



Middle East Spotlight

The Lessons We Teach

As summer winds down, children here in America are heading back to school. While they sharpen their No. 2 pencils and brush up on their reading, writing and arithmetic, children on the other side of the globe are preparing for an entirely different kind of education.

In June, Israel's Ministry of Education unveiled a program to integrate 500 Arab teachers into Jewish schools. According to a report in Haaretz, the Education Ministry's director general, Dalit Stauber, said that the plan reflects "a society that meets in the education system, recognizes the excellence in people and enables teachers to integrate. It's a win for both sides. This partnership breaks down barriers and allows each side to get to know the other properly. It also helps meet the needs of the Arab community, which has a surplus of teachers."

As Mohammed Hiadri, the chairman of the Monitoring Committee for Arab Educational Affairs, stated, "Employing Arab teachers in Jewish schools will be an important contribution that will help promote values of tolerance and acceptance of the other—as racism can stem from ignorance, fear and prejudice."

As Israel works to promote coexistence, the type of ignorant prejudice that Hiadri described is being promoted in Gaza. Hamas, the U.S. designated terrorist group based in the Gaza Strip, issued a new education law prohibiting any relations with Israelis. According to The New York Times, the law "stipulates that any educational institution that receives aid meant to encourage or promote normalization of ties with Israel will face punishment: a 10-year prison term for an individual perpetrator and a fine of 20,000 Jordanian dinar (about \$28,200) for any institution involved in organizing exchange programs or activities that include Israelis."

This is following a summer where thousands of children in the Gaza Strip between the ages of 6 and 16 were invited to pick up AK-47s and engage in a series of quasi-military drills in the sand dunes of Rafah. The activities included weapon use, jumping over fire and crawling under barbed wire, all performed to the tune of exploding charges. Photographs of these drills show young boys dragging a Khaki-clad doll away from an Israeli flag, in what appears to be a re-enactment of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit being kidnapped in 2006. Organizers estimate that nearly 10,000 Palestinian children participated over the summer.

None of this should be particularly surprising; Hamas was founded in the late 1980s with the self-proclaimed goal of the destruction of Israel. Nonetheless, it is tragic. As Israel is demonstrating, even in the face of violent rejectionism the lessons we teach our children should be about inclusion, normalization, and ultimately peace.