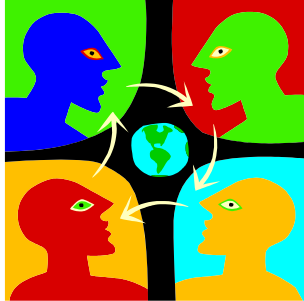


מרכז ישראל/פלסטין למחקר ולמידע

Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information

STRATEGIC AFFAIRS UNIT & THE PEACE  
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
POLICY PAPER



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PALESTINIAN TEXT BOOKS REFORM

NOVEMBER 2004

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The following report is based on the assumption that the Palestinian National movement and its Government in the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian Authority, have made a strategic decision to make peace with the State of Israel. Text books issued by governments are an authoritative source to determine the values that any society lives by. Until now, the Palestinian Authority text books have not provided evidence that the Palestinian Authority has been implementing a policy of peace making.

Palestinian text books have confused messages and it is not difficult to come to the understanding that the main political theme imparted to the students is that Israel should not exist and that is essentially the Palestinian goal. Assuming that this is not the political message that the Palestinian Authority adheres to, there is a need to make real revisions and amendments in the Palestinian text books. If this assumption is correct, then the recommendations in this paper provide some solid suggestions of what could be done immediately by the Palestinian Ministry of Education to rectify the confusion and to strengthen the position of the Ministry and of the entire Palestinian Authority in the eyes of the international community.

Almost all of the recommendations are based on the political statements and values found within Palestinian documents. The main guiding document is the Palestinian Declaration of Independence from November 1988. Palestinians have a natural right to own their own narrative and their own history. This is not the issue in question. The Palestinian education system has the responsibility to build and shape the Palestinian national collective identity and ethos. With this it must be clear that the Palestinian education system is educating the next generation to live in peace with Israel. The Palestinian educational system should not teach hatred and should not encourage violence.

This report includes recommendations on the following issues:

- **General Educational Context**
- **Dealing with Maps and the term “Palestine”**
- **Dealing with History**
- **Dealing with “The Other”**
- **Dealing with Islamic Texts and Concepts**
- **Dealing with Jerusalem**
- **Dealing with Present Relations**

In the Annexes to this report are a number of Islamic Fatwas and papers on Jihad and martyrdom.

The report makes mention of the fact that there is also much work to do on the Israeli side to place Israeli text books in par with Israeli statements regarding its intentions to make peace with the Palestinians. IPCRI has issued reports on Palestinian and Israeli text books and will also produce a report with specific recommendations for revising Israeli text books.

This report is being distributed widely in Palestine, Israel, and the International Community.

## **Background to Document**

IPCRI is contracted by the US Government to conduct a review of Palestinian text books based on a set of criteria developed by a group of Palestinian educators and according to parameters determined by the US Government. The main issues of concern in the investigation relate to the extent to which Palestinian text books incite against Israel, Jews, peace, and the extent to which they encourage the use of violence. Likewise, the investigation includes the opposite parameters as well – the extent to which the Palestinian Authority text books encourage peaceful coexistence with Israel and with Jews.

IPCRI has so far issued two reports:

1. March 2003 on text books for grades 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8
2. April 2004 on text books for grades 4 & 9

IPCRI will issue another report in 2005 on text books for grades 5 & 10.

IPCRI has also issued another report investigating a selection of relevant Israeli text books that was published in April 2004.

In the framework of a joint activity of IPCRI's Strategic Affairs Unit (SAU) and the Peace Education Department (PED), IPCRI has decided to issue an additional report directed to the Palestinian Ministry of Education on recommendations and suggestions for improving Palestinian text books and in providing some thoughts and insights on how to confront some of the more difficult and sensitive issues in the Palestinian text books. This report is based on the conclusions and recommendations of the first two reports.

The Palestinian Ministry of Education was established within the framework of the Oslo Peace Process. With the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, the Palestinians took charge of the educational system, inheriting outdated text books, (Jordanian in the West Bank and Egyptian in Gaza) that had been modified by the Israeli Military Government's education department. The modifications to the text books by Israel concerned the removal of anti-Israel or anti-Jewish content that may have existed in the texts.

The new Palestinian Ministry of Education immediately reverted back to using non-Israeli-modified text books and at the same time launched a process of preparing a new Palestinian curriculum. The National Curricula Writing Center was established and set out on the difficult task of preparing new text books for all grades and all schools in the Palestinian Authority areas. Unfortunately, the Oslo Peace Process did not progress as hoped and relations between the sides continue to sour. Throughout the years, it became increasingly clear that the relations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel remained within the context of conflict, coupled with sporadic periods of some progress in the peace process.

Once the Palestinian Ministry of Education began issuing new text books, the Ministry was immediately confronted with Israeli and International criticism, mostly focused on the view that the new text books preached hatred, violence and non-recognition of Israel. The issues became more complex with the rise of severe violence in 1995, 1996,

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and 2000 until the present time, and in particular with the popular support amongst Palestinians regarding suicide bombers. In Palestinian text books dealing with Islamic studies – concepts such as Jihad and martyrdom are presented in contexts that suggest being supportive and encouraging young people to admire both the concept of suicide bombing aimed at killing Israelis, as well as to consider the possibility of becoming suicide bombers themselves.

International and Israeli reports on Palestinian text books claim that the Palestinian educational system is one of the primary evidences of a lack of Palestinian political will to make real peace with Israel. The failure of the Palestinian text books to address issues such as recognizing the existence of Israel explicitly automatically raises these questions found in the various reports. It should be mentioned, that in our view, some of the reports and some of the motivation for writing the reports were part of the anti-Palestinian propaganda campaign waged by various right-wing Israeli and pro-Israeli groups, nevertheless, the substantive critiques with quotations and hard evidence cannot and should not be ignored by the Palestinian Authority as a mere anti-Palestinian propaganda campaign.

Palestinian Authority senior personnel have avoided dealing with much of the criticism by stating two main issues: 1 – Israeli text books don't make mention of Palestine, the Palestinian Authority, Palestinian political rights or recognition of them; and 2 – the issues which are raised are political in nature and the Ministry of Education does not have the mandate to deal with them. In our view, neither of these reasons appropriately answers the obligation of the Palestinian Authority and its Ministry of Education to do a better job in educating the young people of Palestine towards peace and reconciliation and not towards further fostering the conflict and violence.

We believe that the Palestinian Authority has the political tools to make better decisions regarding the sensitive issues in the text books and that it must improve the text books while taking the criticism more to heart. This document provides some constructive directions to explore and some specific recommendations. We firmly believe that the Palestinian text books can base a more positive attitude towards peacemaking and reconciliation on the content of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence and on the content of the Declaration of Principles of Oslo which was embodied in all of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Furthermore, Islam itself offers many opportunities for a more positive world view than that which is presented now in the text books.

### **Purpose of the Document**

The purpose of this document is to provide some concrete suggestions to the Palestinian Ministry of Education for improving Palestinian text books in areas concerning education towards peace, mutual understanding, and reconciliation between Palestine and Israel. The recommendations in this report are based on conclusions of in-depth studies that have been conducted by IPCRI and by others on Palestinian text books. The document relates to the more sensitive and difficult issues that are dealt with in the text books such as: relating to Israel's existence, maps, dealing with history of the land and of the conflict, dealing with Jerusalem, dealing with Islam and concepts

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such as Jihad and martyrdom, dealing with the peace process and the past 10 years, and dealing with “the other”.

This report, in its first part, provides both general recommendations for dealing with these topics, and in the second part of the report in the annexes, are texts dealing with Islam and concepts such as Jihad and martyrdom. These texts include Fatwas as well as analysis and opinion pieces providing ideas and directions for dealing with these concepts positively.

This document is meant to provoke discussion and debate and is not meant to be only prescriptive. The issues dealt with are extremely sensitive politically and will require intensive internal Palestinian exploration and decision making. We strongly recommend that that exploration engage Israeli and International experts in the field in order to expand the scope of possibilities for confronting them. The inclusion of Israelis in the debate could also be used as a means for investigating needs for reforms in Israeli text books as well.

### Rationale

Text books issued by governments reflect the official values that it wishes to impart to its citizens. When government issued text books are accepted by the society, it can be said that they also reflect the values of the society. Over the past years there has been significant criticisms launched against Palestinian text books, primarily by Israel and the international community, but also by Palestinian civil-society organizations and Palestinian educators. Many official spokespeople from the Palestinian Authority sensing that the “text book war” was just another means for demonizing the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian struggle refused to take the challenge of the criticism and responded defensively rather than substantively.

We believe that much of the substantive critique of the Palestinian text books brought forward in our own reports (see: <http://www.ipcri.org/files/textbooks.pdf> and <http://www.ipcri.org/files/4&9report.pdf>) as well as in reports of others, place serious questions before the Palestinian government with regards to its political intentions. These questions must be answered by responsible leaders and by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. IPCRI’s first report on the text books indicated the following in the section dealing with recommendations:

*Education has a duty to become involved in the resolution of conflicts. Education is sometimes blamed as being part of the problem; it, then, has to be part of the solution. Education should foster peaceful relations between Palestinian and Israelis. The educational system should be used as a primary vehicle for promoting the principles of tolerance, peace, respect for diversity, human rights and citizenship, and for promoting the peace process between the two nations. Opportunities should be provided for students to explore the relationships between the Israelis and the Palestinians, both historically and in the context of the present-day context.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> IPCRI Report on Palestinian Text Books, March 2003, <http://www.ipcri.org/files/textbooks.pdf>

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IPCRI's second report noted the following:

*Educators should be aware of the far-reaching effect of education in the promotion of reconciliation, tolerance and peace. They should also be aware of the effect of education that is based on incitement and violence...<sup>2</sup>*

IPCRI's first two reports on Palestinian text books did not seek to demonize the Palestinians or the Palestinian educational system. IPCRI sought to engage the Ministry of Education and Palestinian educators in an open debate regarding the values instilled by their educational system. IPCRI sought to be constructive and to offer recommendations and suggestions for placing Palestinian education in line with a desire to make peace with Israel. Our conclusion is that the Palestinian Ministry of Education was not prepared to pick up the challenge. Our attempts to engage other Palestinian leaders on these issues also met resistance. One of IPCRI's researchers summarized this resistance as voicing the following: "*They (the Israelis) have taken our land, they destroy our homes, they have determined our future, and the only thing we can hold onto as our own is our identity and our past. Now they want to take that as well.*"

There is a sense today of the beginning of a new era with new opportunities for breaking the impasse of the past four years. There is a need for concrete steps to be taken on both sides to indicate the possibilities for ending the violence and breaking the deadlock. Because of the inextricable link between education and values, Palestinian actions taken regarding the revising of Palestinian text books in accord with IPCRI's reports (and others) would be an undeniable fact that could not be overlooked regarding their intentions for making peace with Israel. The decision of what to teach the young generation is perhaps the most accurate litmus paper of what the future may have in store. As we believe and assume that the Palestinian Authority and the majority of Palestinian citizens are truly interested in reaching a peace agreement with Israel, there must be a decision to revise Palestinian text books accordingly.

We strongly advise the Palestinian Authority to pick up the challenge. We recommend that the Palestinian Authority appoint a national advisory committee on Palestinian text books empowered to review the text books taking into account the critiques that have been raised over the past years. We further recommend that this committee meet with local and international experts, including Israelis and those who have written the reports on Palestinian text books. We recommend that this committee complete its work within 60 days and that its recommendations be presented to the public.

One additional note, there is also a great need for the Government of Israel to revise and reform Israeli text books in the same regards. Israeli text books have been documented by IPCRI and by others to include stereotypes against Arabs in general and Palestinian in particular<sup>3</sup>. Maps in Israeli text books do not designate the Palestinian Authority areas or even the "green line". History books in Israel do not cover

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<sup>2</sup> IPCRI Report of 4<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Grade PA Text Books, April 2004, <http://www.ipcri.org/files/4&9report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> IPCRI Report on Israeli Text Books, April 2004, <http://www.ipcri.org/files/ibookseng.pdf>

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the past ten years and as such Israeli students do not learn about the decision of the Israeli government to recognize Palestinian political rights. Israeli text books teach too little about their Arab and Palestinian neighbors. If Israel is calling for the Palestinians to revise and reform their text books in the spirit of making peace, Israel must also look inside its own classrooms and do the same. This would also be a serious indication of Israeli intentions to make peace with the Palestinians.

We believe that both sides should progress on this issue without regard for what the other sides. This is not a question of negotiations, mutuality or reciprocity. Each side must demonstrate the values that it holds dear without regard for what the other side does. The true test of the ability of both sides to make peace will be to degree to which both sides take positive action in educating the next generation in a true spirit of pursuing peace.

### **Primary Assumptions**

- This report is based mainly on the assumption that the Palestinian Authority is truly interested in achieving peace with Israel on the basis of the two-state solution with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital.
- Inherent within this assumption is another assumption that the Palestinian Authority stands by its recognition of the State of Israel as a partner for peace.<sup>4</sup>
- If the Palestinian Authority could strengthen that recognition statement by adding “recognizing Israel as the State of the Jewish People”, this could be an important step towards rebuilding a peace process that could lead towards real reconciliation and would then find its expression within Palestinian text books as well.
- The Palestinian Authority has the ability to make difficult decisions regarding the need to readdress the primary issues of concern within the text books.
- The adoption of the suggested revisions in this report in the Palestinian Authority text books could make a significant contribution towards peace making by increasing the legitimacy for peace making amongst the Palestinian public.

### **The Main Issues**

Beyond the main task of the Palestinian Ministry of Education to provide the young people of Palestine with international standards and high levels of academic education, the Palestinian Ministry must face the significant task of providing the children of Palestine with a strong values based education aimed at building Palestinian society

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<sup>4</sup> The exchange of letters between the State of Israel and the PLO on September 13, 1993 included the following statement in the PLO letter: *The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security. The PLO accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process, and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations.*

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and the future Palestinian state. An essential aspect of this values based education is imparting and building the Palestinian national identity with all of its many facets. This kind of task is complicated under the best circumstances and when faced with a 100 year violent conflict with the neighbors, it becomes extremely problematic and difficult.

As the Palestinian Authority has witnessed over the past years, Palestinian text books are under great international scrutiny and every word and picture is weighed and judged by reviewers from all corners of the world. The books are not only evaluated by their pedagogical content and context, but also, and perhaps mainly, by the interpretations of the political messages that they deliver to the readers. There is a need for a great deal of care with the selection of every text and every picture, but more so, there is a need for the messages that are being delivered to be clear and based on firm moral ground.

Palestine is embroiled in a struggle for national existence. The conflict and struggle for achieving freedom, liberation, and sovereignty has been very bloody and filled with great suffering. Every Palestinian is aware of the context of the struggle and of the price that Palestinians have had to pay in this struggle. The messages delivered by the Palestinian text books have thus far failed to impart a clear and decisive message that the Palestinian people wish to live in peace with their neighbor, their enemy and hopefully future peace partner. There is no contradiction in teaching the students to need to struggle for their just rights and at the same time to state unequivocally that they wish to live in peace with the people they are fighting against.

The Palestinian text books have confused messages and it is not difficult to come to the understanding that the main political theme imparted to the students is that Israel should not exist and that is essentially the Palestinian goal. Assuming that this is not the political message that the Palestinian Authority adheres to, there is a need to make real revisions and amendments in the Palestinian text books. If this assumption is correct, then the recommendations in this paper provide some solid suggestions of what could be done immediately by the Palestinian Ministry of Education to rectify the confusion and to strengthen the position of the Ministry and of the entire Palestinian Authority in the eyes of the international community.

### **General Educational Context**

Enhancing and building Palestinian national identity could be positively placed in the context of building the nascent Palestinian State. All Palestinians should face the challenge of what is required to build the State that is based on the values expressed in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence:

*Nourished by an unfolding series of civilizations and cultures, inspired by a heritage rich in variety and kind, the Palestinian Arab people added to its stature by consolidating a union between itself and its patrimonial Land. The call went out from Temple, Church, and Mosque that to praise the Creator, to celebrate compassion and peace was indeed the message of Palestine. And in generation after generation, the Palestinian Arab people gave of itself unsparingly in the valiant battle for liberation and homeland. For what has been the unbroken chain of our people's rebellions but the heroic embodiment*

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*of our will for national independence. And so the people was sustained in the struggle to stay and to prevail....*

*The State of Palestine is the state of Palestinians wherever they may be. The state is for them to enjoy in it their collective national and cultural identity, theirs to pursue in it a complete equality of rights. In it will be safeguarded their political and religious convictions and their human dignity by means of a parliamentary democratic system of governance, itself based on freedom of expression and the freedom to form parties. The rights of minorities will duly be respected by the majority, as minorities must abide by decisions of the majority. Governance will be based on principles of social justice, equality and non-discrimination in public rights of men or women, on grounds of race, religion, color or sex, and the aegis of a constitution which ensures the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Thus shall these principles allow no departure from Palestine's age-old spiritual and civilizational heritage of tolerance and religious coexistence...*

*The State of Palestine is an Arab state, an integral and indivisible part of the Arab nation, at one with that nation in heritage and civilization, with it also in its aspiration for liberation, progress, democracy and unity.....*

*The State of Palestine proclaims its commitment to the principles and purposes of the United Nations, and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights....*

*It further announces itself to be a peace-loving State, in adherence to the principles of peaceful co-existence. It will join with all states and peoples in order to assure a permanent peace based upon justice and the respect of rights so that humanity's potential for well-being may be assured, an earnest competition for excellence may be maintained, and in which confidence in the future will eliminate fear for those who are just and for whom justice is the only recourse.....*

*The State of Palestine herewith declares that it believes in the settlement of regional and international disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with the U.N. Charter and resolutions. With prejudice to its natural right to defend its territorial integrity and independence, it therefore rejects the threat or use of force, violence and terrorism against its territorial integrity or political independence, as it also rejects their use against territorial integrity of other states...*

This document clearly places Palestine on high moral grounds and with it Palestinian rights for independence and for the struggle for liberation. The kind of language used in this text should be embodied throughout the Palestinian text books and should provide the primary ideological and moral base for Palestinian education. There are no contradictory messages or words confusing the reader about the intentions and goals of the Palestinian people. It is a positive text and provides the Palestinian educational system with a very solid basis on which Palestinian national education can be built.

## **Definitions and Maps**

### **Palestine**

There is great confusion in the Palestinian text books when using the term “Palestine” – what geographic area is being referred to? One of the primary criticisms of the Palestinian text books thus far derives from the confusion regarding this issue. When showing a map of all of Palestine from the sea to the river, without any indication of the State of Israel on the map, what should the reader understand? Are these the desired and planned borders of the State of Palestine? Is the reader supposed to understand that his or her duty as a Palestinian citizen is to fight to achieve those borders and in doing so to eradicate the State of Israel? Failing to answer these questions definitively in the texts allows the reader to interpret the political message on the basis of their own political persuasion or understanding, and it allows the reader to place more than moderate doubts regarding the real intentions of the Palestinian Authority.

There are several ways to deal with this issue, but the underlying assumption behind all of them is that the Palestinian Authority has come to terms with the existence of the State of Israel and is seeking to make peace with Israel and not to erase it.

The very best solution is to clearly mark the State of Israel within the 1967 borders alongside of Palestine or the future State of Palestine or alternatively, the Palestinian Authority. Another suggestion would be to show various maps from various time periods indicating the time period and the political borders of that period. Here it would be essential to include the present period and include a map that shows the State of Israel. What is most important is to clearly and properly indicate historic and political facts and not to try to hide those facts from the eyes of the reader.

The Palestinian Authority should have no political problem in showing a map of the future State of Palestine alongside of Israel within the 1967 borders. This demonstrates clearly to the readers, including the international community, that the Palestinian Authority is working in accordance with the Palestinian Declaration of Independence and the values upon which it is based.

There is understandable criticism of the Palestinian Authority that the Israeli text books do not include maps with any indication of Palestine or the Palestinian Authority or the future State of Palestine or even defined borders of the State of Israel. This is legitimate criticism and we have directed that criticism to the Israeli Ministry of Education. This legitimate criticism does not; however excuse the Palestinian Ministry of Education of its obligation to designate the State of Israel on maps indicating periods after 1948.

Likewise, maps indicating the names of towns and cities inside of the State of Israel must be designated as such. A map from 1948 onwards with Yaffa or Akka must indicate that these cities are located within the State of Israel. Failure to do so will only call for the reader to understand that in the Palestinian view, these cities will be within the future boundaries of the State of Palestine. There is no room for ambiguity on these issues.

## **Dealing with History**

There is little or no chance that Israelis and Palestinians will share the same understanding and interpretation of the history of the land and the conflict between its people. There is a clear right for Palestinians to give their version of history in Palestinian text books. Palestinians have struggled for their freedom and liberation and Palestinian students must know their history as it is an essential element of collective nation building and in defining the Palestinian identity. Historical texts should reflect the Palestinian views of their history and should challenge the students to identify with their pasts as a link to the present and the future.

New States usually tend to enlist a unified “national” view of history as a means to develop the ethos of the society – a shared collective memory upon which citizens develop their sense of patriotism and loyalty. Usually there is very little room for alternative views or other voices, and if these alternative views do exist, their legitimacy and accuracy are often questioned and even sometimes referred to as next to treasonous. Normally it may take decades before “new historians” present other voices. It is understood that Palestine is in its formative stage of development regarding understanding history (this is not a negative statement or any form of judgment – it is descriptive). Therefore, there should not be any exaggerated expectations regarding the willingness or ability of Palestinian text books to present alternative views or other voices. However, Palestinian educators should be aware that the Palestinian cause is significantly strengthened by not presenting a dogmatic monolithic approach to history.

Palestinians are entitled to their own view of their own history and no one can contest this basic right. The Palestinian collective historical narrative reflects the creation of the State of Israel as a non-legitimate act of the international community. Zionism is understood by Palestinians as an extension of international imperialism and colonialism and as such, the birth of the State of Israel is viewed as having been born in “sin”. This is a legitimate view of history from the Palestinian viewpoint. In order for this presentation not to be considered dogmatic or as one that views Israel today as a non-entity or as an entity that should not exist, it is important to once again refer both to the Palestinian strategic decision to make peace with Israel (the Oslo Process and the exchange of letters of mutual recognition) and to the basic values elaborated in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence regarding the Palestinian national decision to resolve the conflict by peaceful means, based on mutual recognition and on the basis of two-states for two peoples.

The Declaration sets the stage for understanding the Palestinian Narrative:

*And it was the Palestinian people, already wounded in its body that was submitted to yet another type of occupation over which floated that falsehood that "Palestine was a land without people." This notion was foisted upon some in the world, whereas in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations (1919) and in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the community of nations had recognized that all the Arab territories, including Palestine, of the formerly Ottoman provinces, were to have granted to them their freedom as provisionally independent nations.*

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*Despite the historical injustice inflicted on the Palestinian Arab people resulting in their dispersion and depriving them of their right to self-determination, following upon U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947), which partitioned Palestine into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, yet it is this Resolution that still provides those conditions of international legitimacy that ensure the right of the Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty.*

*By stages, the occupation of Palestine and parts of other Arab territories by Israeli forces, the willed dispossession and expulsion from their ancestral homes of the majority of Palestine's civilian inhabitants, was achieved by organized terror; those Palestinians who remained, as a vestige subjugated in its homeland, were persecuted and forced to endure the destruction of their national life.*

*Thus were principles of international legitimacy violated. Thus were the Charter of the United Nations and its Resolutions disfigured, for they had recognized the Palestinian Arab people's national rights, including the right of Return, the right to independence, the right to sovereignty over territory and homeland.*

*In Palestine and on its perimeters, in exile distant and near, the Palestinian Arab people never faltered and never abandoned its conviction in its rights of Return and independence. Occupation, massacres and dispersion achieved no gain in the unabated Palestinian consciousness of self and political identity, as Palestinians went forward with their destiny, undeterred and unbowed. And from out of the long years of trial in ever-mounting struggle, the Palestinian political identity emerged further consolidated and confirmed. And the collective Palestinian national will forged for itself a political embodiment, the Palestine Liberation Organization, its sole, legitimate representative recognized by the world community as a whole, as well as by related regional and international institutions. Standing on the very rock of conviction in the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, and on the ground of Arab national consensus and of international legitimacy, the PLO led the campaigns of its great people, molded into unity and powerful resolve, one and indivisible in its triumphs, even as it suffered massacres and confinement within and without its home. And so Palestinian resistance was clarified and raised into the forefront of Arab and world awareness, as the struggle of the Palestinian Arab people achieved unique prominence among the world's liberation movements in the modern era.*

*The massive national uprising, the intifada, now intensifying in cumulative scope and power on occupied Palestinian territories, as well as the unflinching resistance of the refugee camps outside the homeland, have elevated awareness of the Palestinian truth and right into still higher realms of comprehension and actuality. Now at last the curtain has been dropped around a whole epoch of prevarication and negation. The intifada has set siege to the mind of official Israel, which has for too long relied exclusively upon myth and terror to deny Palestinian existence altogether. Because of the intifada and its revolutionary irreversible impulse, the history of Palestine has therefore arrived at a decisive juncture.*

The text ends here with the first intifada. It is important that the Palestinian educational text books complete the picture. (See section on **Dealing with Present Relations - from 1993 onwards**). The Palestinian Authority was created by virtue of the Oslo

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agreements that translated the Palestinian recognition of Israel into a political platform for creating the future Palestinian state. It is true and should be presented accurately that the agreements were not fulfilled in entirety by both parties and that after being in a negotiated process for years, the situation led to the eruption of the Al Aqsa intifada. It is perfectly proper for the Palestinian text books to refer to the Palestinian claims against Israel in its non-compliance with the agreements. It would be worthwhile to include text which outlines, at least in one article, what claims Israel has regarding Palestinian non-compliance. But the most important thing is to frame all of recent history within the context of the goal of the Palestinian national movement to achieve independence and freedom from the occupation in a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Just as we recommend to the State of Israel that there should be voices and expressions in Israeli text books explaining Palestinian perspectives on the conflict and the peace process, likewise it is worthwhile to include such expressions of Israeli points of view in Palestinian text books. These can be presented as “side bars” or “text boxes” and not part of the main text. These can be taken from existing sources as well as having them commissioned especially for this purpose. It is important for the students on both sides to have a “peak” into the narrative of the other side, not as a means of convincing someone of the justification of the other’s narrative, but as a means of increasing the students’ ability to understand the complex world that they live in. In this context it would be possible, for example, to deal with difficult issues such as the Holocaust and its impact on Israeli and Jewish world views. (for more on this, see section of **Dealing with the “Other”**)

The Palestinian cause is better served by providing the students with the tools to understand the complexity of their world and the problems that we face. Factual and historical accuracy is extremely important for the text books to acclaim legitimacy. The text books must be able to provide accurate and factual explanations for the changing reality over time. For example, presenting Akko as an Arab city ( as is done in the current text books) is a very incomplete look at historical reality and infers a non-recognition of Israel. It is not wrong to say that *“Akko was an Arab city after the fall of the Crusades and remained Arab under Ottoman rule and until the end of the British Mandate. In 1948, most of the Palestinian Arabs of Akko became refugees, like many other Palestinian cities, towns and villages in Palestine. But as in many other cities, towns and villages in historic Palestine, many Palestinians remained in Akko and today Akko is located in the State of Israel. The Palestinian Arab presence and identity of the city is strongly felt, particularly within the Old City walls.”*

This kind of statement clarifies for the student that Akko was a Palestinian city, but today is in the State of Israel and the Palestinian presence and history there remains strong. This also does not place any questions in the readers mind about the existence of Israel and where Israel can be found on the map.

It is equally important to use internationally verifiable factual data on controversial issues. References in the Palestinian text books that “Arabize” the Canaanite people do not provide internationally verifiable historic facts and further puts into question the entire Palestinian narrative. It is clear that Palestinians are trying to ascertain that the Arab presence on the Land came prior to the Jewish presence. However, claiming that

the Canaanite peoples were Arab is beyond the ability of today's historical accounts to certify and opens the text books for severe international criticism. Palestinian claims to the land are substantial enough to not have to rest on questionable historic accounts. In this vein, references should be made regarding historical Israelite and Jewish presence in the land as well as to documenting that the Jews were exiled from the Land by the Romans. Distorting historical facts does not grant greater legitimacy to Palestinian claims for historic rights to Palestine. In fact, ignoring historic facts weakens Palestinian claims.

### **Dealing with the “Other”**

The late Faisal Husseini understood the importance and the impact of the holocaust on the worldview of Israelis and Jews and as a result, one of his first acts after being released from prison, was to visit in the Warsaw Ghetto Fighter Museum in Kibbutz Lohamai Hageta'ot. That visit had a significant impact on Israelis as a deliberate act of reaching out to understand the other side. Palestinian students should be given the opportunity to understand their neighbors. It is not an act of “normalization” to learn about the “neighborhood” and those who live in it. There is nothing in the Palestinian text books that teaches the students something objective or positive about the people they are in conflict with and with whom they hope to some day soon live with in peace.

The Palestinian Ministry of Education must decide in what context and what grade level the students should learn about their neighbors. We recommend including different kinds of materials in various grade levels. It should be considered to include materials about Jewish religion, practices and holidays. It would be worthwhile to include material about significant Israeli and Jewish personalities over time, and not only political personalities but others such as Moshe ben Maimon also know as Moshe Maimonides, a great Jewish philosopher who wrote his books in Arabic script who lived from 1135-1204, or other well known Jewish scholars such as Albert Einstein who was offered to become the first President of Israel.

Teaching about commonalities in culture between Palestinians and Israelis can also serve as an open door for exploration. Whether looking at common foods, similar music and dance or even through looking at the Arabic and Hebrew languages, there are endless possibilities for new discovery and ways to develop a more positive attitude towards fostering a desire amongst the children to want to know more about people on the other side.

In general, it should become mandatory for Palestinians to learn Hebrew and Israelis to learn Arabic. As this will truly symbolize the emergence of a new era, perhaps preparations for this should already begin on both sides.

Student in the upper grades should have the opportunity to examine real documents of key importance, such as the Israeli Declaration of Independence. Likewise, it would be beneficial for the students to have some exposure to modern Hebrew literature that has been translated into Arabic, writers such as Amos Oz, David Grossman, Eli Amir, Sami Michael, A.B. Yehoshua, etc. provide the students with the opportunity to gain keen insights into Israeli society.

Palestinian educators should not fear that by teaching about the “other” they are in any way weakening the Palestinian national identity or Palestinian collective solidarity. In fact, the opposite is quite true.

### **Dealing with Islamic Texts and Concepts**

Teaching religion is a very sensitive issue and one which requires great knowledge and belief. Islamic texts are vast and contain the entire wisdom of humanity. The most difficult element in teaching religion is in making the choice of what to teach, what Holy texts to select and what approach to take. Virtually all religions contain the universal messages that pertain to love, dignity, honor, family, respect, and other human values such as the sanctity of life. All religions also contain the particular and parochial aspects of the religion which are narrower in their outlook and generally pertain to the superiority of the particular faith above all others. Islam is no different.

Concepts such as *jihad* and martyrdom can be taught from different legitimate perspectives in full accordance with Islamic teachings and belief. It is all a matter of making a decision of what should be included and what should be excluded. We recommend looking at a number of text that are found in Annex I of this report dealing with the concepts of Jihad and martyrdom from various Islamic scholars and religious authorities.

Palestinian text books include by necessity Jihad as one of the foundations of Islamic belief. The concept of Jihad as expressed in the text books and in light of the political context in which we are living forces the reader to relate to the violent connotations of the concept. By not placing Jihad in the broader context and leaving it as it is currently dealt with in the Palestinian text books, one cannot but come to the conclusion that the Palestinian Authority is encouraging Jihad in the narrow sense of the Holy War against Israel and against Jews as well as against Christians.

The same can be said for the concept of martyrdom. It is not completely clear and evident from some Palestinian text books that there is rejection of support for suicide bombers. In fact, some of the texts could lead the reader to have real admiration for those who become suicide bombers and kill Israelis. It is not clear that the Palestinian Authority has made a real choice on this issue in the ambiguous kind of educational messages one can infer from the text books. There can be no ambiguity about this issue within the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Praise of martyrdom without being specifically placed in a historical-religious context and without being placed in a context outside of the current conflict transmit extremely problematic messages that should be avoided in all text books. Failure to remove ambiguity concerning these issues – Jihad and martyrdom – more than any other issues in all of the text books, questions to commitment of the Palestinian Authority to live at peace with Israel.

The teaching of Islam in the Palestinian text books should avoid preaching political Islam which could be interpreted as preaching fundamentalism and extremism, which does not seem to be in the interest of the Palestinian Authority and not in line with the values of the declaration of Independence:

*“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful - Palestine, the land of the three monotheistic faiths...”*

Or the Third Draft Palestinian Constitution, Article 5: *“Arabic and Islam are the official Palestinian language and religion. Christianity and all other monotheistic religions shall be equally revered and respected. The Constitution guarantees equality in rights and duties to all citizens irrespective of their religious belief...”*

Islam is a religion of tolerance and acceptance. Islam should not be construed in the Palestinian text books as the opposite. Islam is a religion which accepts Jews and Christians as “Peoples of the Book”. Jewish heritage and beliefs are incorporated in the Holy Qur’an. These are positive elements that should be strengthened in the teaching of Islam in Palestinian schools.

### **Dealing with Jerusalem**

Jerusalem is the Holy City for the three monotheistic religions. This is stated clearly in the Palestinian text books, however, beyond that general statement, the Jewish presence - historical, religious and modern, is absent in the text books. The text books refer to Jerusalem as having always been an Arab city. This is not a true representation of historic fact and the texts must be historically accurate. Jerusalem is the capital of the State of Israel and as Palestinians assert, East Jerusalem will be the capital of the State of Palestine. There is no problem in presenting East Jerusalem as the future capital of Palestine and West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. There is no problem in presenting the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem (along with the West Bank and Gaza) as being illegal by international law and as not being recognized by the international community. The texts could easily speak about Israeli policies that have denied Palestinian rights in Jerusalem. In short, there is no problem with presenting factual information and claims that Palestinians have against Israel regarding Jerusalem and that strengthen Palestinian claims, as long as the information can be substantiated. The context of this information is in the Palestinian determination that Jerusalem should be the capitals of two states in accord with the Palestinian view of making peace with Israel.

It is incorrect to ignore Jewish presence and Jewish affinity for Jerusalem. There are proven facts of a Jewish presence and connection to the city of Jerusalem. It is wrong to ignore this. Ignoring Jewish presence in Jerusalem and Jewish affinity for Jerusalem puts into question the political intentions behind ignoring these facts. Once again, the reader can easily assume that the Palestinian Authority views the future of Jerusalem as one void of Jews and Israelis. The Palestinian cause is not strengthened by ignoring Jewish religious and historical connections to Jerusalem.

One additional point regarding Jerusalem in the existing text books: As in other texts that deal with ancient history, there is no historical factual evidence to justify Arabizing the identity of the Jebusite rulers of Jerusalem prior to King David. In Palestinian text books, Jews are referred to as “foreign infiltrators” in Jerusalem. This is more than questionable from recognized international historic literature and lends the idea to the readers that the Jews today are also nothing more than “foreign infiltrators”. If this is the

attitude and belief of the PA then there is no need to hide this fact, however, if it is not the belief of the PA than such references strengthen animosity and hatred and do not encourage understanding and hopes for peace and reconciliation.

### **Dealing with Present Relations (from 1993 onwards)**

The issues concerning recent history are mainly dealt with in the upper grades of secondary school. This allows the ability to challenge the students and to engage them in a process of investigation and discovery. The PA text books should make true and factual references to the Oslo peace process and its failure. The PLO, representing the Palestinian people signed agreements with the State of Israel based on mutual recognition of these two entities. The peace process failed to produce the desired results according to an agreed time frame. There is full justification for the Palestinian Authority to present its case and narrative regarding the peace process, along with all of the violations of the agreements committed by Israel. The framing of a proper approach would be to assert that the Palestinian Authority remains committed to making peace with Israel and that the Palestinian people continue to hold firm to the vision of two states for two people, along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

It is recommended to place an emphasis on positive Palestinian intentions and positive elements that occurred as a result of the Oslo process, such as the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

It is recommended to present the main issues in conflict between Palestine and Israel. It is recommended to present the complexity of the issues and the complexity of various possible solutions. The aim should be to engage the student to think about the issues and how to resolve them. The texts should not be dogmatic presenting only one viewpoint, particularly on possible solutions and should challenge the students themselves to debate the issues and to propose possible solutions. The texts should challenge the student to understand what went wrong in the peace process and what are some of the lessons that we can learn from the past. The students should be challenged to understand the official Palestinian positions in the negotiations and to understand the official Israeli positions as well. The students should be challenged to seek out alternative voices and opinions from both sides.

Students should have an opportunity to read the agreements, at least the main important elements of the agreements of the Oslo period and to understand what was hoped would emerge from those agreements. The students should be encouraged to engage in researching the developments of the past years.

It should be pointed out that these recommendations are equally valid for the Israeli Ministry of Education. Israeli students do not learn anything about the peace process, about the issues in conflict and the possible solutions for these issues. Israeli students too should be challenged to understand the period of the Oslo peace process in all of its complexities.

**Annexes**

- Al-Azhar's Grand Imam Condemns Killing of Civilians
- Fatwa: Jihad and Peace in Islam: Sheikh Muhammad `Ali Al-Hanooti
- Fatwa: Jihad: Its True Meaning and Purpose: Mufti Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi
- Regarding suicide bombings: Shaykh Ibn Fowzaan
- Concerning suicide bombings: Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen
- On Suicide Bombings: Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez Aal ash-Shaykh
- On Suicide – What the Qur'an says: Submission.org
- The Spiritual Significance of Jihad” by *Seyyed Hossein Nasr*
- Islam and the Concept of Martyrdom, by a Muslim woman from Lebanon

<http://www.islam-online.net/English/News/2001-09/15/article2.shtml>

### Al-Azhar's Grand Imam Condemns Killing of Civilians

CAIRO, Sep 14 (IslamOnline & News Agencies) - The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohammed Sayyed Tantawi, on Wednesday condemned the killing of civilians in the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, considering it a gruesome act denounced by the three monotheistic religions, said Egypt's state information service, Egypt Online.

Also, a number of al-Azhar scholars stressed that Islam rejected violence and bloodshed...

The president of al-Azhar University, Ahmed Omar Hasham, said that Islam is a religion of peace, tolerance and stability. "It does not call for aggression or injustice. Those who are trying to describe Islam as a religion of extremism and violence are wrong," he asserted.

In addition, Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, a world renowned Muslim scholar, was among the first to issue a *fatwa* (religious decree) denouncing the actions of terrorists... "Islam, the religion of tolerance, holds the human soul in high esteem, and considers the attack against innocent human beings a grave sin, this is backed by the Qur'anic verse which reads:

*Who so ever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he has killed all mankind, and who so ever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind," (Al-Ma'dah:32).*

## Fatwa Bank

<http://www.islamonline.net/fatwa/english/FatwaDisplay.asp?hFatwaID=16844>

Details of Fatwa	
<b>Title of Fatwa</b>	<b>Jihad and Peace in Islam</b>
<b>Date of Fatwa</b>	23/ February/ 2003
<b>Date of Reply</b>	23/ February/ 2003
<b>Topic Of Fatwa</b>	Jihad
<b>Question of Fatwa</b>	<p>As-Salamu `Alaykum wa Rahmatu Allah wa Barakatuh. Islam is a religion of peace. We greet our brothers and sisters by wishing peace for them. Must Muslims accept violence? Can Muslims be strictly non-violent? Too often the media in the West presents the image of Muslims as violent, but I know this is not correct. I'm a Muslim, but insha'Allah, I will never kill anyone, or even hurt them intentionally. When I watch the genocide in Chechnya or Bosnia, or the tragedy which unfolds in Palestine, it makes me very angry and very sad. I pray that Allah will allow peace to prevail among humanity, between the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike. I like to think that I and other Muslims can be a force for peace rather than for violence. Am I wrong? Thank you for your help. This is really troubling me, and any advice you can provide would be much appreciated. Jazakum Allah khayran. Wa Salamu `Alaykum wa Rahmatu Allah wa Barakatuh.</p>
<b>Name of Mufti</b>	Sheikh Muhammad `Ali Al-Hanooti
<b>Content of Reply</b>	<p><b>Wa` alykum As-Salaamu Warahmatullahi Wabarakaatuh.</b></p> <p><b>In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.</b></p> <p><b>All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.</b></p> <p>Brother, we do really appreciate your question, which reflects your open-mindedness and interest in analyzing the Islamic teachings. May Allah help us all keep firm in the straight Path!</p> <p>Before tackling your question, we'd like, first of all, to commend you for your good and inspiring words that typify the nature of Muslims; they are peace-loving people. As we have made it clear in our fatwas, Islam is the religion that calls to peace and urges its followers to help peace prevail. It neither incites violence nor does it stand in favor of terrorism, contrary to all the concocted ideas and information that the Western biased media have spread.</p> <p>In response to your question, the eminent Muslim scholar, <b>Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hanooti</b>, member of the North American Fiqh Council, states:</p> <p>"Brother, we should be careful when referring to the Islamic language, conceptions, vocabulary, and ideologies. There are</p>

many non-Islamic terms and vocabulary mingled with the Islamic ones.

When talking about Islam, we should base our argument on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. We should get rid of the terms abused by the enemies of Islam such as terrorism, fundamentalism, etc.

Islam never believes in force or forcing anyone to become a Muslim. The Qur'an says: **"Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things."** (Al-Baqarah: 256)

Also, we read in the Qur'an: **"And if your Lord had pleased, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them; will you then force men till they become believers?"** (Yunus: 99)

We have never had any proof that Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, or his Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, fought for forcing people to accept Islam. This is a matter of fact. Had people entered Islam because of force, they would have gone back to their roots after the fall of the Islamic Caliphate.

We see that all the ideologies have shown their peak at the time of their founders or thinkers. For example, Communism, Fascism, Nazism, and Existentialism have become historical artifacts that now reside in museums. When the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, died, Islam was adopted by tens of thousands. It has been flourishing ever since and encroaching almost every land and sea all over the world to make the population of Islam counts more than 1 billion followers. Islam spread in China and Indonesia without any sword or fight; it is only because of the good demonstration of Islam by excellent Muslims.

I'd like to make it close to your mind why Muslims are in need of fight or combat. How are you going to deal with drug traffickers or any outlaw if your preaching is not doing well? How will you deal with a criminal who wants to disturb peace and make life panicky? Islam believes in stopping injustice, oppression and any threat to peace or freedom. In many instances, there is no way to guarantee these goals without arms and fighting. The Qur'an says, **"... And fight the elites of blasphemy. They don't honor any vow."** (At-Tawbah: 12)

## Fatwa Bank

Details of Fatwa	
<b>Title of Fatwa</b>	<b>Jihad: Its True Meaning and Purpose</b>
<b>Date of Fatwa</b>	11/ March/ 2002
<b>Date of Reply</b>	11/ March/ 2002
<b>Topic Of Fatwa</b>	Jihad
<b>Question of Fatwa</b>	As-Salamu ` Alaykum, dear Ulama. In the light of what is going on nowadays, i.e. the so-called war against terrorism, I think you Ulama need to write something on the true concept of Jihad in Islam, i.e., the way Islam reacts to such issue, for them to see the difference. Jazakum Allah Khayran.
<b>Name of Mufti</b>	<b>Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi</b>
<b>Content of Reply</b>	<p><b>Wa `alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh.</b></p> <p><b>In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.</b></p> <p><b>All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.</b></p> <p>Dear questioner, we appreciate the great confidence you have in us, and we implore Allah to help us serve the cause of Islam and to render this work for His Sake.</p> <p>Actually, as it has been clarified again and again that while Jihad serves as a means of defense for Muslims against aggression, and acts as a deterrent factor against any anti-Islam scheme launched by enemies, it must never be construed as something synonymous with aggression.</p> <p>Jihad is never a tool of waging war against the innocents; it's never a means of flexing muscles or bullying the weak and oppressed. Jihad in Islam is something unique, established to defend the divine message from being eliminated or hindered by its enemies.</p> <p>Shedding more light on the true concept of Jihad, here is the statement made by <b>Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi</b>, former President of the Islamic Society of North America:</p> <p><b>"Allah says, "And strive in His cause as ye ought to strive (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion; it is the religion of your father Abraham. It is He (Allah) Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this (Revelation); that the Messenger may be a witness for</b></p>

**you, and you be witnesses for mankind! So establish regular Prayer, give regular Charity, and hold fast to Allah! He is your Protector, the best to protect and the Best to help!"** (Al-Hajj: 78)

Jihad is one of the most misunderstood, and abused aspects of Islam. There are some Muslims who exploit and misuse this concept for their own political objectives. There are many non-Muslims who misunderstand it. There are some non-Muslims who misinterpret it to discredit Islam and Muslims.

#### **What is Jihad?**

The word Jihad does not mean "Holy War". It means "struggle" or "striving". The word for war in the Qur'an is "*Harb*" or "*Qital*". Jihad means serious and sincere struggle on the personal as well as on the social level. It is a struggle to do good and to remove injustice, oppression and evil from the society. This struggle should be spiritual as well as social, economic and political. Jihad is to work hard to do right things. In the Qur'an this word is used in its different forms 33 times. It often comes with other Qur'anic concepts such as faith, repentance, righteous deeds and migration.

Jihad is to protect one's faith and one's human rights. Jihad is not a war always although it can take the form of war. Islam is the religion of peace, but it does not mean that Islam accepts oppression. Islam teaches that one should do one's utmost to eliminate tension and conflict. Islam promotes non-violent means to bring change and reform. Actually, Islam urges that one should eliminate evil through peaceful means without the use of force as much as possible. In Islamic history from the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) until now, Muslims most of the time resisted oppression and struggled for liberation in non-violent and peaceful manners.

Islam teaches proper ethics in the situation of war also. The war is permissible in Islam, but only when other peaceful means such as dialogue, negotiations and treaties fail. It is a last resort and should be avoided as much as possible. Its purpose is not to convert people by force, or to colonize people or to acquire land or wealth or for self-glory. Its purpose is basically: defense of life, property, land, honor and freedom for oneself as well as defense of others from injustice and oppression.

#### **The basic rules of war in Islam are:**

1. Be strong so that your enemy fear you and should not attack you.
2. Do not begin the hostilities. Work for peace as much as possible.
3. Fight only those who fight, no collective punishment; non-combatants should not be harmed. Weapons of mass destruction should not be used.
4. Stop hostilities as soon as the other party is inclined to peace.

5. Observe the treaties and agreements as long as the enemy observes them.

Allah says very clearly: **"Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not do aggression, for Allah loves not the aggressors."** (Al-Baqarah: 190)

**"The prohibited month, for the prohibited month, and so for all things prohibited, there is the law of equality. If then any one transgresses the prohibition against you, transgress ye likewise against him. But fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who restrain themselves."** (al-Baqarah: 194)

**Jihad is not terrorism:**

It is to be emphasized that terrorism against the innocent civilians, whether through aggression or suicidal means, is under no circumstances permissible in Islam. Islam encourages the oppressed people to struggle for their liberation and it commands other Muslims to help those who are oppressed and suffering, but Islam does not allow, under any circumstance, terrorism against non-combatants and innocent people. Terrorism is not Jihad, it is *Fasad* (mischief). It is against the teachings of Islam. There are some people who use their twisted arguments to justify terrorism for their causes, but it has no justification: Allah says:

**"When it is said to them: 'Make not mischief on the earth,' they say: 'Why, we only want to correct things.' Indeed they are the mischief doers, but they realize (it) not."** (Al-Baqarah: 11-12)

Islam wants to establish a world order where all human beings - Muslims and non-Muslims - can live with justice in peace, harmony and good will. It gives its followers full guidelines to find peace in their personal and social lives, but it also tells them how to extend the good will on the basis of human relations towards others. Muslims worked under these principles for centuries. People of many faiths lived with them and among them. Islamic societies were known for their tolerance, generosity and humanity.

In our modern society where we are living in a global village, where non-Muslims are living with Muslims in the Muslim countries and Muslims are living with non-Muslims in countries where non-Muslims constitute a majority, it is our duty to bring better understanding among ourselves, work for peace and justice for all people and cooperate with each other in matters of goodness and virtue in order to stop all terrorism, aggression and violence against the innocent people. This is our Jihad today."

**Allah Almighty knows best.**

<http://www.fatwa-online.com/fataawa/worship/jihaad/jih004/0030409.htm>

WORSHIP\ Jihaad \ Suicide bombings \

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

fatwa-online.com

### Regarding suicide bombings

Question: Are suicide operations (bombings) permissible? And are there (any) conditions for the acceptability of these actions?

Response: Allaah ([Subhaanahu wa Ta'aala](#)) says:

**{And do not kill yourselves. Surely, Allaah is Most Merciful to you. And whoever commits that through aggression and injustice, We shall cast him into the Fire, and that is easy for Allaah},** [[Soorah](#) an-Nisaa, [Aayaat](#) 29-30]

So, it is not permissible for a person to kill himself, rather, he must protect himself in the full meaning of the word. And this does not prevent him from killing in the Path of Allaah and making [jihaad](#) in the Path of Allaah, and if he is open to being killed and martyred (therein) then that is good.

However, if he opens himself to being killed (in other than the Path of Allaah) then this is not permissible.

In the time of the Prophet ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)), one of the brave (fighters) was fighting alongside the Messenger ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)) and then he was killed. So the (other) companions said:

**((None of us fought as courageously as so-and-so))**

So, the Messenger ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)) said:

**((He is in the Fire (of Hell))**

...and that was after he was injured and before he died. And this (matter) was difficult for the companions (to grasp). So one of the men followed the injured man and saw him place a sword on the ground – raising its blade and then impaled himself upon the blade, entering his chest and dying (as a result).

So this man (returned) and said:

**((The Messenger ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)) has spoken the truth))**

... and they knew the Messenger never spoke from his whims and desires.

(So) why did he enter the Fire having done this action? Because he killed himself and was not patient (at what had befallen him); so it is not permissible for a man to kill himself.

[Shaykh Ibn Fowzaan](#)

al-Amaliyaat al-Istish.haadiyah – suwaruhaa wa ahkaamuhaa – Page 85

[http://www.fatwa-online.com/fataawa/worship/jihaad/jih004/0010915\\_1.htm](http://www.fatwa-online.com/fataawa/worship/jihaad/jih004/0010915_1.htm)

WORSHIP\ Jihaad \ Suicide bombings \

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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### Concerning suicide bombings

In his explanation of Riyaadhus-Saaliheen (Volume 1, Pages 165-166), whilst giving some points of benefit from the [hadeeth](#) of Suhayb, [Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen](#) said:

"That Allaah's Messenger, ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)), said:

**((There used to be a king amongst those who came before you, and he had a sorcerer. So when he grew old he said to the king: "I have become old so send a boy to me so that I can teach him sorcery?"))** ...the [hadeeth](#). (refer to Riyaadhus-Saaliheen - [hadeeth](#) no.30 for full text).

Fourthly: That it is permissible for a person to expose himself to danger for a matter of general benefit to the Muslims, because the boy indicated to the king the way in which he would be able to kill him, and which would lead to his demise, which was that he should take an arrow from his quiver ? etc.

[Shaykh al-Islaam \(Ibn Taymiyyah\)](#) said:

**((Because this was a [Jihaad](#) in Allaah's cause, which caused a whole nation to truly believe, and he did not really lose anything, since although he died he would have to die anyway, sooner or later)).**

But as for what some people do regarding activities of suicide, tying explosives to themselves and then approaching disbelievers and detonating them amongst them, then this is a case of suicide and Allaah's refuge is sought. So whoever commits suicide then he will be considered eternally to Hell-Fire, remaining there forever, as occurs in the [hadeeth](#) of the Prophet, ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)). (i.e., his, ([sal-Allaahu `alayhe wa sallam](#)), saying:

**((and whoever kills himself with an iron weapon, then the iron weapon will remain in his hand, and he will continuously stab himself in his belly with it in the Fire of Hell eternally, forever and ever)).** Reported by [al-Bukhaaree](#), no. 5778 and [Muslim](#), no. 109, in the Book of Eemaan.)

Because this person has killed himself and has not benefited Islaam. So if he kills himself along with ten, or a hundred, or two hundred other people, then Islaam will not benefit by that, since the people will not accept Islaam, contrary to the story of the boy. Rather it will probably just make the enemy more determined, and this action will provoke malice and bitterness in his heart to such an extent that he may seek to wreak havoc upon the Muslims.

This is what is found from the practice of the Jews with the people of Palestine so when one of the Palestinian blows himself up and kills six or seven people, then in retaliation they take sixty or more. So this does not produce any benefit for the Muslims, and does not benefit those amongst whose ranks explosives are detonated.

So what we hold is that those people who perform these suicide (bombings) have wrongfully committed suicide, and that this necessitates entry into Hell-Fire, and Allaah's refuge is sought and that this person is not a martyr (shaheed). However if a person has done this based upon misinterpretation, thinking that it is permissible, then we hope that he will be saved from sin, but as

## IPCRI POLICY PAPER - PALESTINIAN TEXT BOOKS REFORM

for martyrdom being written for him, then no, since he has not taken the path of martyrdom. But whoever performs [ijtihaad](#) and errs will receive a single reward (if he is a person qualified to make [ijtihaad](#))."

[Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen](#)

Riyaadhus-Saaliheen - Volume 1, Pages 165-166

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Translated by: Abu Talhah Daawood Burbank

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<http://www.fatwa-online.com/news/0010421.htm>

**NEWS** Saturday 21 April 2001

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

fatwa-online.com

**Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez Aal ash-Shaykh says suicide bombings are un-Islamic...**

Fatwa-Online has been informed that: "[Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez Aal ash-Shaykh](#), the **grand mufti of Saudi Arabia**, has asked the people to desist from denouncing any Muslim as [kaafir](#).

*The matter should be left to competent religious scholars, the mufti said.*

*Shaykh 'Abdul-'Azeez also said suicide bombings have no basis in the [Sharee'ah](#) as it is another form of killing oneself.*

*Hijacking planes and frightening passengers are also against the [Sharee'ah](#), the Shaykh added.*

*At the same time, he said fighting the enemy was necessary".*

<http://www.submission.org/jihad/suicide.html>

<http://www.submission.org/jihad/suicide.html>

*In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

## SUICIDE BOMBING

Islam (Submission) condemns suicide as much as it condemns oppression and aggression against others. While the Muslims (Submitters) are commanded to stand for their rights and defend themselves, their properties and their freedom they are told to first resort to peace advocate tolerance and disregard the ignorant. The following verses from the Quran show how the Quran describes suicide, such an important issue in our life that was made the center of the conflict in the Middle East lately.

*[2:195] You shall spend in the cause of GOD; do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction. You shall be charitable; GOD loves the charitable.*

*[ 4:29] O you who believe, do not consume each others' properties illicitly - only mutually acceptable transactions are permitted. You shall not kill yourselves. GOD is Merciful towards you.*

*[ 4:30] Anyone who commits these transgressions, maliciously and deliberately, we will condemn him to Hell. This is easy for GOD to do.*

Suicide bombing by young uninformed Muslim youths has been carried out almost routinely as a mean of revenge in the Middle East conflict. It is mainly done to avenge their oppression, occupation and loss of freedom they have been experiencing all their life. It is carried out by the youth who lost all the hope to a peaceful settlement as they witnessed their families, loved ones, neighbors, and the innocent bystanders die or tortured at the hand of a merciless occupying force. Despite these intolerable situation no permission can be found in Islam to avenge by suicide bombing or by targeting the innocent civilians. These young desperate Muslim youth have been taught what is NOT in the Quran, and what was never promised by God in the Holy book.

As the verses quoted above show, suicide in any form is condemned by God, no excuse given under any circumstances. The Quran does not promise Heaven (Paradise) to those who commit suicide but rather warn of condemnation to Hell. The promise of paradise or of virgin wives in Heaven for those suicide bombers and those who kill the innocent civilians has no basis in Islam and cannot be found anywhere in the Quran. These fabrications taught to these poor desperate Muslim youths originated probably from the man made books of Hadiths and Sunna that were condemned by God and by the prophet Muhammad himself who told his followers to follow ONLY the Quran.

Suicide is a state of disbelief and loss of faith that is condemned by God throughout the Quran. In the Quran, God commands the believers never to despair or lose hope and instead work for a brighter future.

[12:87] "..... None despairs of GOD's grace except the disbelieving people."

We do understand the dire situation in which these youth live and we do have the full sympathy to their suffering and oppression , but we cannot agree with breaking God's commandment. Oppression is not a reason to break God's law, on the contrary oppression is a good reason to hold tight to these commandments and to show the world the true and peaceful face of Islam (Submission). If we break God's law we move ourselves away from His mercy and lose His support. We should know that it is by following God's law in the Quran we will gain dignity and sovereignty on our land while achieving peace, tolerance and love to the whole world around us. We have to believe that two wrongs will not make one right. Now after thousands of wrongs carried out by both sides in the conflict, no right emerged and will never emerge. Unless we go back to God's commandments in the scriptures, the Torah, Gospel and/or the Quran, there will be no success and no victory for any group. . All the scriptures call on the people to live in peace and harmony and to advocate tolerance. Victory as far as God is concerned is achieved by the guarantee of freedom and justice for all and not by the domination of one group or nation above another..

Quran urges the followers of Islam (Submission) to resort to peace first and whenever possible but they may fight the oppressors if peaceful means failed. Fighting does not include killing the innocent civilians and the least expecting people as this reflects the meanest kind of character and does not reflect the spirit and/or teachings of Islam (Submission.) These suicide bombers can contribute more and better for the society if they direct their efforts into teaching the world about their cause and work with their neighbors to strengthen their stand against oppression, or be a part of the peaceful solution of the problem they have been facing instead of being a reason for its failure.

The blame can be equally thrown at the oppressors who gave these youths no chance or HOPE to live in dignity and freedom. The world has to speak up against the oppression and occupation of the land and life of these people as well. No where in any divine or human law is a place for a group of people to live at the expense of oppressing others or occupying their homes, land, and life. Peace can only be achieved when mutual respect of human life and properties are achieved.

(8:61) "If they resort to peace, so shall you, and put your trust in GOD. He is the Hearer, the Omniscient."

(7:199) You shall resort to pardon, advocate tolerance, and disregard the ignorant.

(16:90) GOD advocates justice, charity, and regarding the relatives. And He forbids evil, vice, and transgression. He enlightens you, that you may take heed.

(49:13) O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another. The best among you in the sight of GOD is the most righteous. GOD is Omniscient, Cognizant.

**“The Spiritual Significance of Jihad”**  
by *Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/jihad-nasr.htm>. The author, **Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr**, one of the world's leading experts on Islamic science and spirituality, is University Professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University. Professor Nasr is the author of numerous books including **Man and Nature: the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man** (Kazi Publications, 1998), **Religion and the Order of Nature** (Oxford, 1996) and **Knowledge and the Sacred** (SUNY, 1989) (His biography can be found at: <http://www.nasrfoundation.org/bios.html>).

**<http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/jihad-nasr.htm>**

**Al-Serat**

**The Spiritual Significance of *Jihad***

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*Seyyed Hossein Nasr*  
Vol. IX, No. 1

*And those who perform jihad for Us, We shall certainly guide them in Our ways, and God is surely with the doers of good. (Quran XXXIX; 69)*

*You have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad. (Hadith)*

The Arabic term *jihad*, usually translated into European languages as holy war, more on the basis of its juridical usage in Islam rather than on its much more universal meaning in the Quran and *Hadith*, is derived from the root *jhd* whose primary meaning is to strive or to exert oneself. Its translation into holy war combined with the erroneous notion of Islam prevalent in the West as the 'religion of the sword' has helped to eclipse its inner and spiritual significance and to distort its connotation. Nor has the appearance upon the stage of history during the past century and especially during the past few years of an array of movements within the Islamic world often contending or even imposing each other and using the word *jihad* or one of its derivative forms helped to make known the full import of its traditional meaning which alone is of concern to us here. Instead recent distortions and even total reversal of the meaning of *jihad* as understood over the ages by Muslims have made it more difficult than ever before to gain insight into this key religious and spiritual concept.

To understand the spiritual significance of *jihad* and its wide application to nearly every aspect of human life as understood by Islam, it is necessary to remember that Islam bases itself upon the idea of establishing equilibrium within the being of man as well as in the human society where he functions and fulfills the goals of his earthly life. This equilibrium, which is the terrestrial reflection of Divine Justice and the necessary condition for peace in the human domain, is the basis upon which the soul takes its flight towards that peace which, to use Christian terms, 'passeth understanding'. If Christian morality sees the aim of the spiritual life and

its own morality as based on the vertical flight towards that perfection and ideal which is embodied in Christ, Islam sees it in the establishment of an equilibrium both outward and inward as the necessary basis for the vertical ascent. The very stability of Islamic society over the centuries, the immutability of Islamic norms embodied in the *Shari'ah*, and the timeless character of traditional Islamic civilization which is the consequence of its permanent and immutable prototype are all reflections of both the ideal of equilibrium and its realization as is so evident in the teachings of the *Shari'ah* (or Divine Law) as well as works of Islamic art, that equilibrium which is inseparable from the very name of *islam* as being related to *salam* or peace.

The preservation of equilibrium in this world, however, does not mean simply a static or inactive passivity since life by nature implies movement. In the face of the contingencies of the world of change, of the withering effects of time, of the vicissitudes of terrestrial existence, to remain in equilibrium requires continuous exertion. It means carrying out *jihad* at every stage of life. Human nature being what it is, given to forgetfulness and the conquest of our immortal soul by the carnal soul or passions, the very process of life of both the individual and the human collectivity implies the ever-present danger of the loss of equilibrium and the fact of falling into the state of disequilibrium which if allowed to continue cannot but lead to disintegration on the individual level and chaos on the scale of community life. To avoid this tragic end and to fulfill the entelechy of the human state which is the realization of unity (*al-tawhid*) or total integration, Muslims as both individuals and members of Islamic society must carry out *jihad*, that is they must exert themselves at all moments of life to fight a battle both inward and outward against those forces that if not combatted will destroy that equilibrium which is the necessary condition for the spiritual life of the person and the functioning of human society. This fact is especially true if society is seen as a collectivity which bears the imprint of the Divine Norm rather than an antheap of contending and opposing units and forces.

Man is at once a spiritual and corporeal being, a micro-cosm complete unto himself; yet he is the member of a society within which alone are certain aspects of his being developed and certain of his needs fulfilled. He possesses at once an intelligence whose substance is ultimately of a divine character and sentiments which can either veil his intelligence or abett his quest for his own Origin. In him are found both love and hatred, generosity and coveteousness, compassion and aggression. Moreover, there have existed until now not just one but several 'humanities' with their own religious and moral norms and national, ethnic and racial groups with their own bonds of affiliation. As a result the practice of *jihad* as applied to the world of multiplicity and the vicissitudes of human existence in the external world has come to develop numerous ramifications in the fields of political and economic activity and in social life and come to partake on the external level of the complexity which characterizes the human world.

In its most outward sense *jihad* came to mean the defence of *dar al-islam*, that is, the Islamic world, from invasion and intrusion by non-Islamic forces. The earliest wars of Islamic history which threatened the very existence of the young community came to be known as *jihad* par excellence in this outward sense of

'holy war'. But it was upon returning from one of these early wars, which was of paramount importance in the survival of the newly established religious community and therefore of cosmic significance, that the Prophet nevertheless said to his companions that they had returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war, the greater *jihad* being the inner battle against all the forces which would prevent man from living according to the theomorphic norm which is his primordial and God given nature. Throughout Islamic history, the lesser holy war has echoed in the Islamic world when parts or the whole of that world have been threatened by forces from without or within. This call has been especially persistent since the nineteenth century with the advent of colonialism and the threat to the very existence of the Islamic world. It must be remembered, however, that even in such cases when the idea of *jihad* has been evoked in certain parts of the Islamic world, it has not usually been a question of religion simply sanctioning war but of the attempt of a society in which religion remains of central concern to protect itself from being conquered either by military and economic forces or by ideas of an alien nature. This does not mean, however, that in some cases especially in recent times, religious sentiments have not been used or misused to intensify or legitimize a conflict. But to say the least, the Islamic world does not have a monopoly on this abuse as the history of other civilizations including even the secularized West demonstrates so amply. Moreover, human nature being what it is, once religion ceases to be of central significance to a particular human collectivity, then men fight and kill each other for much less exalted issues than their heavenly faith. By including the question of war in its sacred legislation, Islam did not condone but limited war and its consequences as the history of the traditional Islamic world bears out. In any case the idea of total war and the actual practice of the extermination of whole civilian populations did not grow out of a civilization whose dominant religion saw *jihad* in a positive light. On the more external level, the lesser *jihad* also includes the socio-economic domain. It means the reassertion of justice in the external environment of human existence starting with man himself. To defend one's rights and reputation, to defend the honour of oneself and one's family is itself a *jihad* and a religious duty. So is the strengthening of all those social bonds from the family to the whole of the Muslim people (*al-ummah*) which the *Shari'ah* emphasizes. To seek social justice in accordance with the tenets of the Quran and of course not in the modern secularist sense is a way of re-establishing equilibrium in human society, that is, of performing *jihad*, as are constructive economic enterprises provided the well-being of the whole person is kept in mind and material welfare does not become an end in itself; provided one does not lose sight of the Quranic verse, '*The other world is better for you than this one*'. To forget the proper relation between the two worlds would itself be instrumental in bringing about disequilibrium and would be a kind of *jihad* in reverse.

All of those external forms of *jihad* would remain incomplete and in fact contribute to an excessive externalization of human being, if they were not complemented by the greater or inner *jihad* which man must carry out continuously within himself for the nobility of the human state resides in the constant tension between what we appear to be and what we really are and the need to transcend ourselves throughout this journey of earthly life in order to become what we 'are'.

From the spiritual point of view all the 'pillars' of Islam can be seen as being related to *jihad*. The fundamental witnesses, 'There is no divinity but Allah' and 'Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah', through the utterance of which a person becomes a Muslim are not only statements about the Truth as seen in the Islamic perspective but also weapons for the practice of inner *jihad*. The very form of the first witness (*La ilaha illa' Lla-h* in Arabic) when written in Arabic calligraphy is like a bent sword with which all otherness is removed from the Supreme Reality while all that is positive in manifestation is returned to that Reality. The second witness is the blinding assertion of the powerful and majestic descent of all that constitutes in a positive manner the cosmos, man and revelation from that Supreme Reality. To invoke the two witnesses in the form of the sacred language in which they were revealed is to practice the inner *jihad* and to bring about awareness of who we are, from whence we come and where is our ultimate abode.

The daily prayers (*salat* or *namaz*) which constitute the heart of the Islamic rites are again a never ending *jihad* which punctuate human existence in a continuous rhythm in conformity with the rhythm of the cosmos. To perform the prayers with regularity and concentration requires the constant exertion of our will and an unending battle and striving against forgetfulness, dissipation and laziness. It is itself a form of spiritual warfare.

Likewise, the fast of Ramadan in which one wears the armour of inner purity and detachment against the passions and temptations of the outside world requires an asceticism and inner discipline which cannot come about except through an inner holy war. Nor is the *hajj* to the centre of the Islamic world in Mecca possible without long preparation, effort, often suffering and endurance of hardship. It requires great effort and exertion so that the Prophet could say, 'The *hajj* is the most excellent of all *jihads*'. Like the knight in quest of the Holy Grail, the pilgrim to the house of the Beloved must engage in a spiritual warfare whose end makes all sacrifice and all hardship pale into significance, for the *hajj* to the House of God implies for the person who practices the inner *jihad* encounter with the Master of the House who also resides at the centre of that other Ka'bah which is the heart.

Finally the giving of *zakat* or religious tax and *khums* is again a form of *jihad* not only in that in departing from one's wealth man must fight against the covetousness and greed of his carnal soul, but also in that through the payment of *zakat* and *khums* in its many forms man contributes to the establishment of economic justice in human society. Although *jihad* is not one of the 'pillars of Islam', it in a sense resides within all the other 'pillars'. From the spiritual point of view in fact all of the 'pillars' can be seen in the light of an inner *jihad* which is essential to the life of man from the Islamic point of view and which does not oppose but complements contemplativity and the peace which result from the contemplation of the One.

The great stations of perfection in the spiritual life can also be seen in the light of the inner *jihad*. To become detached from the impurities of the world in order to repose in the purity of the Divine Presence requires an intense *jihad* for our soul

has its roots sunk deeply into the transient world which the soul of fallen man mistakes for reality. To overcome the lethargy, passivity and indifference of the soul, qualities which have become second nature to man as a result of his forgetting who he is constitutes likewise a constant *jihad*. To pull the reins of the soul from dissipating itself outwardly as a result of its centrifugal tendencies and to bring it back to the centre wherein resides Divine Peace and all the beauty which the soul seeks in vain in the domain of multiplicity is again an inner *jihad*. To melt the hardened heart into a flowing stream of love which would embrace the whole of creation in virtue of the love for God is to perform the alchemical process of *solve et coagula* inwardly through a 'work' which is none other than an inner struggle and battle against what the soul has become in order to transform it into that which it 'is' and has never ceased to be if only it were to become aware of its own nature. Finally, to realize that only the Absolute is absolute and that only the Self can ultimately utter 'I' is to perform the supreme *jihad* of awakening the soul from the dream of forgetfulness and enabling it to gain the supreme principal knowledge for the sake of which it was created. The inner *jihad* or warfare seen spiritually and esoterically can be considered therefore as the key for the understanding of the whole spiritual process, and the path for the realization of the One which lies at the heart of the Islamic message seen in its totality. The Islamic path towards perfection can be conceived in the light of the symbolism of the greater *jihad* to which the Prophet of Islam, who founded this path on earth, himself referred.

In the same way that with every breath the principle of life which functions in us irrespective of our will and as long as it is willed by Him who created us, exerts itself through *jihad* to instill life within our whole body, at every moment in our conscious life we should seek to perform *jihad* in not only establishing equilibrium in the world about us but also in awakening to that Divine Reality which is the very source of our consciousness. For the spiritual man, every breath is a reminder that he should continue the inner *jihad* until he awakens from all dreaming and until the very rhythm of his heart echoes that primordial sacred Name by which all things were made and through which all things return to their Origin. The Prophet said, 'Man is asleep and when he dies he awakens'. Through inner *jihad* the spiritual man dies in this life in order to cease all dreaming, in order to awaken to that Reality which is the origin of all realities, in order to behold that Beauty of which all earthly beauty is but a pale reflection, in order to attain that Peace which all men seek but which can in fact be found only through the inner *jihad*.

## Islam and the Concept of Martyrdom

[http://www.mideastweb.org/islam\\_martyrdom.htm](http://www.mideastweb.org/islam_martyrdom.htm)

*We found another very interesting text in the internet written by a Muslim woman from Lebanon who in dialogue with Jews and Israelis over the internet confronted her own beliefs. This is a thoughtful and thought provoking piece. It is not written by an authority on Islam, but by a practicing believer who in her search documents her beliefs with texts from Islamic scriptures. Her real name does not appear. We have been granted permission by MidEastWeb.org to republish the article in the report. The article is found in Annex II: Islam and the Concept of Martyrdom, [http://www.mideastweb.org/islam\\_martyrdom.htm](http://www.mideastweb.org/islam_martyrdom.htm)).*

02/18/2004

*Suicide bombing in Islam? Just say "No" argues Amina from Lebanon.*

There is a need for every believing Muslim to 'strive', or engage in spiritual *Jihad*, to understand the word and will of God and to live accordingly. Failure to engage in that *Jihad* makes our responses in times of crises mere reflexes based on what we are told (traditions) rather than the result of rational (yes, I believe one can be rational in his/her approach to understanding the written word of God) and independent thinking that is grounded in evidence from the Qur'an, the most authoritative religious book for Muslims.

### **Mixing politics and religion**

I have the feeling that, in our pressing need to defend the Palestinian struggle and to counter Zionist or anti-Islamic propaganda in the Western media, we Muslims are 'reacting' rather than 'acting', repeating what we are told Islam is about, rather than carefully and directly examining what our religious beliefs are and should be about. As such, we are mostly providing the mirror image of what we believe is reprehensible on the part of our enemy, Zionists who are persecuting Palestinians, that is, applying the principle of an eye for an eye the way some readily suggest in order to deal with Zionists, or parroting 'official' positions that all too often know how to manipulate religion and manufacture consent among largely God-fearing populations. Those official positions, an alliance of political and religious 'legitimate' voices, have no qualms about interpreting religious texts to suit their own agendas, even if those agendas were legitimate on their own, such as defending the rights of Palestinians. Those "legitimate voices", more alarmingly, sometimes act with the certainty of someone who knows God better than God, even when the Qur'an damns such "unfaithful" practices. Sura 3, verse 7:

He [God] has sent down to you [Mohammad, *Praise Be unto Him*] this Book which contains some verses that are categorical and basic to the Book, [unequivocal or '*muhakkamaṭ*'] and others equivocal. But those who are twisted of mind look for verses equivocal [*'mutashabehaṭ*' as opposed to '*muhakkamaṭ*'] seeking deviation and giving them interpretations of their own but none knows their meaning except God

In Sura 2, verse 79, the Qur'an reads:

But woe to them who fake Scriptures and say  
"This is from God" so that they might  
earn some profit thereby,  
and woe to them for what they fake,  
and woe to them for what they earn from it

I believe the Palestinian struggle is better served by enlightened positions (including religious ones) that appeal to what I think most beings can respond to: reason. Emotional, unreflected responses are short sighted. They can backfire because all sides have their 'emotional' justifications. They do not need to be 'discussed' or 'debated'. They also mainly serve to annihilate the "Other", who ever that "Other" happens to be at a specific historical point.

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**...the Palestinian struggle has been enmeshed with the Islamic religion by both sides: the Zionists and their defenders and the Palestinians and their defenders, and consequently both Islam as religion and the Palestinian struggle emerged tainted and vilified. This is the price of making religion subservient to one's political interests.**

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To be specific, the Palestinian struggle has been enmeshed with the Islamic religion by both sides: the Zionists and their defenders and the Palestinians and their defenders, and consequently both Islam as religion and the Palestinian struggle emerged tainted and vilified. This is the price of making religion subservient to one's political interests. Muslims in general, and Arabs and Palestinians in specific, unfortunately share the responsibility, along with Zionists, in this vilification. I even dare to say that Muslims have provided the Zionists with ammunition to use against them and discredit the Palestinian struggle and Islam as a religion of the one true God in the propaganda war.

I will not discuss here the legitimacy of the methods used by Palestinians to defend their basic human rights. I will leave the issue of the legitimacy of Palestinian suicide bombing as a method of warfare to those who can argue for it or against it from the perspective of international law and basic human rights. What I am interested in here, however, is to disentangle some of the webs that have been woven around the issue of suicide bombing and Islam.

## Muslim "indulgences"

Apologists of suicide bombing see it as a religiously sanctioned method of fighting the Israelis/Jews (those two categories are used by them interchangeably). They encourage Palestinians to engage in this form of violent struggle by telling them they will be "martyrs" or '*shuhada*', a position highly valued by God according to the Qur'an. They also promise them multiple rewards in heaven (72 virgins per 'martyr' - a heterosexual male I assume!) in addition to securing heaven for the entire family of the martyr. Such religious justifications are deeply problematic from a religious point of view. To start with, the 72 virgins and the tickets to heaven for the entire family are attributed to the Prophet Mohammad (*Praise Be Unto Him*) and are not mentioned in the Qur'an. Worse yet, telling a family member he/she can take all loved ones along to heaven strongly contradicts the Qur'an, as I shall explain later on. This contradiction indeed brings up the issue of the veracity of many sayings attributed to the Prophet. Scholars of 'Hadith' (traditions and sayings of the Prophet) have to deal constantly with the problem of weeding out 'true Hadith' from false ones. As for the Prophet himself (*Praise Be Unto Him*), he probably already knew the possibilities for abusing his authority and the danger of attributing to him things he never said. In the most famous and multiply attested Hadith, he says (translation mine):

"Don't take anything from me to write down except the Qur'an. Whoever takes anything from me other than to write down the Qur'an should erase it. And deal with me (or criticise me) without hesitation, and whoever lies on my behalf may he have his seat in the fire of hell" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 18, p. 229).

## On martyrdom

Even if we establish that that the Prophet himself did not promise virgins and family tickets to martyrs or *shuhada*, one still has to contend with the issue of *shahada* (traditionally understood to mean martyrdom) which does exist in the Qur'an. Indeed, *shuhada* are highly rewarded by God in several verses from the Qur'an. But who are the *shuhada* and what should they do in order to obtain such rewards?

Common religious knowledge tells us that Palestinian suicide bombers are 'shuhada' or 'martyrs'. By killing those whom they consider to be enemies of God, Jews or Israelis, and sacrificing themselves in the process, they obtain the status of 'martyrs' or 'shuhada' and go to heaven to accept their reward. When this 'common knowledge' is cross-referenced with the Koran, the concept of 'martyrdom' becomes less clear-cut, if not flimsy. To start with, Muslims are asked to fight those who fight them (2:19) but are also asked somewhere else to go beyond the principle of an eye for an eye and to forgive their oppressors (Qur'an 5:45). This may seem quite contradictory as a command from God, except that those people that the early Muslim believers were fighting against in self defence were specifically the polytheists of the Arab peninsula. Jews, by contrast, were to be dealt with differently according to the Qur'an.

## **On Jews**

As a Sunni Muslim Lebanese, I grew up "knowing" that Jews were bad and that they were constantly punished and rejected by God for their lack of faith and defiance (praying to the calf, etc.). Seeing them being killed by the very people they oppressed was not questionable in that sense, especially if it was sanctioned by the Qur'an, as I was "told". Only later on, upon reading and working on comprehending the Qur'an by myself did I understand that most of what I thought Islam was about was not found in the Qur'an, at least not in any unequivocal way. I was indeed very surprised to find out that the Qur'an often states clearly that some Jews are going to heaven and are blessed by God! "Those who believe, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabeans, any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear, no shall they grieve" (2: 62). Of course the Qur'an is full of verses damning of the Jews and their disbelief (3:72, 3:75, 3:78, 5:14), but, having read the Old Testament too, I found the Old Testament much more damning of the very people who use it as their sacred book! The Qur'an indeed constantly warns believers not to repeat the mistakes of those who came before them, reiterating what David, (*Praise Be Unto Him*) and then Jesus himself, (*Praise Be Unto Him*) thought of their own people when they transgressed the bounds of God:

"Curses were pronounced on those among the children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David and Jesus the son of Mary: because they disobeyed and persisted in excesses" (5:78).

Of course the key words here are: "those among the children of Israel". If one were to collect all the Qur'anic verses critical or hostile to the Jews, one notices that most of them refer to "some of" the Jews and not all of them. In other words, the Qur'an is never damning of ALL Jews: "Not all of them are alike: of the People of the Book (Jews or Christians) are a portion that stand for the right: They rehearse the signs of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration" (3:113). If not all Jews are alike, how can Muslims fight "the Jews"? Of course this is only possible if Muslims "think" for God, which is itself a lack of faith in God and his ability to judge his own people! Finally, the Prophet himself (*Praise Be Unto Him*) is ordered in one of the verses to "forgive them (the Jews)" (5:13).

## **False witnesses?**

Apologists of suicide bombers might justifiably argue that the enemy is not 'the Jews' but Israelis or Zionists, and martyrdom or 'shahada' applies to the fight against them as oppressors of Muslims. In other words, they argue that suicide bombers who 'sacrifice' themselves in order to kill as many of their enemies as possible are highly regarded by God. A close examination of the Qur'an, however, does not lend unequivocal support for this 'justification'.

To start with, most of the Qur'anic verses (cited by apologists of suicide bombing as 'evidence') refer to "those killed" (*kutila*) and not "who kill" (*katala*) in the cause of God (Qur'an 2:154, 3:157, 3:169, ) . So, a suicide bomber in that respect may actually not qualify for a reward in the afterlife (at least not unequivocally), because such a person would be killing, rather than just be killed for his faith in God!

**...the struggle is not a religious one, but purely a political/nationalist one. Since Palestinians are not oppressed because of their religion, but because of their land, which has nothing to do with God or belief in God as no piece of land should, their "fighting" against Israelis cannot be "rewarded" by God in that sense.**

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This still does not mean that Muslims are not ordered in the Qur'an to "fight" and "kill" (*kital*) in the cause of God (3: 195, 4:74). Quite to the contrary! However, it is this condition ("in the cause of God") which is the most problematic part when justifying suicide bombing on religious grounds. Muslim believers who fight (their oppressors) and strive with their person and belongings in order to be "witnesses" of God and live their faith openly are indeed shuhada (plural of *shaheed*) according to the Qur'an. This cannot be said of Palestinian suicide bombers unless they are fighting and being killed by Israelis because of their faith in God. I truly do not believe that this is the case. Palestinians are not attacked, oppressed, thrown out of Palestine, etc. because of their faith. Christian Palestinians were treated in the same way, and all Palestinians could be Buddhists or atheists for that matter and they would still have been persecuted by the Israelis. In other words, the struggle is not a religious one, but purely a political/nationalist one. Since Palestinians are not oppressed because of their religion, but because of their land, which has nothing to do with God or belief in God as no piece of land should, their "fighting" against Israelis cannot be "rewarded" by God in that sense. Actually, a verse from the Qur'an is clear in its categorical forbidding of suicide. Speaking to believers, the Qur'an says:

Do not kill yourselves. God is merciful to you.  
If someone does so through oppression or injustice,  
we shall cast him into Hell (4:29, 30).

### **Witnessing for the faith**

Finally, the most important issue when it comes to suicide bombing is who actually is a "*shaheed*", as mentioned in the Qur'an. Anybody who reads the Koran regularly and critically, I must say, would notice that first, a "*shaheed*" is someone who lives out his/her faith in front of others (e.g. Qur'an 3:140), attests openly to belief in God, or someone, as Christ, (*Praise Be Unto Him*), said, who does not put their light under a bushel. No where in the Qur'an, as far as I know, is there a direct equation between being a "witness" and the act of killing an enemy of the faith. Of course a Muslim who witnesses for God might face persecution, just as early Christians were persecuted because of their faith. This is also dealt with in the Qur'an, where anyone who dies in

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the cause of God is rewarded by God. The point I am making so far is that to unequivocally equate a "witness" or "*shaheed*" as used in the Qur'an with individuals who 'sacrifice themselves' or "are martyred" is the result of interpretation and is not obvious or unequivocal in the Qur'an, as we are made to believe. Indeed, any such equation or parallelism between the two concepts, witnessing and martyrdom, I would argue (until someone argues successfully the opposite) is purely political, the result of (forced?) interpretation, and is meant to legitimise, on religious grounds, the Palestinian form of armed struggle, and suicide bombing in particular.

In further defence of the Qur'anic sanctioning of suicide bombing, some have argued that the concept of 'witness', the way I understand it from the Qur'an, that is. as living openly one's faith in God), has a different word for it in Arabic: '*shahed*' and not '*shaheed*'. In other words, they claim that 'witness' means '*shahed*' and 'martyr' means '*shaheed*'. I looked up verses in the Qur'an that contain the word '*shahed*'. If their argument is correct, I should not find the word '*shaheed*' in those verses that speak about 'witnessing', since '*shaheed*' according to them means 'martyr'. I stopped at this verse (4:41):

How shall it be when We call  
witnesses from each and every people  
and call you [Muhammad, *Praise Be Unto Him*] as witness over them?

In this verse, the word for 'witness' in Arabic is not '*shahed*' as these apologists argue it should be, but '*shaheed*', that is: 'martyr', according to their 'dictionary'. Since God is speaking about all the prophets that God sent to spread his message, including Mohammad (*Praise Be Unto Him*) who was sent to the Arabs of the peninsula, Mohammad (*Praise Be Unto Him*) was definitely a 'witness' in spreading the word of God, but could not have been a 'martyr', that is, sacrificed through death, especially that he died of natural causes! Again, the distinction between '*shahed*' and '*shaheed*' becomes almost impossible to accept when, in Sura 2 verse 282, in the context of writing contracts, two men are needed to 'act as witnesses' (the word used is the plural of '*shaheed*', and not '*shahed*'). Since I believe those men have to be alive for their testimony to be valid in a court of law, '*shaheed*' in reference to them cannot mean 'martyr' but 'witness'!

If still in doubt, Sura 48, verse 28 refers to God as '*shaheed*'! obviously that word does not mean 'martyr', not according to the Qur'an in any case. Indeed, in the eyes of God, we are all potential 'shuhada' (witnesses and not martyrs), simply by believing in God and his apostles, and we shall have our reward and our light (57:19).

The supposedly two different terms, one being '*shahed*' and meaning 'witness' and one being '*shaheed*' and meaning 'martyr' are, unless I am proven incorrect, actually two words meaning the same thing, 'the one who sees, pledges, or attests, or witnesses', though with variable intensity. One of the most authoritative Arab dictionaries, *Muheet al Muheet* by Boutros al Bustani, explains that '*shahed*' is the one who sees and '*shaheed*' is one whose testimony is trustworthy. Muslims thus can readily argue, based on the Qur'an, that being killed for one's faith is an extreme case of 'witnessing'. However, when some Muslim theologians 'stretch' that concept of 'witness' to include

those who simultaneously kill their enemy, instead of forgiving them, and commit suicide, a crime in the eyes of God, they should, out of fear of God, make it also known that this is their own interpretation of the word of God, that they could be wrong about this interpretation, and that they should pray to God day and night to forgive them in case they were wrong. God is all merciful, all compassionate!

### **Concluding thoughts**

In conclusion, I hope my criticism is not misunderstood as a negation of the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle. But I do reserve the right, based on my religion, to think about how God would like me to deal with injustice and adversity. As a submitter to God, that is, '*muslim*' in Arabic, notably with a lower case "m", I should not merely repeat 'folk stories' and traditions about Islam, nor uncritically accept self-serving interpretations of God's word. To do so would be to forfeit my basic duty and responsibility as a believer in God, that is, to engage in Ijtihad, or the struggle to understand the word and will of God. Repeating uncritically what some people in authority claim to be from God, however 'authoritative' they may be, will not save me from the responsibility of my acts should they be wrong (35:18)

Nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burden.  
If one heavily laden should call another to bear his load,  
not the least portion of it can be carried by the other  
even though he be nearly related

As a final note, I don't advance these views about suicide bombing and Islam in order to be "politically correct," as some might think. Being a Lebanese Muslim Sunni woman, I know too well the meaning of challenging religious orthodoxy in an environment that often literally 'eliminates' dissent. I and others like me may be politically correct in the USA or Western Europe, but are indeed politically very incorrect in the Middle East. In any case, I don't care for being politically correct as much as I want and strive to be 'religiously' correct in the eyes of God. If some 'traditions' and interpretations, including Hadith, tell me things that contradict what is unequivocal in the Qur'an, I know as a Muslim that the Qur'an is the highest authority for Muslims. A case in point is the hadith oft quoted by religious clerics to encourage suicide bombers. According to that hadith, Palestinian '*Shuhada*' or 'martyrs,' accepting the interpretation of the apologists, not only get 72 virgins but also get to guarantee heaven for their entire family. The above-mentioned verse (35:18) clearly states the opposite, saying that each individual is strictly responsible for his/her own acts on earth (see also 53:38 and 60:3).

I truly urge well meaning Muslims involved in the Palestinian struggle not to sacrifice God's truth in the cause of Palestine. This would be an unacceptable price to pay for believers in God. True, putting religion in the service of politics might entail some 'earthly rewards' and political gains, but most probably will end up depriving us of the greater, more enduring reward in heaven (8:28):

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And know that your possessions and your progeny  
are but a trial  
and that it is God  
with whom lies your greatest reward

Amina (a pseudo name)  
Lebanon  
February, 2004