaari, "The *Muqawama* Doctrine," *Jerusalem Report*, November 13, 2006.

<https://ar-ar.facebook.com/fatehal3sfh>;

According to the "people's war" paradigm, borrowed from Marxist-Leninist traditions in China and Vietnam, conflict is waged on both the political and military levels. Joel S. Fishman, "Ten Years since Oslo: The PLO's 'People's War' Strategy and Israel's Inadequate Response." *JCPA*, No. 503, September 2003. Accessed Oct 14, 2017. <http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=375&PID=1843&IID=947>.

<sup>53</sup> *National Education*, Grade 8, 2017-18, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96; *Arabic Language*, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 128.

accusation, repeated many times in various textbooks, is "forcing the Zionist Entity's identity on residents of the Golan," including Judaization.

The Zionists are accused of imposing the Hebrew language on Arab-Syrian residents, replacing Syrian educational programs with "the terrorist Zionist Entity's programs, with the purpose of keeping the Arab-Syrian citizens in the dark."<sup>56</sup> In a short story taught to eighth graders, a boy from the Golan returns home from school crying because he was suspended from school for refusing to salute the "Zionist flag."

- لماذا تبكي؟! -

- لقد طردوني من المدرسة؛ لأنني رفضتُ أداءَ تحيةٍ للعَلَمِ الصَّهْيُونِيِّ. لَيْسَتْ المَرَّةُ الأُولَى...  
لن أحييه أبداً... وراح يركضُ في الشَّارِعِ، فصرختُ به الأُمُ قائلةً: قِفْ، قِفْ، وقِفْ، والتفتتُ  
إليها قائلاً: ماذا تُريدين؟ قالتُ: إذا أردتُ أن تنالَ من عدوك فلا بُدَّ أن تُعدَّ العُدَّةَ لَهُ.

- 'Why are you crying?'
- 'I was suspended from school, because I refused to salute the Zionist flag. This wasn't the first time . . . I will never salute it. . .' He ran to the street and his mother shouted to him: 'stop, stop!' He stopped, turned around and said: 'What do you want?' She said: 'If you want to hurt your enemy, you must prepare for him.'

*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 42.*

Violence and martyrdom are justified in children's textbooks, even encouraged, as part of the Syrian resistance to the occupiers of the Golan. While teaching the term *jihad* (holy war) to twelfth graders, it is explained that one of its modern forms takes place in the Golan: "One of the forms of '*jihad* in the way of God' in our modern era is the *jihad* of our people in the occupied Golan."<sup>57</sup> The story of Ghalia Farhat, a young woman killed by IDF fire during a pro-Syrian demonstration in the Golan, is proudly introduced. She is named the "Bride of the Golan," "one of many martyrs of the Golan."<sup>58</sup>

There is no mention of Druze residents of the Golan in books we encountered in the Syrian curriculum.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *National Education, Grade 8, 2017-18, p. 95.*

<sup>57</sup> *Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017-18, p. 62.*

<sup>58</sup> *Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017-18, p. 127.*

<sup>59</sup> Tamar Pileggi, "As Syria crumbles, Golan Druze seek Israeli citizenship," *Times of Israel*, November 1, 2015. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-syria-crumbles-golan-druze-seek-israeli-citizenship>.

### Syria as a Leader of the Palestinian Cause and Pan-Arabism

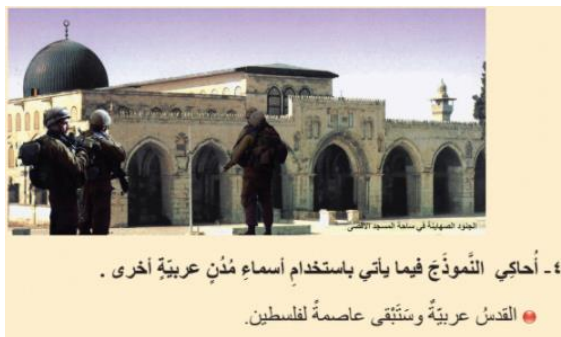
Another major trend emphasized in school textbooks is the devotion of the Syrian people to the Palestinian cause, as part of their view of Arab solidarity and aspiration for pan-Arab unity. In the following example an image of an anti-Israeli demonstration is included in a discussion of national culture:



Mass march in Damascus condemning the terrorist Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip, in occupied Arab Palestine.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, pp. 9–10.*

Jerusalem as an example of an Arab city.



Jerusalem is Arab and will remain the capital of Palestine

*Arabic is My Language, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 89.*

Israel's legitimacy is negated through various narratives. The "Arab Canaanite ancestors" are presented as the first inhabitants of Palestine, and the ones who built the city of Jerusalem according to the curriculum's history textbooks.<sup>60</sup> In a description of the 1929 Arab riots, the

<sup>60</sup> *History, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 47.*



Western Wall is referred to by its Islamic name "Buraq Wall," and its connection to Jewish heritage is not even mentioned.<sup>61</sup> Syrian twelfth graders are expected to emulate Palestinians who fight for their land, as they are asked to "express in two lines your admiration for the resistant people of Palestine, as they defend the land of Palestine and Jerusalem."<sup>62</sup>

Thus, it is unsurprising to find the Palestinian and Jerusalem causes so heavily emphasized in the Syrian educational system. Similarities are pointed out between Palestinians and residents of the Golan, and the narrative of the Palestinian "right of return" is stressed repeatedly. In Islamic Education, students are taught to love their homeland as a religious duty "toward our occupied land in the Golan and Palestine."<sup>63</sup> They also read short stories about Palestinians holding keys to their original homes,<sup>64</sup> and are asked to create a group project for international tourism in the Arab city of Jerusalem, following its liberation.<sup>65</sup> In addition, President Bashar Al-Assad's speech from the IOC conference of 2009 is quoted, warning all Islamic countries against Israeli attempts to Judaize the city of Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup>



I will not remain a refugee. I will return.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 87.*

### **Anti-Semitism and Demonization of Israelis**

Syria and Israel are presented as two nations holding opposing values. Judaism is presented in a prejudiced manner.

In a high school history textbook, students are taught about the rise of Christianity and its spread in Syria, and the differences between Christianity and its predecessor, Judaism. Unlike Christianity, Judaism is defined as an "ethnic specific religion," based on the premise of Jews as "God's chosen people."

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> *Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 63.*

<sup>63</sup> *Islamic Education, Grade 5, 2017–18, p. 87.*

<sup>64</sup> *National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 87.*

<sup>65</sup> *Social Studies, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 51.*

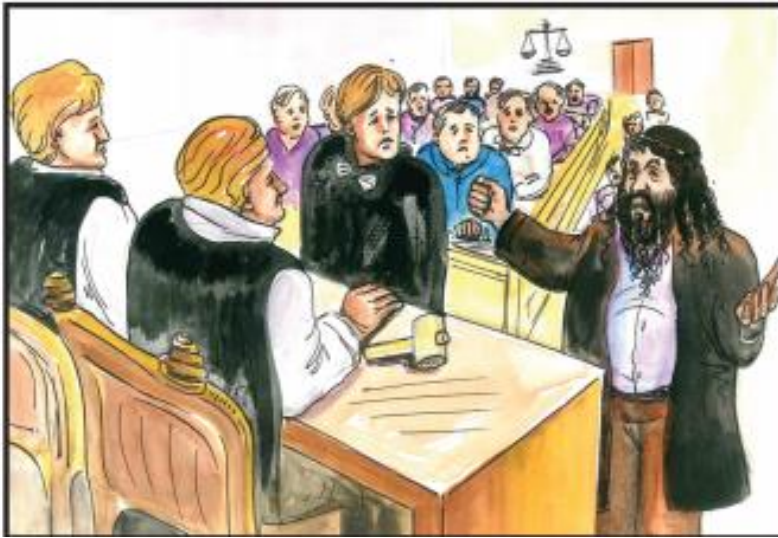
<sup>66</sup> *National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 74.*

رغم وجود التوحيد في الديانة اليهودية  
لكنها لم تنتشر لأنَّ معتقبيها جعلوا لها  
خصوصية عرقية غير قابلة للانتشار  
(شعب الله المختار).

In spite of the existence of monotheism in the Jewish religion, it did not spread because those adopting it made it "ethnically specific" that cannot be spread (Allah's chosen people).

*Historical Issues, Grade 10, 2017-18, p. 107.*

This worldview is described as "extremist," a negative expression.<sup>67</sup> Regarding Jews living in the Arabian Peninsula during the rise of Islam and the battles of Muhammad, students are provided with a list of valuable lessons and admonitions, including: "treason and deception are part of the Jew's attributes," as are "violation of treaties and breaching promises."<sup>68</sup> Syrian students are taught one single play written by Shakespeare during their studies: *The Merchant of Venice*. According to their Arabic language textbook, "the play shamefully reveals the depths of a Jewish usurer, and the greed and avarice he pursues by every possible means." Adding insult to injury, a caricature of Shylock is presented as an illustration from the play, revealing a stereotypical medieval ugly Jewish image.



*Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017-18, p. 101.*

<sup>67</sup> *Historical Issues, Grade 10, 2017-18, p. 107.*

<sup>68</sup> *Islamic Education, Grade 6, 2017-18, pp. 126-27.*

There is no mention of the Holocaust in any of the textbooks we reviewed. Likewise, a table of casualty figures from World War II is presented (by nation) with no inclusion of Jews.<sup>69</sup> In the ninth grade, students learn that the Zionists shifted their operation center to the United States during World War II,<sup>70</sup> and in twelfth-grade history class, they learn that, "The Zionists took advantage of World War II's circumstances to realize their Zionist dream, as they benefited from colonialist assistance . . . The Zionists started working to arouse sympathy in the American public opinion, following the Nazi position towards them."<sup>71</sup>

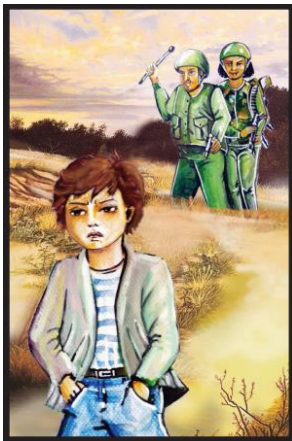
Syrian textbooks also recycle widespread, longstanding anti-Semitic claims, blaming the "Zionist Entity" of religious and ethnic racism, control of global media, and striving for territorial expansion.<sup>72</sup> These ideas are presented as pure facts. The textbooks make extensive use of inciting claims, stories, illustrations and photographs, with no consideration for context. A short story by Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani is preceded by this introductory paragraph:

تُلحُّ الشرائعُ السماويَّةُ والقوانينُ التي وَصَّعَهَا الإنسانُ، على إبرازِ قيمةِ الإنسانِ وحَقِّهِ  
في الحياةِ بكرامةٍ وحرِّيَّةٍ من غيرِ تمييزٍ، ولكنَّ هناك مَنْ لا يَسْتَعْدِبُ الحياةَ إلا على حسابِ  
الأخرينَ. والصهاينةُ مثالٌ صارخٌ على ذلكَ.

The heavenly religions and human laws insist on emphasizing the value of a human being and his right to live with respect and freedom and with no discrimination. There are those, however, who don't see pleasure in life unless it is at the expense of others. The Zionists are a shouting example of this.

*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 105.*

The paragraph is immediately followed by an image of soldiers harassing a child:



*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 105.*

<sup>69</sup> *National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 69.*

<sup>70</sup> *History, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 55.*

<sup>71</sup> *History, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 79.*

<sup>72</sup> *National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, pp. 80–83, 86, 89.*

Following a poem by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, ninth graders are asked to identify different ideas present in sequences from the poem, such as: "The Zionists' ignorance and disconnection from civilized thought," "the Zionist presence in Palestine is a momentary presence."<sup>73</sup> An even more radical expression is, "insistence on purifying the land and all of humanity from the Zionists."<sup>74</sup>

### All Means are Legal in Fighting Israel

Acts of martyrdom against Israel are considered legitimate, in addition to other acts of resistance; there is the suggestion that such actions are supported by international law.

وقد أقرَّ القانونُ الدوليُّ، والإعلانُ العالميُّ لحقوقِ الإنسانِ وكلُّ الشرائعِ حقَّ المقاومينَ في استخدامِ كلِّ الوسائلِ للدِّفاعِ عن حقوقهم.  
وللمقاومةِ أشكالٌ متعدِّدةٌ منها ثوراتُ التحرُّرِ الوطنيِّ ضدَّ الاحتلالِ، والأعمالُ الاستشهاديَّةُ ضدَّ العدوِّ الصُّهيوونيِّ الإرهابيِّ المحتلِّ، والإضراباتُ، والنتائجُ الأدبيَّةُ والفكريَّةُ الموجهةُ ضدَّ العدوِّ المُغتصبِ للحقوقِ.

International law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the entire legal system have asserted the right of resisters to use all means to defend their rights.

**The resistance takes many forms**, including national liberation revolutions against the Occupation, acts of martyrdom against the occupying terrorist Zionist enemy, strikes, and literary and other intellectual works aimed against the enemy who usurps rights.

*National Studies, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 88.*

Textbooks show that the UN has consistently supported violent resistance, and provide an example for a UN resolution as proof.

قرار الجمعية العامة للأمم المتحدة رقم ٣٢٤٦ بتاريخ  
١٩٧٤/١٢/١٤ الذي جدد التأكيد على مشروعية كفاح  
الشعوب في سبيل التحرُّر من السيطرة الاستعماريَّة  
والأجنبيَّة والقهر الأجنبي بالوسائل المتاحة بما في ذلك  
الكفاح المسلح.

<sup>73</sup> *Arabic Language, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 169.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid., p. 170.*

The UN General Assembly Resolution No. 3246 adopted December 14, 1974, reaffirmed the legitimacy of the peoples' struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle.

*National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 92.*

### Peaceful Solutions

The 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israel and Syria is mentioned after a description of the Arab achievement during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.<sup>75</sup> Here is an example, with special emphasis on the role of the UN:



The Peacekeeping forces in the Golan, according to the Separation of Forces Resolution in 1974, following the October War of Liberation.

*National Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 54.*

While Israel is not mentioned by name and despite the rampant demonization evident within the curriculum, there exists a Syrian policy to "solve the conflict with the Zionist entity." As one can see in the following paragraph, the word peace is used, but there is no expression such as "peace with Israel" or even "peace with the Zionist entity." Instead the term "land for peace" is used, though it is hard to know what this means. "Arab land" as taught throughout the curriculum includes all of Israel. The anti-Semitic—at times genocidal—tone as regards Israel and the Jews adds to this skepticism. Still, the word "peace" is used. Moreover, the late Hafez Al-Assad is quoted as saying that "Syria made a strategic choice for peace."

<sup>75</sup> *History of the Modern and Contemporary Arab Homeland, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 56.*

• **موقف سورية من تسوية الصراع مع الكيان الصهيوني:** وافقت سورية على تسوية الصراع العربي-الصهيوني استناداً إلى القرارات الصادرة عن مجلس الأمن الدولي على أساس الأرض مقابل السلام، وعلى أن تكون عادلة حسب مقررات الشرعية الدولية، وشاملة لكل الأطراف (السورية والفلسطينية واللبنانية والأردنية)، فأعلن الرئيس الراحل حافظ الأسد في مؤتمر مدريد عام ١٩٩١م: "أن السلام خيار سورية الاستراتيجي، لكنّه السلام الذي يعيد الحقوق والكرامة"، لكنّ الكيان الصهيوني كان يتصلّل من متطلّبات السلام العادل والشامل، فلجأ إلى عقد اتّفاقيات منفردة مع الأطراف العربية، بهدف إضعاف الصف العربي، وخاصة سورية، وتصفيّة القضية الفلسطينية.

**Syria's Position on the Resolution of the Conflict with the Zionist Entity:** Syria agreed to resolve the Arab-Zionist conflict on the basis of the UN Security Council's resolutions of **Land for Peace**, on condition of its being just, within the framework of international legitimacy, and comprehensive for all parties (Syrian, Palestinian, Lebanese and Jordanian). In the Madrid Conference of 1991, former President Hafez Al-Assad declared: **'Syria made a strategic choice for peace, but it is a peace which brings back the rights and the dignity.'** However, the Zionist Entity withdrew from the requirements of a just and comprehensive peace and persisted in signing separate agreements with the Arab parties, in order to weaken Arab unity, especially Syria, and eliminate the Palestinian issue.

*History of the Modern and Contemporary Arab Homeland, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 58.*

UN Resolution 194, adopted December 11, 1948 is mentioned. The Syrian textbook free synopsis includes putting Jerusalem under "a permanent international regime," the "right of return of refugees to their homes by way of the changing conditions" and the "establishment of peace in Palestine in the future." Syria initially voted against this resolution, due to its recognition of Israel's right to exist. However, there is no mention of this in the curriculum. There is no Israel in this synopsis.<sup>76</sup>

Israel is presented as the main stumbling block to achieving the pan-Arab goal of unity, as it aspires to conduct bilateral negotiations instead of working toward a comprehensive peace. Israel is blamed for the failure of the Madrid Conference of 1991, with its split into bilateral talks, resulting in agreements with Jordan and the PLO. From the Syrian point of view, Israel's overall policy was geared toward "weakening the Syrian position and eliminating the Palestinian cause."<sup>77</sup> We did not locate an allusion to the bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria during the 1990s and the late 2000s.

### The United States

In many ways, the United States is portrayed in Syrian textbooks as the negative mirror image of Russia. The US is depicted as a colonialist nation, trying to usurp the world's resources from

<sup>76</sup> *National Education, Grade 8, p. 60.*

<sup>77</sup> *History, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 33; National Education, Grade 9, 2017–18, p. 42.*



their rightful owners in their own countries, as well as intervening in the internal affairs of Arab countries. In addition, the US is considered to be an ally and sponsor of Israel, and therefore participating in the occupation project across the Middle East. In general, the Syrian curriculum uses wording and imagery in order to create prejudices, misconceptions and hatred toward the US.

Many examples show the US being blamed for intervening in regional affairs in order to accomplish its own goals.

تسلّم صدام حسين الحكم، وشهدَ عهدهُ قيامَ عدّة حروبٍ في منطقة الخليج العربيّ، الأولى كانت مع إيران، سُمّيت حرب الخليج الأولى عام (١٩٨٠-١٩٨٨م)، وكانت بتحريض من الولايات المتحدة الأمريكيّة، بهدف إضعاف البلدين، ثمّ كان غزو صدام حسين

Saddam Hussein took power, and his period witnessed a number of wars in the Arab Gulf area. The first was with Iran, called the First Gulf War (1980–88), which occurred through incitement by the US, in order to weaken both countries.

*History, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 105.*

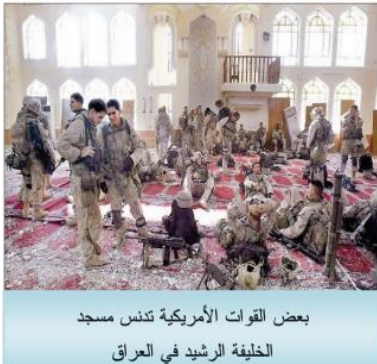
Another textbook shows two photographs side by side, comparing the French occupation of Syria in 1920 to the US forces entering Iraq in 2003. This comparison presents the US as the modern colonialist power, described in hateful terms.



French forces occupying Syria in 1920.

احتلال القوات الفرنسية لسورية عام ١٩٢٠م

حضارة.



American forces desecrating the Caliph A-Rashid Mosque in Iraq.

بعض القوات الأمريكية تكس مسجدا  
الخليفة الرشيد في العراق

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 80.*

في مصر بين الأسطولين  
الانكليزي والفرنسي عام  
١٧٩٨م وكان نتيجة المعركة  
تدمير الأسطول الفرنسي.

التحالف والاتفاق، وتفاقم هذا التنافس والصراع مع  
تطور النظام الرأسمالي وظهور قوى احتلال جديدة  
هيمنت على السياسة الدولية، كالولايات المتحدة  
الأمريكية التي استغلت تفوقها العلمي والتقني  
والاقتصادي والعسكري... لتوسيع نفوذها وسيطرتها  
على مقدرات شعوب العالم بالتعاون مع حلفائها لتعزيز وجودها على الساحة الدولية كقوة  
عظمى وحيدة دون منازع.

This competition and struggle worsened as the capitalist system developed and new occupying forces such as the US, took control over international politics. It exploited its scientific, technological, economic and military supremacy in order to expand its influence and [gain]control over the capabilities of the peoples of the world. This was done in cooperation with its allies, to increase its presence in the international arena as the only undisputed superpower.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 81.*

While explaining the division of power during the Cold War, and the Unipolar Moment which followed, the US is described using hateful language which does not provide students with an opportunity for critical thinking.

وعسكرياً، وهي تسعى للحفاظ على هذا  
التفوق من خلال احتكار التقنية  
المتطورة والسيطرة على مصادر الثروة  
والطاقة في العالم، وأهمها النفط،  
وفرض هيمنتها على المجتمع الدولي.

(The US) strives to maintain its supremacy by monopolizing developing technology, controlling wealth and energy sources in the world, most importantly oil, and forcing its hegemony on the international community.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 82.*

Textbooks explain American intervention in Arab countries as a means to expand their control over the world, lying to justify their actions. In addition, the US is described as acting unilaterally against the UN's directives.

الاتحاد السوفيتي السابق

كان أكبر بلد في العالم من حيث المساحة (٢٢٤٠٢ م كم<sup>2</sup>) للغة الرسمية: الروسية، تأسس عام ١٩١٧م بعد قيام ثورة أكتوبر الاشتراكية، ويضم ست عشرة جمهورية أكبرها روسيا الاتحادية، بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، أسس الاتحاد السوفياتي حلفاً عسكرياً (وارسو) لمواجهة حلف شمال الأطلسي (الناتو) بقيادة الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، ولعب دوراً بارزاً في التوازن الدولي ومساندة الشعوب الفقيرة، تفكك في عام ١٩٩١م.

الموسوعة السياسية- الجزء الأول

بعد غياب التوازن الدولي وهيمنة القطب الواحد على العالم أخذت الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية تبحث عن ذرائع لتبرير تدخلها في الشؤون الأخرى، فقامت باحتلال أفغانستان عام ٢٠٠٢م بحجة محاربة "الإرهاب" لتحقيق أهداف سياسية واقتصادية، منها بناء قاعدة عسكرية متقدمة بالقرب من دول تعدها الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية خطراً عليها (روسيا - الصين - الهند - إيران -

كوريا الشمالية) فضلاً عن امتلاك أفغانستان للعديد من الثروات منها (خامات الحديد والغاز...) وفي عام ٢٠٠٣م أعلنت الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية الحرب على العراق، تُسندتها مجموعة من الدول؛ بحجة امتلاك العراق أسلحة الدمار الشامل ومساندته للإرهاب، وجاء الاحتلال بعد حصار جائر وقصف جوي لمدن العراق ومنشآته دون تفويض من هيئة الأمم المتحدة ومجلس الأمن الدولي.

After the disappearance of international balance and unipolar hegemony took control of the world, the US began searching for excuses to justify its intervention in other countries. It occupied Afghanistan in 2002, under the pretext of fighting against "terrorism" in order to realize its political and economic goals. One of the goals was to build an advanced military base close to countries which the US considers to be dangerous (Russia, China, India, Iran and North Korea). In addition, Afghanistan had many assets (such as iron ore and gas). In 2003, the US—helped by a group of countries—declared war on Iraq under the pretext that Iraq was holding weapons of mass destruction and aiding terrorism. The occupation came after an unjust siege and air strikes over Iraqi cities and institutions, without authorization from the UN general assembly and the Security Council.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 82.*

Globalization is a major concern in the Syrian curriculum. The globalization process is negatively attributed to the US, defining it as a cynical mechanism which robs people of their rights. The term, according to Syria's curriculum, also refers to the attempt to destroy nationalism and its unique attributes.

تفاعلية للإنسانية بأكملها، وهي نموذج للقرية الصغيرة الكونية التي تربط ما بين الناس والأماكن مغلقة المسافات ومقدمة المعارف من دون قيود... وتتجاوز النظم والإيديولوجيات وتعد تشكيلاً موزعة من الأنشطة والبنى.

أوليفيه دولغوس، مفكر وكاتب فرنسي

جعل العالم على صورة واحدة ونموذج ونمط واحد هو النمط الأقوى المهيمن على العالم اقتصادياً وعسكرياً (النمط الأمريكي). هيمنة النظام الرأسمالي الشامل لجميع جوانب الحياة، الذي يسعى إلى السيطرة على العالم من خلال الشركات المتعددة الجنسيات والمنظمات

الدولية (البنك الدولي، صندوق النقد الدولي) وتحويل العالم إلى سوق استهلاكية للمنتجات والأفكار الغربية، وهي انسلاخ عن مبادئ الأمة وتقاليد عاداتها، وإلغاء شخصيتها وكيانها، وذوبانها في الآخر، والقضاء على خصوصيات الأمم والحضارات تدريجياً من خلال طرح مفاهيمها الخاصة لخدمة مصالحها.

مستند (٤)

Making the world become one form, one structure and one model, which is the most powerful model now controlling the world, economically and militarily—the American model.

The hegemony of the capitalist system . . . turning the world into a consumer market for Western products and ideas, while stripping the nation of its principles, customs and traditions, abolishing its personality and identity, first diluting and then gradually eliminating nations and cultures.

*National Education, Grade 12*, 2017–18, p. 31.

## Controlled Freedom: Islam, Christianity, Gender

In Assad's Syria—and this is evident from the curriculum—there is no political or individual freedom. There is also no room for ethnic or confessional collective expression except for the official Syrian/pan-Arab identity. In this section, we will survey those controlled freedoms allowed within this authoritarian, yet secular system, focusing on religion and gender.

### Islam

The Syrian curriculum includes obligatory Islamic education throughout the twelve years of school. Although Syria has been ruled for decades by an Alawite president and regime, Islamic education is an approved version of the Sunni majority faith. Christian education is also part of the curriculum, but no other religious content related to other faiths is featured.<sup>78</sup>

As shown in the previous section, love of the homeland is considered a religious duty, going back to the days of Prophet Muhammad. Students are asked to "find an indication of the prophet's love for his homeland."



The homeland offers abundant grace to its sons. Answer the following:  
What are the most prominent blessings your homeland grants you?  
How must you fulfill your duty toward your homeland?

*Islamic Education, Grade 5*, 2017–18, p. 86.

<sup>78</sup> Joshua Landis, "Syria: Secularism, Arabism, and Sunni Orthodoxy," in *Teaching Islam: Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East*, eds. Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Gregory Starrett (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), pp. 177–95.

While Islam is utilized for national causes, sovereignty belongs to the Syrian people, affirming the nation's essential secularity.

The constitution determines the characteristics of the regime in Syria—a republic; sovereignty belongs to the people; it is based on the principle of the rule of the people, by the people and for the people.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 48.*

Islam has no role in the portrayal of Syrian civil life in the textbooks. The following picture under the title "The society we want" includes civil institutions necessary in every city or town, providing services to its residents: hospital, school, grocery store and library, without any mention of religious institutions.



*Social Studies, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 42.*

This is even more evident when the city of Hama is introduced, adding an illustrated map of the city's main attractions and institutions: university, restaurants, museum, cinema, market and the famous Norias ("wheels of pots") of Hama on the banks of the Orontes River, with no mention of the five famous historical mosques in the city. Hama was a center of Islamist uprisings crushed by massacres in 1982 and 2012.

انطلق تلاميذ الصف الثالث برحلة سياحية إلى محافظة حماه، وصلوا ساحة العاصي ومعهم مخطط المدينة.



*Social Studies, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18, p. 18.*

In addition, Syrian children are given examples of the different professions of the Syrian people: engineers, farmers, teachers, doctors, carpenters, bakers, firemen and more, with no mention of Imams or any religious professionals.<sup>79</sup>

Generally speaking, the Islamic textbooks stress love, benevolence and even peace. Two central exceptions are the detailed military education drawn from the experience of the battles in early Islam. These include tactics, dissimulation, martial spirit and wise politics to secure a decisive victory.

The other exceptions—in grade 7 and more in grade 12—is education for *jihad* and martyrdom *now*, with special focus on fighting Israel. A special table distinguishing between *jihad* and terror seems to focus on intentions rather than actions and is perhaps aimed at depicting the opposition within Syria as terrorists. Also stressed are loyalty, on the one hand and treachery/hypocrisy on the other.

### **Love is the Proof of Faith**

The prophet of Allah said: 'None of you believes unless he loves his brother as he loves himself.'

*Islamic Education, Grade 3, 2017–18, p. 15.*

In the following images the students are supposed to love and be happy when a friend succeeds, love all those who are sick, love to see all the children of the world living in peace.

<sup>79</sup> *Arabic is My Language, Grade 1, Vol. 2, pp. 75–76, 138–40.*



٢- ألاحظُ الصُّورَ الآتيةَ وأُكملُ الجُمْلَ بما يناسبُها .



أحبُّ أنْ \_\_\_  
أطفالُ العالمِ بِسلامٍ



أحبُّ أنْ \_\_\_  
اللهُ كلَّ المرضى

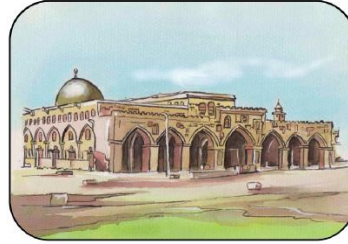


أحبُّ أنْ ينجحَ  
رفاقي كلُّهم

*Islamic Education, Grade 3, 2017–18, p. 16.*

The curriculum portrays the liberation of the Golan and Al-Aqsa Mosque as acts of love.

١- اكتبْ دعاءً يُعبِّرُ عن حُبِّكَ ورغبتِكَ في تحريرِ الجولانِ والمسجدِ الأقصى .



Write a prayer expressing your love and your wish for liberating the Golan and Al-Aqsa Mosque. \_\_\_\_\_

*Islamic Education, Grade 3, 2017–18, p. 98.*

But for the Syrian curriculum, love appears to be flexible; Islamic studies unhesitatingly teach the faith's military history and martial skills.



**نتائج غزوة تبوك:**

- ١- فضحت الغزوة المنافقين وكشفت جبنهم وتخالفهم، حتى سميت الفاضحة.
- ٢- فرض المسلمون هيبتهم وعزروا سلطانهم على الجزيرة العربية ورهبهم الروم والفرس.
- ٣- سقطت هيبة الروم من نفوس العرب.
- ٤- أظهرت الغزوة قوة الدولة الإسلامية.

**Results of the Battle of Tabuk:**

1. The battle exposed the hypocrites, their cowardice and feebleness, and was dubbed "the shaming" [*al fadiha*].
2. Awe for Muslims spread as they strengthened control of the Arabian Peninsula, engendering fear among the Byzantines and the Persians.
3. Fear of the Byzantines diminished among the Arabs.
4. The battle displayed the power of the Islamic polity.

*Islamic Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 101.*

While Islam is mobilized against the Israeli enemy, the focus of the Islamic textbooks appears to remain on Mecca.



قال تعالى:

﴿وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا﴾  
[الآية/آل عمران: ٩٧]

"And [due] to Allah from the people is a pilgrimage to the House—for whoever is able to find thereto a way." (Al-Imran, 3:97)

*Islamic Education, Grade 4, 2017–18, p. 37.*

The Syrian Islamic textbooks emphasize that the war against Israel is a religious duty, because it exists on the homeland's territory.

✦ " إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ الْمُؤْمِنَ لَا يَقْبَلُ التَّفْرِيطَ بِذَرَّةٍ مِنْ تَرَابِ وَطَنِهِ ."  
صنمٌ في صنوءِ المقولةِ السَّافِيةِ وبالتعاونِ معِ بعضِ رُمالِكَ لَوْحَةٍ حَانِطِيَّةٍ تَبِينُ  
فِيهَا وَاجِبَكَ تَجَاهَ أَرْضِنَا الْمُحْتَلَّةِ فِي الْجَوْلَانِ وَفِلَسْطِينَ .



### 'The believer will not abandon a grain of soil of his homeland'

In light of the above saying, design, with some of your friends, a wall panel expressing your duty toward our occupied land in the Golan and Palestine. Use this model for the magazine.[in the wall panel, clockwise]

- In the heart, oh Golan
- Loving your country is faith
- Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine
- Selected pictures the dear Golan and beloved Palestine
- Selected sayings of homeland's love
- Poems expressing love for the country
- Love of the country in Islam

*Islamic Education, Grade 5, 2017–18, p. 87*

The textbooks closely follow the wars of early Islam, the assumed treachery of the Jewish tribes and the fate of the defeated [execution and slavery]. The text focuses on the hypocrites and the Jews.

٤- عُلِّ ما يَأْتِي:

✦ لَمْ يَكُنْ حُكْمُ سَعْدِ ﷺ عَلَى بَنِي قُرَيْظَةَ لَيْبًا.

ابْحَثْ فِي مَرَجِعٍ يَتَنَاوَلُ حَيَاةَ الصَّحَابِيِّ الْجَلِيلِ سَعْدِ بْنِ مَعَاذٍ ﷺ، اَكْتُبْ  
مَوْضُوعًا تَوْضِّحُ فِيهِ: أ- مَوْقِفَهُ حِينَ أَسَاءَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ.  
ب- الْحُكْمَ الَّذِي حَكَمَهُ فِي يَهُودِ بَنِي قُرَيْظَةَ.

**Explain the following:**

The verdict of Sa'ad on [the Jewish tribe of] Bani Quraiza was not lenient.

Search a source about the life of the companion Sa'd ibn Mu'adh. Write an essay clarifying:

1. His position while the hypocrites harmed the Prophet of Allah.
2. His verdict on the Jews of Bani Quraiza.

*Islamic Education, Grade 5, 2017–18, p. 91.*

Historical Islamic battles serve as a military guide.

**الدروس والعبر المستفادة من غزوة بدر :**

الاستعداد للقتال والأخذ بالأسباب أمر مهم لتحقيق النصر .

قبول النصيحة والمشورة من أهل الخبرة والحكمة اقتداء برسول الله ﷺ.

التسلح بالعلم وتشجيعه والعمل على نشره.

العفو شعار للمسلم يلزمه في مختلف الظروف والأحوال.

الدعاء والالتجاء إلى الله تعالى من أعظم أسباب النصر .

- أذكرُ ذُرُوساً وَعِبْرًا أُخْرَى .

**Lessons and conclusions drawn from the Battle of Badr:**

- Preparation for the fight and obtaining equipment are critical for securing victory.
- Acceptance of advice and consultation from experts and following the Prophet of Allah.
- Arming oneself with science and encouraging and spreading it.
- Forgiveness is the Muslim's slogan and should accompany him in all circumstances.
- Prayer and beseeching Allah are among the chief causes of victory.

Look for other lessons and conclusions.

*Islamic Education, Grade 5, 2017–18, p. 24.*



**The Value of Martyrdom and the Martyrs**  
*Islamic Education, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 27.*

### مكانة الشهيد وعظيم أجره

أقرأ وأناقش:

- لماذا شرع الجهاد في الإسلام؟
- لماذا استحق الشهيد أجراً عظيماً عند الله تعالى وخلوداً في الجنة؟
- عدّد بعض صور الدفاع عن وطنك الحبيب.

### The Status of the Martyr and his Great Reward

- Why is *jihad* part of Islamic Sharia?
- Why does the martyr (*shahid*) deserve great reward from Allah and eternity in paradise?
- Enumerate a few images of defending your beloved homeland.

*Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 60.*

■ ويختم النبي ﷺ حديثه مُعظماً فضلَ الشهادةِ في سبيلِ اللهِ مُقسماً باللهِ تعالى مُتمنياً أن يُقتلَ في سبيلِ اللهِ تعالى ثم يحيا مراراً وتكراراً، فلا يتوقّفُ عن الجهادِ في سبيلِ اللهِ أبداً؛ بل يتمنى أعماراً في نهايةِ كلِّ عمرٍ استشهاداً في سبيلِ اللهِ ... وهكذا لتكونَ الشهادةُ خاتمةَ الأعمار.

The Prophet ends his words glorifying the virtue of martyrdom in the way of Allah expressing the hope that he could die [in battle] in the way of Allah, and then coming

alive again and again, and never ever stopping the *jihad* [war] for Allah. He wishes to live again and again and at the end of each life to die as martyr in the way of Allah . . . and so will martyrdom be the seal of [all his] lives.

**Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 61.**

■ إِنَّ التَّضْحِيَةَ بِالنَّفْسِ أَسْمَىٰ دَرَجَاتِ الْإِخْلَاصِ، وَأَصْدَقُ بَرَهَانٍ عَلَىٰ صِحَّةِ الْإِيمَانِ، وَطَرِيقُ الْخُلُودِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ، وَالْفَوْزِ بِرِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَىٰ، وَالْأُمَّةُ بِأَمْسٍ الْحَاجَةُ إِلَىٰ تَضْحِيَاتِ أَبْنَائِهَا دِفَاعاً عَنِ النَّفْسِ وَالْوَطَنِ وَحِفَافاً عَلَىٰ الْمَقَدَّسَاتِ وَالْحُرُمَاتِ وَتَحْقِيقاً لِلْعِزَّةِ وَالْكَرَامَةِ. لِهَذَا جَعَلَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَىٰ الشَّهِيدَ حَيًّا يُرْزَقُ عِنْدَهُ، وَغَفَرَ لَهُ ذُنُوبَهُ، وَبَوَّأَهُ الْمَنْزِلَةَ الْعَالِيَةَ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مَعَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ.

إِنَّ مِنْ صُورِ الْجِهَادِ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فِي عَصْرِنَا الْحَاضِرِ جِهَادَ أَهْلِنَا فِي الْجَوْلَانِ الْمُحْتَلِّ، وَجِهَادَ أَبْنَاءِ فِلَسْطِينَ الْمُحْتَلَّةِ مِنْ أَجْلِ اسْتِعَادَةِ أَرْضِهِمِ الْمَغْتَصَبَةِ وَحَقُوقِهِمِ الْمُسْتَلَبَةِ وَالِدِّفَاعِ عَنِ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَأَعْرَاضِهِمْ وَأَمْوَالِهِمْ فَإِنْ قُتِلُوا فَهَمَّ شُهَدَاءُ تَصَدِيقاً لِقَوْلِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ:

The sacrifice of one's soul constitutes the highest level of loyalty, and the most reliable proof of the health of one's faith, the way for eternal bliss, while securing Allah's favor. The nation critically needs the sacrifices of her sons in defense of soul and homeland and for the protection of the holy places and for achieving pride and dignity. That's why Allah made the martyr alive with him, and has forgiven all his sins, and granted him the highest status in paradise with the prophets and messengers.

Among the images of *jihad* in the way of Allah in our time the *jihad* of our people in the occupied Golan, the *jihad* of the sons of occupied Palestine for the return of their usurped land and their robbed rights and defending their lives and property and if they die, they become martyrs and affirm the words of the Prophet.

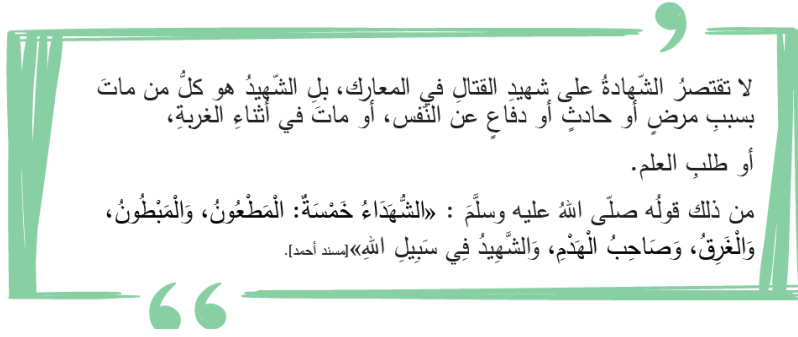
**Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 62.**

The martyr receives a series of benefits and priorities in paradise.<sup>80</sup>

The textbooks expand the meaning of being a martyr (*shahid*) from an array of causes and circumstances.

<sup>80</sup> *Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 63.*





Martyrdom is not limited to battleground martyr; but the martyr is he who died due to illness, accident or self-defense, or died away from home or seeking knowledge.

From that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'The martyrs are five: the stabbed, the one who suffers from an intestinal ailment, the drowned, the accident victim, and the martyr in the way of Allah.' (*Ahmad Hadith Collection*).

*Islamic Studies, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 30.*

﴿وَإِنْ يُرِيدُوا أَنْ يَخْدَعُوكَ فَإِنَّ حَسْبَكَ اللَّهُ هُوَ الَّذِي إِلَيْكَ يَنْصَرُونَ. وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾ [الأنفال].  
 والمقصود بالسلم هنا السلم العادل المنصف الذي يحفظ للمسلمين عزتهم وكرامتهم ويضمن لهم حقوقهم، فهو سلام من منطق القوة، سلام العزة والكرامة، سلام يصون الذات والأهل والمجتمع والوطن والدولة من الاعتداء الغاشم والبغي العاتي، وليس سلام الضعفاء الأذلاء المقهورين، فالإسلام لا يرضى لاتباعه إلا القوة والعزة والأمن والكرامة.

انقد وابن موقفاً:  
 هل يلتقي السلم العادل مع الاحتلال والاستعمار والاستيطان؟ بين رأيك.

'But if they intend to deceive you—then sufficient for you is Allah. It is He who supported you with His help and with the believers.' (Anfal 8:62)

What is meant by peace is just and equitable peace that will safeguard the Muslims' honor and dignity and will guarantee their rights, a peace that comes out of the logic of force, a peace of honor and dignity, a peace protecting the person and the family and the collective and the homeland and the state from the brutal, violent, oppressive aggression, and not the peace of the weak, the humiliated, the defeated. Because Islam does not wish for its followers anything but power and honor and security and dignity.

Criticize and develop a position: Is a just peace commensurate with occupation, colonialism, and settlement? Elaborate.

*Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 143.*

It is the right of the peoples who are helpless and living under occupation to gain their freedom by all means available to them.

Existing Aggression: Aggression that has occurred, just like the aggression of the Quraish tribe against the Prophet in the battles of Badr and the Trench, the occupation of the Zionists in Palestine and the Golan.

*Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 147.*

Discussing peace between the Muslims and their enemy, the text takes a conservative Islamic view allowing only a temporary truce (*hudna*) to be concluded, not a peace treaty. Such a truce can be concluded only if this serves the interest of the Muslims. Examples for such interests are the weakness of Muslims from a "shortage of people, money or equipment, and the enemy is powerful."<sup>81</sup> Lacking such pressing military interest, no truce can be allowed with the non-Muslim enemy.

### Christianity

Textbooks demonstrate congruence between the Christian religion and the conscription law of compulsory military service in Syria. The following is an example of an assignment for students, which requires their knowledge of the Syrian constitution and the pillars of the religion:

١- أبين من خلال الدستور في الجمهورية العربية السورية واجبات المواطن المؤمن تجاه الدفاع عن سلامة الوطن. وأعط مثالا على ذلك.

١- الخدمة العسكرية الإلزامية واجب مقدس وتنظم بقانون. (المادة: ٤٦)

٢- الدفاع عن سلامة الوطن وصيانة أسرار الدولة واجب على كل مواطن. (المادة: ٤٦)

Through the constitution of the Arab Syrian Republic, explain the believer citizen's duties to defend the country's integrity, and provide examples.

1. Compulsory military service is a sacred statutory duty. (Article 46)
2. Defending the country's integrity and safeguarding state secrets is the duty of every citizen. (Article 46)

**Christian Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 114.**

As will be demonstrated below, Christians are the only segment of Syrian society treated as a minority, with special religious textbooks. There is a price for such favorable treatment: The Christian education textbooks also stress the obligation to serve in the army, "safeguarding state secrets," and include visuals of atrocities said to be committed by Israel and the rebels and scenes from the civil war's destruction. All this amid an enhanced message of peace (as a particular Christian trait) while encouraging a shared hatred for the regime's enemies. Connecting these dots, arguably the Christian authors seek to reassure that the loyalty of their confessional community is steadfast.<sup>82</sup>

The following paragraph explains, rather apologetically, the need to serve in the army. It presents Isaiah's (2:4) famous dictum against warfare but also images of destruction caused by the rebels, particularly to the Church.

<sup>81</sup> *Islamic Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 153.*

<sup>82</sup> Lela Gilbert, "Bitter Split Among Syria's Christians over Loyalty to Assad," *The Hudson Institute*, April 18, 2018. Accessed May 26, 2018. <https://www.hudson.org/research/14271-bitter-split-among-syria-s-christians-over-loyalty-to-assad>.

Public authorities have the right to impose on citizens what is necessary to defend the homeland, and they have the duty to do so. Those who specialize in serving the nation in military life are the servants of the people's security and freedom. If they do their job properly, they really contribute to maintaining peace.

*Christian Education, Grade 12*, 2017–18, p. 116.

The Islamic studies textbooks seem to be more straightforward; martyrdom as an act of defending the country is considered to be of great value. Students are taught to idealize martyrs who sacrifice their lives for Syria's sake and to cherish their memories.

٢. قَدَمَ الشَّهِيدُ أَعَزَّ مَا يَمْلِكُ لِلدَّفَاعِ عَنِ الْوَطَنِ وَعِزَّةَ أَبْنَائِهِ.  
اكتَبْ موضوعاً لا يتجاوز خمسة أسطرٍ عن اهتمام الدولة والمجتمع بذوي الشهداء.

2. The martyr dedicates his most valuable possession in defense of the homeland and the honor of its sons.

Write a paragraph no longer than five lines showing the care which country and society give to martyrs' families.

*Islamic Studies, Grade 7*, 2017–18, p. 31.

### Gender Equality

Regarding the status of women in Syrian society, many illustrations and photos of women, young and old, are shown in Syrian textbooks. Almost all of these women, even authority figures, are dressed in Western clothing without any sort of head covering or other indication of their Islamic identity. Women in secular textbook images appear more casually dressed.



*My Beautiful Language: Arabic, Grade 1*, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 46.

أعبر شفوياً عن دور الأم في الأسرة:



Say something about the role of the mother in the family.

*Islamic Education, Grade 1, 2017–18, p. 41.*

Regarding women's rights and women's status in society, the importance of this subject is emphasized, showing examples of women as role models in Syrian history. An entire chapter in a National Education textbook is dedicated to the woman's role in Syrian society.

تعدُّ أوضاعُ المرأةِ في كلِّ مرحلةٍ من المراحلِ التاريخيةِ انعكاساً للظروفِ الاقتصاديةِ والاجتماعيةِ السائدةِ، فلا يمكنُ للمجتمعِ أن يستمرَّ في تقدُّمه إذا لم يوفرِ الشروطَ الموضوعيةَ الكفيلةَ بإسهامِ المرأةِ في بنائه وتطويره.

ما أهميَّةُ دورِ المرأةِ في بناءِ الأسرةِ والمجتمعِ؟ وكيفَ يمكنُ تمكينها للمشاركةِ في عمليةِ التَّمنيةِ؟

The status of women in every period in history reflects the prevailing economic and social circumstances. It is impossible for a society to continue its progress without providing objective conditions, guaranteeing women's participation in building and advancing society.

What is the importance of women in building family and society? How can they be empowered to participate in the process of development?

*National Education, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 18.*

Astronomer and Physicist Shadia Rifa'i Habbal is presented as an Arab scientist from Greater Syria, who had a spectacular career in the US and Britain, yet remains proud of her Arab heritage. Her distinguished career—including her advisory role with NASA—exposes a paradoxical attitude toward working with the West. The text also stresses her "family duties" alongside her professional burden.

حَرَصَ الدَّستورُ السُّوريُّ على مساواةِ الرِّجُلِ بالمرأةِ، في الحقوقِ والواجباتِ، وأتاحَ لها الدُّخولَ في الحياةِ السِّياسيةِ والصَّناعيةِ والمشاركةِ الفعَّالةِ في قِطاعيِّ التَّعليمِ والقضاءِ.

وقد حَظَّيتِ المرأةُ السُّوريَّةُ بحقِّ التَّصويتِ في الانتخاباتِ منذَ عامِ ١٩٤٩م، وأوجدتِ المؤسساتُ الرِّسميةُ بيئةً خصبةً لسيداتِ الأعمالِ، ونعروضُ فيما يأتي جدولاً يبيِّنُ مشاركةَ المرأةِ في مجلسِ الشَّعبِ:

جدولٌ يبيِّنُ مشاركةَ المرأةِ في مجلسِ الشَّعبِ



She is an international expert in solar and solar wind research. She is also a member of many international scientific societies. Dr. Shadia is a fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society and her scientific and family life points to the great potential of women scientists in the Arab Homeland. She combined her family duties with teaching, scientific research, leading scientific teams and academic activity.

*Arabic is My Language, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18, pp. 72–73.*

Gender equality is highlighted as an important Syrian value, and Syria is shown as a country fighting for women's rights through legislation, with the goal of being an inclusive country for women in all walks of life.

The Syrian constitution is keen on equality of the rights and obligations between men and women, allowing women to enter political and industrial life, and actively participate in the educational and judiciary sectors.

The Syrian woman obtained the right to vote in 1949, and the official institutions created a productive environment for businesswomen. . . . the number of women members in the People's Assembly [31 out of 250].

*Arabic Language, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 109.*

Historical continuity of the woman's role in Syrian society from ancient times is shown below. Note that men remain in the center, and women stand at their side. Freedom for women is based more on support for males and the needs of society, rather than straightforward rights for women.

المراة ودورها في بناء المجتمع

الدرس الثاني

أثبتت المرأة عبر العصور كفاءتها ومشاركتها للرجل في بناء المجتمع في جميع المجالات، فعندما بدأ في ممارسة الزراعة وقفت إلى جانبه، وحينما بدأت بواكيز الصناعات شاركته في ذلك.

### **The Woman's Role in Society-Building**

Throughout the ages, the woman has established her competence and participation, alongside the man, in all areas of society-building. When man started pursuing agriculture, she stood at his side, and as the first craftwork emerged, she participated with him in that.

*History, Grade 7, 2017–18, p. 23.*

Another subject emphasized in a high school national education textbook is family planning. Unlike Islamic customs and traditions, school textbooks educate students to have small families with family planning.

إن التحولات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية المهمة التي حققها المجتمع العربي لا بد أن يواكبها تطوّر في الاتجاهات والمواقف الاجتماعية حول بنية الأسرة وحجمها؛ لأن الأسرة السليمة تبني مجتمعاً سليماً، على حين أن تعرضها للفقر والتشرّد والجنوح يمنعك سلباً على المجتمع، ويؤدّي إلى عدم استقراره.

The important economic and social transformation achieved by Arab society should be accompanied by progressive social tendencies and positions regarding family structure

and size. This is because a sound family makes a sound society, while poverty, displacement and delinquency negatively impact society and lead to instability.

*National Education, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 7.*

The curriculum defines family planning with different criteria: rising marital age; pre-planning numbers of children; longer intervals between pregnancies; and decision-making about when child-bearing ages should end. Examples are given from national projects for family planning from Tunisia, Japan and China. In an effort to explain the obstacles facing this issue, customs and traditions are mentioned.



Family planning is influenced by the economic, cultural and social conditions of society. for example: the spread of illiteracy and unemployment; out of use customs and traditions which discriminate between males and females; and conceit about one's large family while honoring women with many children; . . . along with inadequate health awareness.

*National Education, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 10.*

## International Organizations and Peace

The textbooks show Syria's support for the UN and its various agencies striving for world peace, attempts to prevent violence and oppression and struggles for human rights. Syria views itself a "natural member" of the UN, as it professes to share the same values. The textbooks view the US as a constant violator of UN principles, using its veto to thwart Security Council resolutions. Syria has called for reform in the UN to abolish the right of veto. In addition, Syria approves of what it views as the UN's consistent condemnation of Israeli actions and policies; moreover it supports the forces of resistance fighting against Israel, including violent ones. Syrian children are taught to view the UN as an organization to which they can turn with complaints about the Israeli occupation.

Over the past seven years, the UN has adopted numerous resolutions regarding the Syrian Civil War, calling for ceasefires, access to humanitarian aid, monitoring of civilian evacuations as well as the controversial resolutions regarding the investigation and elimination of Syrian chemical weapons. All of the above resolutions are absent from Syrian textbooks. Instead, textbooks



highlight the UN's role in failed attempts to put international pressure on Israel. It is noteworthy that the intensive attention the UN places on Israel is acknowledged in the textbooks, and considered a positive trend.

### دور الأمم المتحدة في حل النزاعات الدولية:

نظراً لما تحدثه الحروب من دمار، وانطلاقاً من إيمان الشعوب بالحقوق الأساسية للإنسان وبحقوق المتساوية للأمم، ولضمان العيش بسلام سعت الأمم المتحدة إلى حل معظم النزاعات الدولية التي تحدث بين أعضائها، غير أنها بقيت عاجزة عن حل العديد من المشكلات الدولية، وأبرزها العدوان الصهيوني على الشعب العربي الفلسطيني...، لكن

• من المستفيد برأيك حالياً من منظمة الأمم المتحدة أم الدول الضعيفة أم الدول القوية؟

مستند (5)

ولماذا؟

### The UN's Role in Solving International Conflicts:

In light of the destruction caused by wars, based on the peoples' belief in fundamental human rights and equivalent nations' rights, and in order to ensure living in peace, the UN aims to resolve the majority of international conflicts between its members. Nevertheless, it is still incapable of solving many international problems, while the most prominent one is the Zionist aggression toward the Arab Palestinian people.

• Who do you think benefits the most from the UN organization: weak countries or powerful countries, and why?

*National Education, Grade 11, 2017–18, p. 96.*

The UN is often described as a somewhat paralyzed organization, unable to realize any important resolutions, because of the veto power of the permanent nations on the Security Council, including the US. The curriculum emphasizes that this situation empowers the US and its ally Israel, for the US can veto any resolution.

الأمم المتحدة، كما أن استمرار صراع المعسكرين أدى إلى عجز منظمة الأمم المتحدة عن مواجهة ظاهرة عدوان الدول الكبرى وحلفائها من خلال استخدام حق النقض (الفيتو) ضد أي قرار يتعارض مع مصالحها، الأمر الذي شل مجلس الأمن وجعله عاجزاً عن أداء مهامه، كعجزه عن مواجهة العدوان الأمريكي على فيتنام بين عامي /١٩٦٢ - ١٩٧٣م/ وعدوان الكيان الصهيوني الإرهابي المستمر على الأمة العربية.

The continuing two-camp conflict led to the UN's inability to confront the phenomenon of aggression by large countries and their allies, through the use of the power of veto against any resolution which contradicts their interests. This immobilized the Security

Council and rendered it incapable of fulfilling its mission. For example, it was incapable of confronting American aggression toward Vietnam in 1962–1973, as well as the terrorist Zionist Entity's continuous aggression toward the Arab Nation.

**National Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 48.**

Students are asked to inform themselves of the UN's limitations, specifically regarding implementation of resolutions favoring Palestinians.

حاول مع زملائك أن تبحث في موقع الأمم المتحدة الإلكتروني عن قرارات تخص القضية الفلسطينية، وبيّن سبب عدم تنفيذها.

With your friends, try to research resolutions on the UN's website concerning the Palestinian issue and explain the reason for their lack of implementation.

**National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 72.**

- ما أشكال المقاومة التي قام بها أهلنا في الجولان المحتل ضد قوات الاحتلال الصهيونيّ الإرهابيّ؟

- لماذا لم تأخذ قرارات الأمم المتحدة طريقها للتنفيذ؟

- 
- What are the different forms of resistance which our people in the occupied Golan have waged against the terrorist Zionist Occupation forces?
- Why weren't the UN resolutions implemented?

**National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 99.**

However, the UN is considered to be a respected international institution, perhaps the only one still condemning Israel. The following pictures compare alleged crimes ascribed to Israeli forces against children in Gaza and to an innocent Christian priest killed during the Syrian Civil War. The Syrian regime has blamed rebel forces for the priest's murder, although this has never been proved. This UN is expected to equate the war crimes of Syrian rebel forces to those of Israeli forces.



الأب الشهيد باسيليوس نصار



الطفلة الشهيدة من غزة



الأطفال الأسرى خلف الشريط

٢- أكتب نشرة باسم الشباب لهيئة الأمم المتحدة أناشدهم بوضع آلية لوقف الحرب في العالم من خلال إظهار بشاعة نتائج الحروب على البشر والخلقة جمعاء.

Photo 1: Prisoner children behind bars.

Photo 2: Baby girl martyr from Gaza.

Photo 3: Martyr Father Basilius Nassar.

2 – Write an announcement in the name of Syrian youth, calling on the UN to establish a mechanism for stopping war in the world, by showing its ugliness to mankind and the entire universe.

*Christian Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 113.*

Israel is seen as the main violator of humanitarian law.

٣- هناك أطراف لا تتقيد في أثناء الحرب بأحكام القانون الدولي الإنساني، على رأسها الصهيونية. قَدِّم اقتراحاً يضمن تحقيق التزام أحكام هذا القانون.

There are parties who fail to abide by international humanitarian law during war—first and foremost: Zionism. Create a proposal to achieve commitment to this law.

*Arabic Language, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 99.*

When citing the different councils and committees that compromise the UN, the UN Human Rights Committee is mentioned. Although the UNHCR has condemned the violation of human rights carried out by the Al-Assad regime during the Civil War, this textbook emphasizes the Committee's work against Israel.

٢ يتولى من خلال آلياته مهمة الفحص والرصد، وتقديم المشورة، والتبليغ عن أوضاع حقوق الإنسان في العالم، وقد اتخذ المجلس قراراً بإدانة الكيان الصهيوني العنصري لممارساته اللا إنسانية بحق الشعب العربي الفلسطيني في قطاع غزة عام ٢٠٠٩م.

Through its different mechanisms, it (UNHCR) is in charge of investigation, observation, consultation and information on human rights situations around the world. The committee adopted a resolution condemning the racist Zionist Entity for its inhuman actions against the rights of the Arab Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip in 2009.

*National Education, Grade 8, 2017–18, p. 61.*

Syria is presented in the curriculum as taking part and sharing values with the UN despite the obvious contradiction of events that have taken place in Syrian during the past few years.

• **تفاعل سورية مع العالم:** تفاعلت سورية مع قضايا العالم الإنسانية من خلال مشاركتها في جميع أنشطة المؤسسات الدولية التابعة لمنظمة الأمم المتحدة، فكان لها دور بالوقوف إلى جانب الدول النامية، ودعمها لصنع قوتها عن طريق نظام دولي اقتصادي جديد، يعتمد العدل في توزيع الثروة ما بين الدول الغنية (الشمال) والدول الفقيرة (الجنوب)، من

وليس بالضرورة أن تعنى الجانب العسكري، بل جوانب أخرى اقتصادية وتقنية ومعرفية وغيرها، ومن يمتلك هذه العناصر يمتلك أوراق القوة، ومن لا يمتلكها ليس له موقع ولا كلمة في المستقبل.

السيد الرئيس بشار الأسد، خطاب مجلس الشعب، ٢٠٠٣م.

٥٨

خلال إنهاء واقع الاستغلال والتخلف، الذي فرض عليها من قبل الاستعمار، كما دعت سورية إلى احترام حقوق الشعوب والإنسان عموماً، وحقوق المرأة والطفل خصوصاً، وكان لها مشاركتها فيما يخص الرعاية الصحية، وحماية البيئة.

**Syria's cooperation with the world:** Syria has cooperated with the humanitarian issues of the world by participating in all the activities of the international institutions which belong to the UN. Syria had a role to stand in support of developing countries. In addition, Syria called for the respect of individuals and the rights of all peoples in general, and specifically women's and children's rights.

*History, Grade 12, 2017–18, pp. 58–59.*

As shown in previous sections, the textbooks present Syria's hope for a brighter future, including economic prosperity, technological development and modernity, as well as peace throughout its lands. Regarding economic issues, Syria appears to be looking toward its manufacturing industry and renewed tourism in the future. In this context, Syria is hopeful about stopping the "brain drain" phenomenon and repatriating its talented citizens to help develop the Syrian economy. However, it is clear that Syria is struggling to find the right balance between modernity and internationalism, while trying to avoid the globalization which until now has been spearheaded by the West. Textbooks attempt to give children hope for a more prosperous Syria in the future, which they are expected to take part in.

أرسم خريطة وطني سورية بحدوده البرية والبحرية محدداً عليه الأنهار والمحافظات، وأماكن المشاريع الاقتصادية التي نطمح لها) ولا ننسى المشاريع السياحية).

و الآن ... ماذا لو تمّ تنفيذ ما خططناه لتنمية وطني سورية ... كيف ستبدو بلدنا مستقبلاً؟

Draw a map of the homeland Syria, including its land and sea borders, rivers and provinces, and the places of planned economic projects we hope Syria will achieve (don't forget tourist projects).

And now, if what we planned for the development of the homeland Syria could be accomplished, what would our country look like in the future?

*Geography, Grade 10, 2017–18, p. 111.*

### The Danger of Globalization

The hegemony of powerful countries over weak countries.

*National Education, Grade 12, 2017–18, p. 33.*

In relation to peacekeeping and peacemaking, as shown, Syria maintains an aggressively negative stance toward Israel and the US. However, this does not stop Syria from presenting itself in textbooks as part of the international peace movement, alongside the UN and its agencies. In addition, since none of the rebel groups in the civil war are mentioned, no hope for peace in this context is even considered.

An entire chapter in a social studies textbook is entitled "Our Vision of Peace" and discusses the International Day of Peace and the UN amid the contributions of its various organizations for world peace. Students are encouraged to strive for world peace, shown through the next activities:

فما رسالتك إلى العالم لنشر الأمن والسلام؟



.....

أصمّم شعاراً للسلام أراه مناسباً.



What is your message to the world for spreading security and peace?

Design a slogan for peace which you find suitable.

*Social Studies, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18, p. 57.*

Textbooks even show Syria's compliance with the idea of peace between its Muslim and Christian factions. The next example shows the synthesis between Syria's readiness for peace and its view of Israel as the obstacle. This church in Qunietra was under Israeli occupation, allegedly "robbed, burned and destroyed" by the Israeli army. However, the area still carries hope for peace.



**أماكن مقدّسة في سورية**  
**كنيسة القديس جاورجيوس - القنيطرة**  
تُعدّ كنيسة القديس جاورجيوس في القنيطرة من المعالم والمواقع الأثرية والتاريخية والدينية المُهمّة في الجولان العربي السوري المُحتل. بُنيت عام ١٩٣٠م من الحجر البازلتي الأسود القلبي. وقد تعرّضت الكنيسة للتدمير والخراب بفعل احتلال مدينة القنيطرة من قبل الجيش الإسرائيلي في معظم أجزائها، ولاسيما الجهة الجنوبية والدرج والمُؤر الذي يحيط بها، كما تعرّضت الموجودات والأثار التي كانت بداخلها للنهب والسرقة والعبث والحرق والتخريب.

وقد زارها قداسة البابا يوحنا بولس الثاني عام ٢٠٠١م خلال زيارته التاريخية إلى سورية حيث صلّى فيها وألقى كلمة، وزرع عندها غرسة زيتون داعياً أن يعم السلام على هذه الأرض.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II visited this church in 2001 during his historical visit to Syria. He prayed there, gave a speech and planted an olive tree, calling for peace to prevail over this land.

*Christian Education, Grade 5, 2017–18, p. 32.*

## Conclusion

The Syrian curriculum offers a unique look at a people in the midst of a battle for life and death, trying to create a semblance of normalcy and coherence on the edge of the abyss. At first look, there is much to admire about the modern secular dimensions of the curriculum which highlights women's and Christian rights and genuine encouragement of creative thinking and commitment to scientific research and hard work.

An examination utilizing IMPACT's UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance (see Methodology, p. 101) brings unsettling currents to the fore. On all accounts except gender and tolerance toward the Christian minority, the Syrian curriculum does not meet these standards. Despite abstract sentiments about peace and love, the curriculum focuses on indoctrination; does not provide a balanced worldview; avoids human and personal presentation or even respect of the Other; does not provide serious environmental and economic education; and professes an ideology that is exclusionary, militaristic and authoritarian.

To what extent did the curriculum contribute to the start and ruthless continuation of the Syrian Civil War? The textbooks bear strong similarities to what was earlier detected in our 2001 report, entitled "Peace and the 'Other' in Syrian School Textbooks."<sup>83</sup> There remains an atmosphere of intolerance and a stress on radical martial heroism, conjoined with pan-Arab nationalistic ambitions. There is a conscious directing of hatred toward the Israeli Other. The curriculum uses Islam to foster a *jihadist* military spirit, rife with reverence to martyrs and heroes, both secular and religious. The environment created by the curriculum supports an attitude of self-righteousness that justifies "resistance" (guerilla-terrorism) while using "all available means" to destroy the Other, under the assumption that international organizations such as the UN are supportive of such actions. Expressions such as "the Zionist presence in Palestine is a momentary presence," "insistence on purifying the land and all of humanity from the Zionists," or "Zionist Entity," are used in concert with other anti-Semitic messages.

The Syrian tragedy is evidence that the dichotomous choices offered by the curriculum to students—that of love, progressive thinking, and a volunteer spirit vs hatred and a martial attitude toward the Other—may only be contributing to the tumult that is modern Syria. Syria and its people can no longer afford such dual existence. Relative tolerance toward some aspects of national life, while ruthlessly oppressing or ignoring important ethnic and collective identities within Syria for the sake of monochromatic radical pan-Arab indoctrination, comes with a hefty price tag.

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<sup>83</sup> Arnon Groiss, "Jews, Zionism And Israel in Syrian School Textbooks," June 2001, IMPACT-se/  
<http://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Syria2001.pdf>.



One particular topic of interest is that Syrian authoritarian pan-Arabism and secularism bring it culturally closer to Russia than to any other major actor. Iran and its proxies are not viewed positively in the curriculum. This may point to another kind of dissimulation (*taqiya*)—so often used by minorities in the Middle East. Given the ideological differences between Iran and Syria, alliances of convenience are possible but if the curriculum is to be taken on its face, there can never be a true friendship with this Iranian regime. Russia, however, is a different case altogether. The Syrian relationship with Russia—demonstrated eagerly in the textbooks—comprises what is akin to a mutual admiration society.

The curriculum's duality is nowhere exhibited more than in discussions of competitors—and even foes. Thus, while Iran is typically described as an occupier and land usurper, its revolution is praised for its popular anti-Western dimension. While the curriculum is emphatically secular, Islamic studies allow for other views. While Syria claims much Turkish land, typically only Alexandretta is shown on the maps. And while Israel is demonized throughout the curriculum and is fated to disappear, the disengagement agreement and Syrian conditions for peace (in general terms) are also mentioned. Moreover, while all Arab states are destined to melt into one pan-Arab entity, even the presence of their "artificial" borders is acknowledged. Finally, while Arabism (unlike Islamism) does not claim European territory, heroic stories of the conquest of Al-Andalus (the Iberian Peninsula) are featured.<sup>84</sup>

The civil war is treated in the textbooks as a catastrophe that occurred for no apparent reason; certainly not as a result of social issues. The curriculum ignores the 2011 uprising and efforts for democracy and freedom—which ultimately led to the war. It does evoke Assad's answer: the regime still has a strong enough balance between hatred for Syria's enemies and love of the nation, which manages to create a large enough consensus for the Assad regime to survive.

Ultimately hate and militarism cannot be controlled. A culture of peace and tolerance must be taught and fostered. Despite the urgent priorities weighted toward survival from the Syrian disaster, the international community should not compromise on meaningful peace education, vital to bring the internal changes among the hearts and minds of students that can later translate into real peace.

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<sup>84</sup> *Arabic, Grade 9, Vol 1, 2017–18, p. 11.*

## Methodology

IMPACT-se's research utilizes a content analysis research method to examine the textbooks according to the following criteria which is a condensed version of UNESCO's standards for peace and tolerance in school education:<sup>85</sup>

1. **RESPECT:** The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the "Other," his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.<sup>86</sup>
2. **INDIVIDUAL OTHER:** The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the "Other" as an individual, his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated.<sup>87</sup>
3. **NO HATE:** The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.<sup>88</sup>
4. **PEACEMAKING:** The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.<sup>89</sup>
5. **UNBIASED INFORMATION:** Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use equal standards to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The methodology was initiated by Yohanan Manor. This is an updated version of the standards prepared by Eldad J. Pardo, Jean-Claude Nidam and Shimon Shetreet (May 2014). <http://www.impact-se.org/methodology/>

<sup>86</sup> As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, III. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

<sup>87</sup> The goal of education for peace is the development of universally recognized values in an individual, regardless of different socio-cultural contexts. See *Ibid.*, Article 6. See also, on exchanges between youth, the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principles IV, V.

<sup>88</sup> Based on *Ibid.*, Articles III.6, IV.7 and VII.39; and on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 18.2.

<sup>89</sup> Based on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eighth session, Paris, November 1995, Article 9; and on the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 5.

<sup>90</sup> Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Article V.14.

6. **GENDER:** The curriculum should foster equality and mutual respect between women and men. It should refrain from stereotyped gender roles.<sup>91</sup>

7. **SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION:** The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination against Women and emphasizes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to gender.

<sup>92</sup> Based on UNESCO recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, November 19, 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing “systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance,” see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance proclaimed and signed by member states of UNESCO on November 16, 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.

## List of Textbooks

The following Arabic language textbooks have been monitored for the research in this study. Please feel free to contact IMPACT-se for access to textbooks contained in our research (<http://www.impact-se.org/about-us/contact-us/>). The titles both here and referenced in the text have been translated into English to aid the reader.

*My Beautiful Language: Arabic*, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*

*Christian Education*, Grade 1, 2017–18.

*Islamic Education*, Grade 1, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 1, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 1, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 2, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

*Social Studies*, Grade 2, Vol. 1, 2017–18.

*Social Studies*, Grade 2, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*

*Islamic Education*, Grade 3, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 3, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*

*Christian Education*, Grade 4, 2017–18.

*Islamic Education*, Grade 4, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 4, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

*Christian Education*, Grade 5, 2017–18. \*

*Islamic Education*, Grade 5, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 5, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Social Studies*, Grade 5, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*

*Arabic is My Language*, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18.

*Islamic Education*, Grade 6, 2017–18. \*

- Social Studies*, Grade 6, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*
- Social Studies*, Grade 6, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language*, Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language*, Grade 7, Vol. 2, 2017–18.
- Geography*, Grade 7, 2017–18. \*
- History*, Grade 7, 2017–18. \*
- Islamic Education*, Grade 7, 2017–18. \*
- National Education*, Grade 7, 2017–18. \*
- Russian Language*, Grade 7, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language*, Grade 8, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language*, Grade 8, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*
- History*, Grade 8, 2017–18. \*
- Islamic Education*, Grade 8, 2017–18.
- National Education*, Grade 8, 2017–18. \*
- Russian Language*, Grade 8, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language*, Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language*, Grade 9, Vol. 2, 2017–18. \*
- Geography of the Arab Homeland and Syria*, Grade 9, 2017–18. \*
- History*, Grade 9, 2017–18. \*
- Islamic Education*, Grade 9, 2017–18.
- National Education*, Grade 9, 2017–18. \*
- Russian Language*, Grade 9, 2017–18. \*
- Arabic Language and Literature*, Grade 10, 2017–18.
- Geography*, Grade 10, 2017–18. \*
- History*, Grade 10 (Literary Branch), 2017–18. \*
- History*, Grade 10 (Scientific Branch), 2017–18. \*
- History of the Modern and Contemporary World*, Grade 11, 2017–18. \*
- National Education*, Grade 11, 2017–18. \*
- Christian Education*, Grade 12, 2017–18. \*
- Geography*, Grade 12, 2017–18.
- History*, Grade 12, 2017–18. \*
- Islamic Education*, Grade 12, 2017–18. \*
- National Education*, Grade 12, 2017–18. \*

**\* Quoted Textbooks**