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**Institute for Gulf Affairs**

*POLICY BRIEF:*

# A STATE OF DECEPTION

*The Continuation of Saudi Arabia's  
Curriculum of Hate*

**BY ALI ALAHMED**

*The intentions of the Americans have also been clarified in statements about the need to change the beliefs, curricula, and morals of the Muslims to become more tolerant.*

*-- Osama bin Laden, January 7, 2004*

## Introduction

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the United States was awakened to the reality of transnational terrorism and introduced to the al-Qaeda paradigm of global jihad. Driven by a puritanical version of Jihadist ideology and an existential hatred, al-Qaeda perpetrated the single most horrific act of terrorism in U.S. history. The roots of al-Qaeda's existence rest in a powerful base of zealous supporters fanatically committed to its violent aims, and its future durability depends on the continued resonance of its extremist message among subsequent generations of Muslim youth. While the vast majority of the world's Muslims wholly reject the doctrines and methods of al-Qaeda and other Islamist extremist organizations, small – but potent – segments of the Islamic world remain drawn to Islamic extremism. Saudi Arabia is no exception and is not immune to extremely ideology within its borders. In fact, Saudi Arabia has faced some of the greatest threats posed by terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda in the Arab World and continues to inform the international community of its revamped domestic policies to quell extremism and prevent terrorism. However, legitimate concerns still remain as the Saudi Arabian government continues to neglect reforms to extremist rhetoric founding its central educational materials, often perpetuated messages of hate and intolerance that negatively influence the country's youth population.

Saudi Arabia has been a strategic ally of the United States for decades. This relationship relies most heavily on Saudi Arabia's cooperation through economic partnership, regulating regional security, and maintaining a steadfast commitment to combating terrorism across the Middle East. Although shaky at times, the United States has enjoyed a lasting bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia, several points of engagement prevent obstacles for the American people with regard to the country's worrisome human rights record, religious freedom, and most recently, rising incidence of domestic terrorism in the Kingdom. Although the government of Saudi Arabia has been responsive to U.S. requests to improve its human rights record and to actively uncover domestic terrorist cells, it continues to bypass essential reforms to eject hateful rhetoric from state-owned media and educational outlets. For nine years now, leading NGO's and think tanks have uncovered significant findings that demonstrate the Saudi Arabian government's perpetuation of extremist rhetoric in textbooks printed for public schools, and Muslims around the world. Following the events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing War on Terror, heightened investigations into the internal dynamics that seemed to nurture terrorism in the Kingdom were conducted and encouraged the Saudi Arabian government to robustly quell extremism within its borders. However, this policy has still not transcended into the state-owned education system and presents new U.S. concerns vis a vis Saudi Arabia's campaign to tackle regional extremism.

Fifteen of the nineteen al-Qaeda hijackers on September 11th were Saudi nationals, and Saudis constituted the highest percentage of al-Qaeda fighters in Iraq, according to a 2007 study by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.<sup>1</sup> This study also found that Saudis were vastly overrepresented in the ranks of suicide bombers in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> Saudi Arabia's exceptional record of supplying terror recruits and swelling the ranks of al-Qaeda presents a striking correlation and reflects the Monarchy's institutionalization of religious extremism through a government-controlled education curriculum. This education curriculum is among the most highly centralized in the world, as the Saudi Ministry of Education issues volumes of standardized textbooks to each of the Kingdom's schools. From first through twelfth grade, five days a week, Saudi schoolchildren are instructed from Ministry of Education religious textbooks. These textbooks are imbued with religious intolerance, virulent anti-

Semitism, and incitements to violence. By imparting religious chauvinism and sanctioning the killing of “nonbelievers,” Saudi religious textbooks inculcate generations of impressionable youth with extremist ideas. Each year, five million Saudi children are introduced to this curriculum of intolerance.

The Institute for Gulf Affairs (IGA) identified the Saudi education curriculum as a national security concern prior to the 9/11 attacks. In January 2001, IGA warned the international community of the national security threats posed by the Saudi education curriculum and its schoolbooks during a Congressional conference on January 30, 2001. Months later, Saudi nationals played a leading role in formulating and executing the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Following this disturbing revelation, global attention focused on Saudi Arabia as a source for extremism and arbiter of regional instability.

For nine years, IGA has annually obtained and reviewed editions of Saudi Ministry of Education textbooks, providing the State Department with complete volumes of schoolbooks in 2004, 2006, and most recently in 2010. In 2006, IGA published a comprehensive report based on its review of dozens of textbooks. This report, a collaborative effort between IGA and Freedom House, garnered enormous media coverage, jumpstarted Congressional involvement, and triggered a Saudi response. Again in 2008, IGA supplied the U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom with copies of textbooks used in the Saudi Islamic Academy.

Faced with pressure from the American media and an outpouring of international concern, Saudi officials felt compelled to engage the American public in order to quell accusations and ease popular concerns. Repeatedly, Saudi officials promised comprehensive reforms and reaffirmed its determination to eradicate religious intolerance and extremism from the official textbooks, yet few tangible measures of progress can be cited.

## Policy Recommendations

Considering that 15 of the 19 terrorists that orchestrated the September 11 attacks of 2001 were from Saudi Arabia, regional and security experts are looking to draw conclusions that could potentially diminish the opportunities for terrorists to be recruited in Saudi Arabia, and to provide reliable information to the government of Saudi Arabia, so that it may more accurately assess terrorist threats at the earliest stage. The Institute for Gulf Affairs is pleased to provide an assessment of its findings on the Saudi Education system and proposes several action points that should be considered at the highest levels of our diplomatic relations with the Al Sa'ud Monarchy.

- Discourage the continuing supply of hyperbolized textbooks to Islamic extremist groups like Hamas and the Taliban. Remarkable similarities in the ideologies of regional terrorist groups and the content found in the government-produced textbooks in the Saudi School system is worrisome and presents obstacles for the international community in its efforts to quell extremism and combat terrorism. (<http://www.icpa.org/jl/vp504.htm>)
- Demonstrate disdain for the KSA's continuing indirect financing of terrorist organizations operating in the West Bank and Gaza strip. A peaceful resolution to the prolonged conflict in Israel and the Palestinian territories is a cornerstone to American foreign policy in the region; a goal which will never be met without the support of responsible and diplomatic cooperation from our regional partners. (<http://www.icpa.org/jl/vp504.htm>)
- Coordinate a series of high-level bilateral discussions between senior USG officials and their Saudi counterparts. Highlight our growing concerns over increasing rhetoric geared towards Islamic terrorism in the Saudi education system, and underscore the more severe impact powerful rhetoric can have on young populations.
- Request that the US government put pressure on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to reexamine the information disseminated in the Central Education System in an effort to quell the spread dangerous ideology and messages of hate.
- Remove content that spreads messages that encourage terrorist activities and the legitimization of Islamic jihad
- Demand greater transparency of educational materials in the Kingdom and an honest commitment to removing messages of hate.
- Encourage cooperation between the Saudi government and local NGO's and human rights groups to advocate tolerance and a deviation away from social discrimination.
- Demonstrate a no-tolerance policy for the financing of terrorist groups

## Saudi Official Deception

*Saudi Arabia is upgrading its own educational system. Not only have we eliminated what might be perceived as intolerance from old text books that were in our system, these curricula also emphasize the teaching of true Islamic values ... as well as how to safeguard community in peace, the environment, health and human rights.*

**Prince Turki al-Faisal, former Saudi Ambassador to the United States**

Town Hall Los Angeles HRH, March 21, 2006.

In an apparent public relations campaign to announce the Saudi Monarchy's dedication to curricula reform following 9/11, a host of Saudi government officials launched public speaking engagements before American audiences. During a May 2003 appearance on NBC's *Meet the Press*, then Foreign Affairs Advisor Adel al-Jubeir (now the Saudi Ambassador to the Washington), stated, "We have looked at our educational systems. We have changed textbooks." Two years later, on C-Span, Mr. Jubeir proclaimed, "We have reviewed our educational curriculums. We have removed materials that are inciteful or intolerant towards people of other faiths."

Former Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. Prince Turki al-Faisal commented on the Kingdom's educational policy reforms during an April 2006 speaking event at the Chicago Council on Foreign relations, stating, "Not only have we eliminated what is objectionable from old text books that were in our system, we have also implemented a comprehensive internal revision and modernization plan." He has issued countless statements of similar effect.

In a *20/20* interview with Barbara Walters on October 14, 2005, King Abdullah heralded, "Islam is a religion of peace that forbids the killing of the innocent (regarding textbooks calling for the killing of Jews and other extremist teaching)" ... "Yes, we have. We have toned them down (on having changed the textbooks)."

However, Saudi official promises and public statements affirming completed reforms did not accrue to an open and transparent process of curricula reform. On the contrary, the same Saudi officials who loudly announced the completion of sweeping reforms did their best to ensure that the details of the education curriculum remain shrouded in a veil of secrecy. The Saudi Monarchy has repeatedly ignored requests by American officials and politicians to obtain Saudi textbooks, enabling the unmonitored continuation of its intolerant curriculum.

In September 2005, the Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal vowed that he would provide Senator Arlen Specter, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, with the complete set of the current Saudi religious textbooks, but ultimately was only provided with one book.<sup>3</sup> Concerned by the content of schoolbooks used by the Islamic Saudi Academy in Fairfax, Virginia, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom asked for a set of textbooks from the Saudi government, which firmly rebuked the request and refused to disclose a single copy to the panel.<sup>4</sup> Most strikingly, however, the U.S. State Department has been unable to receive copies of Saudi textbooks, relying instead on IGA's covert procurement of government editions.

The Saudi government's consistent refusal to disclose copies of their textbooks to U.S. authorities indicates its desire to maintain secrecy over its "process of reforms" and unwillingness to publicly reveal alterations to the content of its schoolbooks.

## The Continuation of Hatred

*The hour [of judgment] will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them. [It will not come] until the Jew hides behind rocks and trees. [It will not come] until the rocks or the trees say, 'O Muslim! O servant of God! There is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him.*  
**9<sup>th</sup> Grade Saudi Ministry of Education Textbook on the Hadith**  
2009-2010 Edition

Although Saudi officials have repeatedly promised reforms, the textbooks remain rampant with the same hatred and intolerance as previously uncovered. The Saudi Ministry of Education has not eliminated instances of “perceived intolerance” from the latest edition of Saudi textbooks, which do not convey “true Islamic values,” as Mr. al-Faisal suggests.

This section contains excerpts from the 2009-2010 edition of Saudi Ministry of Education textbooks, obtained and translated by IGA:

***Narrated by Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet said:***  
***“The hour [of judgment] will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them. [It will not come] until the Jew hides behind rocks and trees. [It will not come] until the rocks of the trees say, ‘O Muslim! O Servant of God! There is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him.***

***When God sent his Prophet Muhammad, He abrogated with his law all [other] laws and He commanded all people, including the people of the book, to believe him and to follow him. The people of the book should have been the first to believe him because they find him in their scriptures. Their prophets had informed them of Muhammad’s mission. But most of them denied and rejected him.***

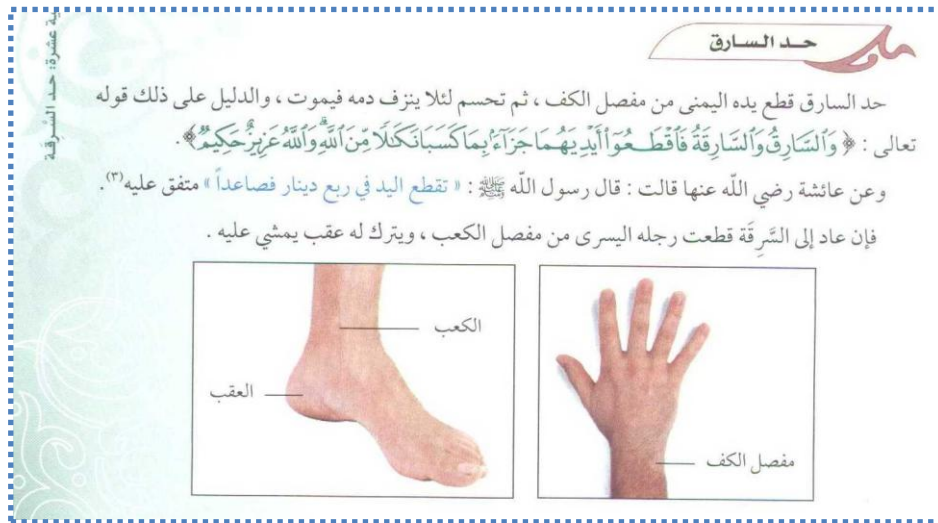
***The clash between this [Muslim] nation and the Jews and Christians has endured, and it will continue as long as God wills. In this Hadith, Muhammad gives us an example of the battle between the Muslims and the Jews.***



Source: *al-Hadith wa Athaqafah (Sayings of the Prophet and Islamic culture)*, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010), pg. 148

**This excerpt details the punishment for thievery, which involves severing the thief's hand upon the first offense and the foot upon the second:**

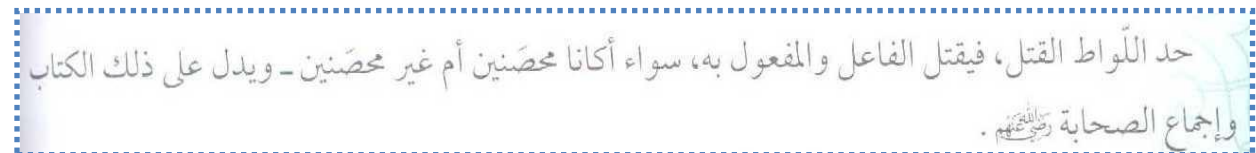
The following excerpt provides justification for carrying out acts of swift justice for violators of state law. Readers are provided explicit details of carrying out amputations of limbs given the severity or frequency of thievery. This behavior bypasses the need for a judicial system and allows for ordinary citizens to carry out extreme acts of violence towards perceived criminals. By offering citizens an avenue to bypass the legal system limits the government's ability to maintain control over extremist behavior, and heightens the risk for religious doctrine to dictate judicial procedures instead of rule of law.



Source: *Fiqh*, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010), pg. 100.

The following excerpt explicitly sanctions hate crimes towards homosexuals. This message of intolerance forces homosexuals to conceal their identities and risk becoming outcasts in a very family-oriented and introverted society founded upon personal honor and relations. This severe penalty for homosexual activity should be considered barbaric and should not be included in material intended to educate a nation's youth, despite any relevant content that is interpreted under Islam.

***The punishment for homosexuality is death, both actors should be killed, if they were married or not....***



Source: *Fiqh*, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010), pg. 100.



### Third: Punishment of the Jews who lost their religion:

*The Jews lost their religion and attacked the religion of Islam, which consists of accepting the oneness of God and the worship of Him alone. God told His Prophet Muhammad: Say to those who cast aspersions on your religion: has anyone told who will receive the harshest punishment from God on the Day of Resurrection? They are the Jews, whom God has cursed and with whom He is so angry that He will never again be satisfied. The people of the Sabbath [Jews and Christians] were punished by being turned into apes and swine. Some of them were made to worship the devil, and not God, through consecration, sacrifice, prayer, appeals for help, and other types of worship. Some of the Jews worship the devil. Likewise, some members of this [Muslim] nation worship the devil, and not God.*

ثالثاً: عقوبة اليهود الذين أضاعوا دينهم:  
أضاع اليهود دينهم وطعنوا في دين الإسلام الذي هو توحيد الله وإفراده بالعبادة، فقال الله سبحانه لنبيه محمد ﷺ قل لهؤلاء العائنين لدينكم: هل أخبركم بمن ينال شر الجزاء عند الله يوم القيامة؟ هم اليهود الذين لعنهم الله وغضب عليهم غضباً لا يرضى بعده أبداً. وقد عوقب أصحاب السبت منهم بالمسخ إلى قردة وخنزير، وجعل منهم من يعبد الطاغوت من دون الله بالنذر والذبح، والدعاء والاستعانة، وغير ذلك من أنواع العبادة. فإذا كان في اليهود من عبد الطاغوت فكذلك يكون في هذه الأمة من يعبد الطاغوت من دون الله.

Source: *al-Tawhid*, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010), pg. 43.

Below are excerpts extracted directly from the Ministry of Education's national textbooks. The first example highlights distinct inheritance laws based on gender, explicitly allocating a lesser value to women based on their gender. By perpetuating this disparity of value as it pertains to gender inhibits female empowerment and perpetuates chauvinism in an already male dominated society. The excerpt also indicates that non-Muslim "infidels" are also given a lesser value, marginalizing people of other religions living within the Kingdom and condoning religious intolerance.

*The blood money for a Muslim woman is half of the blood money for a male Muslim, and the blood money for an infidel woman is half of the blood money for a male infidel.*

أنواع الدِّيَّات	
١	دية المسلم الحر الذكر ١٠٠ من الإبل
٢	دية المرأة المسلمة الحرة ٥٠ من الإبل
٣	دية الكافر الحُر مطلقاً نصف دية المسلم ٥٠ من الإبل
٤	دية الكافرة نصف دية الكافر الحُر ٢٥ من الإبل

Source: *Fiqh (Jurisprudence)*, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010), pg. 129.



The following excerpt is taken from a textbook currently used by the Islamic Saudi Academy in Fairfax, Virginia. Detailing the prerequisites of marriage, this excerpt upholds the legality of child marriage and, therefore, enforces the subjugation of females:

### Prerequisites of Marriage

Validity of marriage ought to fulfill six conditions, as follow:

1. **Determining the couple:** Each should be known by a certain name, or a distinctive description during the contracting of marriage, if both or one of them were unknown it is not a valid marriage. If one said: I'm giving you one of my daughters into marriage at a time that he has more than one (daughter), it is not a valid marriage.
2. **Consent of the couple:** The contract should be carried by consent of both parties, if one or both were obligated into marriage, it's not valid, as consent is a prerequisite by all scholars in all contracts. The exception is when one party is unable to give consent, such as a retard, a boy and the young girl, a father or the guardian is permitted to give them into marriage without their consent, as their consent is not required.

### شروط النكاح

يشترط لصحة النكاح ستة شروط، وهي:

١ - تعيين الزوجين : وذلك بأن يكون كل منهما معروفاً معيناً باسمه، أو بوصف يميزه عند العقد، فإن كانا مجهولين أو أحدهما لم يصح، فلو قال: زوجتك إحدى بناتي وله أكثر من واحدة لم يصح.

٢ - رضا الزوجين : بحيث يتم العقد عن رضا من الطرفين، فلو أُجبراً أو أحدهما لم يصح، لأن الرضا شرط في العقود كلها بالإجماع، ويستثنى من ذلك كون أحدهما غير مكلف، كالمجنون والصبي والصغيرة، فيجوز للأب أو وصيه أن يزوجه دون رضاهم، لعدم اعتبار إذنه، أما غير الأب أو وصيه فلا، وذلك لحديث أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: «لا تُنكح الأيم<sup>(١)</sup> حتى تُستأمر، ولا تُنكح البكر حتى تُستأذن، قالوا يا رسول الله وكيف إذنها؟ قال: أن تسكت»<sup>(٢)</sup>. فنهي صلى الله عليه وسلم عن إنكاح الأيم حتى تستأمر، أي: يؤخذ أمرها بالنطق صراحة، وعن إنكاح البكر حتى يؤخذ إذنها، وذلك بنطقها أو سكوتها، فإن رفضت أو بكت بكاء السخط فلا يجوز إجبارها.

Source: *Fiqh (Jurisprudence)*, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010), pg. 53.

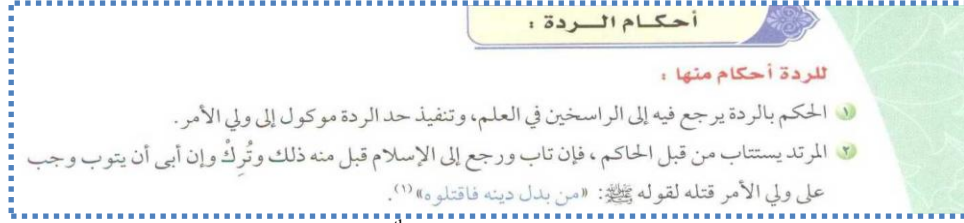
### The Rulings on Apostasy:

The following excerpts highlight religious intolerance towards all non-Muslims, and outwardly sanction violent opposition to religious minorities, apostates, and Jews, further amplifying Saudi's strict adherence

to religious opposition both within the Kingdom, and across the world. This rhetoric has emerged in the charters of major terrorist organizations that share similar viewpoints with regard to religious expression.

**The rulings are as follows:**

1. **The apostate (Muslims who convert, question or doubt Islam) is required to repent to the ruler.**
2. **If he repents and returns to Islam, it is accepted and he is left alone. If he refuses it is mandatory that the ruler kill him.**



### **The Aims of the Zionist-Movement:**

**The Zionist movement aims to achieve a main goal, which is: the control of Jews over the world and the control over the world's resources through secondary goals:**

1. **Instill a fighting spirit among the Jews, as well as religious and nationalist fanaticism to challenge [other] religions, nations, and peoples**
2. **Establish Jewish control over the world; Incite rancor and rivalry among the great powers so that they fight one another, and kindle the fire of war among states so that all states are weakened and their state arises.**
3. **Establishing their government in the Promised Land, which stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates**



## Teaching an Ideology of Terrorism

*It is part of God's wisdom that he made the clash between truth and falsehood continue until the Day of Resurrection. As long as this clash endures, jihad continues.*

**12<sup>th</sup> Grade Saudi Ministry of Education Textbook on the Hadith & Islamic Culture**  
2009-2010 Edition

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*It is incumbent upon believers to wage jihad to establish the truth and eradicate falsehood.*

**Osama bin Laden**

February 2003

Much of the content in Saudi textbooks is identical to statements made by terrorist leaders and mirrors the ideological philosophy of al-Qaeda and other Islamist terror organizations.

The ninth-grade Saudi textbook on the Hadith, for example, promotes the eternal “clash of civilizations” between the Muslims and the infidels (Jews and Christians), an essential philosophical underpinning of al-Qaeda’s ideology. Additionally, these textbooks sanction violence towards Jews and Christians, teaching that jihad against the unbelievers is a religious obligation incumbent upon every Muslim. It is unsurprising, then, that Osama bin Laden publicly defended the Saudi education curriculum in 2004, accusing the United States of trying to “change the morals of the Muslims to become more tolerant.”

It is important to underscore the religious indoctrination that these educational materials engrain in Saudi students. There is a high risk that students will be conditioned to hate based on skewed explanations of Islam (either through child-friendly proverbs, like (text found in the first graders book), or by way of explaining historic, geographic, political and social realities atop an extreme ideological backdrop (12<sup>th</sup> grade texts). Although the point diverges slightly from this country-specific study, it is significant to mention that many of the Islamic Madressas throughout the Muslim world are funded by Saudi Arabia, and the correlation of emerging extremism and recruitment of terrorists from Madressas rallies considerable support.

Below is a comparative table of excerpts in Saudi textbooks and statements made by terrorist organizations:

Saudi Textbook	Terrorist Organization
<p><i>“The hour [of judgment] will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them... There is a Jew behind me come and kill him.”</i></p> <p><i>Hadith, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education</i></p>	<p><i>“The hour [of judgment] will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them... There is a Jew behind me come and kill him.”</i></p> <p>Article 7 Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)</p>

(2010)	Official Charter
<p><b><i>“The First World War: The Jews played a role in starting it.”</i></b></p> <p><b><i>“The Jews exploited the French Revolution...They had a hand in planning the revolution.”</i></b></p> <p><i>Hadith and Islamic Culture, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010)</i></p>	<p><b><i>“No war takes place anywhere without the Jews behind it.”</i></b></p> <p>Article 22 of Hamas Official Charter</p>
<p><b><i>“It is part of God’s wisdom that he made the clash between truth and falsehood continue until the Day of Resurrection. As long as this clash endures, jihad continues.”</i></b></p> <p><i>Hadith and Islamic Culture, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010)</i></p>	<p><b><i>“It is incumbent upon believers to wage jihad to establish the truth and eradicate falsehood.”</i></b></p> <p>Osama bin Laden, “Osama bin-Laden urges Jihad,” February 2003</p>
<p><b><i>“God will help Muslims....The Jews and Christians are enemies of the believers”</i></b></p> <p><i>Hadith, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010)</i></p>	<p><b><i>“He will never be satisfied with the infidels [Jews and Christians]...We are confident that no one can harm us if God is with us.”</i></b></p> <p>Mullah Omar, leader of the Taliban. The Guardian Newspaper, 2001</p>
<p><b><i>“Jihad in the path of God – which consists of battling against unbelief, oppression, injustice, and those who perpetrate it – is the summit of Islam... Muslim scholars have agreed that jihad to spread the faith of God is an obligation.”</i></b></p> <p><i>Hadith &amp; Islamic Culture, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, Saudi Ministry of Education (2010)</i></p>	<p><b><i>“The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies - - civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it”</i></b></p> <p>Osama bin Laden, “Jihad against Jews and Crusaders,” February 23, 1998.</p>

## A Failed Approach

*We've been given assurances that, as of this school year, those textbooks will no longer contain intolerant references to other faiths...we are very encouraged by the position of the Saudi Government and by the responsiveness as well as by a number of statements that have been made by King Abdullah which I think are forward leaning within that context, promoting tolerance, standing up before the whole organization of Islamic countries, and issuing a call for greater tolerance.*

**John V. Hanford, former Ambassador-at-large for Religious Freedom**

Unquestionably, the U.S. State Department possesses the greatest institutional capacity to confront the Saudi Monarchy on the issue of curricula reform and, by virtue of its foreign policymaking power, is able to directly influence Saudi policy. Because the United States and Saudi Arabia share a close economic, strategic, and political partnership, an advanced diplomatic relationship naturally follows. Accordingly, the State Department frequently conducts high-level interactions with Saudi diplomats and officials over substantive policy issues, including heightened concerns surrounding the Saudi education curriculum.

Since 2001, the State Department has adopted a strictly dialogic approach with Saudi officials over the textbook issue, which resulted in a broken series of dialogues and unfulfilled promises by the Saudi government. Despite the recurrent treachery of Saudi officials' statements and their ongoing reluctance to address an issue pertinent to its ally's national security, the dynamics of the U.S.-Saudi diplomatic relationship have not changed. The State Department possesses an array of foreign policy instruments, ranging from economic or diplomatic sanctions to restricting the entry of foreign diplomats to the U.S., but has shown an unwillingness or inability to implement even the mildest of punitive measures against a Saudi regime whose intransigence severely undercuts U.S. counterterrorism operations in the Middle East and, therefore, does nothing to ameliorate threats toward U.S. national security.

In a July 2006 agreement with the State Department, the Saudi government pledged to undertake a comprehensive review of its education system, whereby all hateful and intolerant content would be removed from its textbooks within a two year period. This agreement was highly lauded by the State Department, prompting former Ambassador John Hanford to remark, "We are very pleased with the reforms that King Abdullah and his government have been making."<sup>5</sup> However, this agreement has yielded no such reforms; four years have passed and the textbooks remain abundant with the same levels of hatred and intolerance.

The July 2006 agreement marked the State Department's last notable attempt to critically address the issue. Saudi Arabia was not punished for its failure to live up to the agreement – nor was it pressured, as the frequency of Saudi statements on the education curriculum sharply declined following the agreement. The last four years have witnessed a profound neglect on the part of the State Department to resolve this longstanding national security concern. Despite the apparent bankruptcy of a policy of engagement intended only to elicit empty promises from Saudi officials, the State Department continues to rely on the same tried-and-failed approach. Such an approach likely represents a deliberate neglect of the issue stemming from a deep-seated aversion to pursuing tougher measures against the Kingdom. The latter explanation is certainly consistent with past and present U.S. policy toward the Kingdom, as the U.S. has regularly exempted Saudi Arabia from necessary punitive legal measures. In particular, the U.S. has refrained from imposing sanctions against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in spite of its designation as a "country of particular concern," which automatically subjects the country to U.S. trade sanctions.<sup>6</sup>

This circumspect approach will undoubtedly prevent progress toward serious reforms in the near future, as the policy is evidently not intended to achieve results, halting serious efforts to address a problem known to be an urgent issue of national security.

## **Regime Security & Indoctrination**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formed upon a unique marriage of the al-Saud ruling family and the Wahhabi religious establishment, whereby the al-Saud derived its legitimacy from the fatwas and support of the Wahhabi clerics. Projecting an image of a monarchy whose policies are ultimately constrained by a more radical religious establishment, the al-Saud publicly portrays the Kingdom's institutionalized religious and social intolerance as "concessions" to the Wahhabis.

Religious freedom is nonexistent in the Kingdom, as religious minorities are routinely imprisoned for merely practicing their faith. The al-Saud is also the only regime in the world that practices gender apartheid, forcefully subjugating half of its population. By proclaiming political impotence, the Monarchy successfully reduces external pressures for reforms and maintains a prosperous friendship with the United States. However, this image of regime fragility is heavily at odds with reality, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest absolute monarchy in the world and has instituted numerous ruling mechanisms that place it firmly in control of all aspects of society.

Article 5 of the Basic Law promulgated in 1993 states that the rule over the kingdom is limited to the male children and grandchildren of King Abdul-Aziz, the founder of Saudi Arabia. The ruling family of al-Saud maintains complete monopoly on power by placing its princes in strategic government positions, granting the regime total control over the state's political institutions. Loyalty and public order are ensured through a vast internal security apparatus, the *Mabahith*, while adherence to the Kingdom's draconian religious and social laws is enforced by the ubiquitous religious police, the *Mutawa'een*. These institutions are tightly controlled by the al-Saud, which extends its hand into every facet of Saudi society.

Without a doubt, therefore, the al-Saud regime possesses the authority and ability to swiftly enact changes to its education system, so its continued reluctance to carry out reforms indicates a substantial interest on the part of the Monarchy to preserve an institution that indoctrinates children and youth in an ideology of hatred and religious extremism. This paper argues that the Saudi regime, rather than the Wahhabi clerical establishment, seeks to maintain a curriculum of hatred and benefits from the religious indoctrination of Saudi youth.

The religious curriculum exists neither as a means to placate the clerical establishment nor as an institution that spreads the Monarch's personal religiosity, but rather constitutes the foundation of a decades-long policy designed to guarantee the survival of the regime. Specifically, the education system creates a barrier between the people and the outside world. By making religion a focal point of primary and secondary education, the Saudi regime ensures that its population remains preoccupied with religious studies, obsessed with doctrinal minutia, and ignorant of other affairs. Indoctrinated in a religious-centric education system that teaches a puritanical and chauvinistic interpretation of Islam, Saudi youth structure their lives around religious devotion and remain distracted from the excesses of the regime.

For decades, the Saudi regime has adopted a philosophy that religion is the "opium of the masses" and transformed it into a policy of regime survival and is institutionalized at every level. The government-controlled education system represents the foundation of this policy, shaping young minds and cultivating extremist ideologies. The textbooks function importantly in breeding hatred toward the other and resentment toward outside peoples, especially Jews and Christians. Rather than directing anger and discontent inwards and demanding rights from the regime, many Saudis unleash their discontent toward foreign entities. Later, the regime is able to harness its population's extremism, empowering fundamentalist mentalities by institutionalizing the literalist interpretation of Islam in the country's Shari 'a Law and social structure.

Primarily through an education curriculum of hate, the Saudi regime successfully exports threats toward its own security and pacifies an entire population under the blanket of religious extremism. The 1980 Afghan Jihad represented the hallmark of this policy's success, as the Saudi regime officially supported



the Jihad and sent thousands of the country's most restive and ideologically committed Islamists to participate in the war. This approach channeled public discontent toward a foreign enemy, heading off domestic threats toward regime security. Foreign enemies remain a powerful outlet for domestic restiveness, and the al-Saud regime continues to permit the radicalization of its population and the export of Saudi hardliners to terror groups based in other countries.

## **Conclusion: A New Approach**

Nine years without substantive reforms signals concerns over U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia regarding its education curriculum. An overhaul of existing U.S. policy on this issue is urgently required in favor of a renewed approach based on a combination of carrots incentives and sanctions.

The renewal of high level discussions with Saudi officials is an obvious starting point. However, engagement must be supplemented with an array of punitive policy options. In order to hold Saudi officials accountable for their statements and enforce agreements, the U.S. must demonstrate a willingness to implement tougher measures against the Kingdom. Economic sanctions or the discontinuation of military equipment sales are powerful policy options. Additionally, targeting specific Saudi officials via diplomatic sanctions would be a policy carefully calibrated toward addressing specific issues. In this case, prohibiting the future entry of the Saudi Minister of Education, Faisal bin Abdullah, into the United States is among the most effective options available. Mr. Bin Abdullah's visa prohibition would be removed upon evidence of the completion of comprehensive educational reforms, a process that could be aided by the U.S. Department of Education and established experts on the Saudi education in the United States. Given Saudi Arabia's high level of dependence on the United States and the enormous benefits accruing from the strategic alliance, sanctions would doubtlessly be effective.

Furthermore, a more direct approach is not without precedent in other countries. In 2007, the British government moved to remove the hateful material contained in Saudi textbooks used at the King Fahad Academy in London, threatening to forcibly close the school in the absence of reform. Faced with this ultimatum, the Saudi Embassy agreed to alter the curriculum and revise the school's educational material. A few months later, the British government was rewarded with a \$50 billion military contract, demonstrating that tougher measures need not damage relations.

Tougher measures against the Saudi regime would not damage the Saudi-American relationship, but rather would strengthen cooperation between the two governments and pave the way toward a more mutually beneficial relationship. Moreover, progress on this issue could lead to a general improvement in Arab attitudes toward the U.S., given Saudi Arabia's leadership role in the Islamic World and influential position in the Persian Gulf.

The threat posed by the Saudi curriculum of intolerance to U.S. national security cannot be overstated. America's security is threatened if only a tiny percentage of the five million Saudi schoolchildren embrace the material from these textbooks and converts these ideas into a terrorist ideology. One-tenth of one-percent of this yearly figure represents 5000 individuals. It only took fifteen on September Eleventh.

Hollow statements and empty promises made by Saudi officials are no longer tenable, as the U.S. can no longer afford to patiently wait for elusive reforms. The future of America's security rests in the balance.



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<sup>1</sup> According to the 2007 report, “Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq,” by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, “Saudi Arabia was by far the most common nationality of the fighters’ in this sample; 41% (244) of the 595 records that included the fighter’s nationality indicated they were of Saudi Arabian origin,” <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTCForeignFighter.19.Dec07.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Saudi Arabia’s Curriculum of Intolerance,” Center for Religious Freedom, Freedom House (2006), [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special\\_report/48.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/special_report/48.pdf), pg 15.

<sup>4</sup> “Revised Islamic History Books at Saudi Academy Face Criticism,” *Fox News* (online), (March 17, 2009), <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/03/17/revised-islamic-history-books-saudi-academy-face-criticism/>

<sup>5</sup> Elise Labott, “Saudi Arabia Promises to Revise Textbooks,” *CNN* (online), (July 20, 2006), <http://www.cnn.com/2006/EDUCATION/07/20/saudi.textbooks/index.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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