

## U.S. Urges Saudis to Practice Self-Control

Published: Wednesday, 05 December 2018 07:39

By Tony Perkins

Ms. 067  
No one wakes up one morning and decides to become a terrorist. It's a gradual process that can start almost anywhere: online, in school, or at a mosque. The 19 men who hijacked planes on 9/11 didn't roll out of bed and resolve to kill 3,000 Americans -- they'd been radicalized. "By what?" is a difficult question. But it's one that the world has spent 17 years trying to get to the bottom of.

At the United States Commission on International Religious Liberty (USCIRF), there isn't anything we can do to turn back the clock on 9/11. But there is something the government can do to prevent another one: stem the tide of indoctrination. It begins with Saudi Arabia reforming and reprinting their textbooks.

For the last several years, USCIRF, where I was sworn in as a commissioner earlier this year, has been monitoring the content of curriculum in the Arabian Peninsula. The school's books have been a problem that the West has focused on since 9/11, when it was obvious that more children were being taught to hate as nonchalantly as American kids were being taught to read. When the U.S. government and other countries got their hands on the textbooks, they were shocked. At most of the country's modern schools, teachers were encouraging nothing short of jihad. More alarming is that the distribution of Saudi's inciting material went well beyond their borders.

In 2009 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appointed Farah Pandith, as the first ever U.S. special representative to Muslim communities around the world. In 2015, after visiting Muslims in 80 countries, she wrote in the New York Times that the Saudi "Wahhabi influence was an insidious presence, changing the local sense of identity; displacing historic, culturally vibrant forms of Islamic practice..." Among the means the Saudi's accomplished this, according to Pandith -- textbooks.

When the West leaned on Saudi Arabia to do something in 2006, Saudi leaders promised they would by 2008. Ten years later, [USCIRF found](#), almost nothing's changed. Yesterday, I talked with USCIRF Vice Chairwoman Kristina Arriaga on "[Washington Watch](#)" about our new report and what can be done to stop the spread of radicalism. As she reiterated, the problem isn't isolated to Saudi Arabia. These textbooks, which threaten non-Muslims, are used in countries all over the world. At one point, Kristina told our listeners, USCIRF found a school in Virginia using one!

"Let me give you a couple of things that this year's book still says... One of the hadiths [it] quotes is 'Hitting your wife is only permitted when necessary'... 'Anyone who makes fun of [Allah], his verses, or his prophets, is an apostate. No excuses are acceptable from him regardless of whether he repents' ... These passages are found all over Africa, the United Kingdom, in Pakistan. In fact in 2010, in England, 15-year-olds who attended over 40 private Muslim schools were given diagrams on how to cut the hands of individuals who broke Sharia law by saying something like 'Mohammed is not the last prophet.'"

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Published: Wednesday, 03 December 2014 17:39  
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Hits: 667

In the 8,000 pages of text the commission analyzed, they found only *two* places encouraging religious tolerance. What's worse, Kristina points out, is that the textbooks are very specific about their hatred for Christians and Jews. In recent years, the rhetoric has only gotten more inflammatory. That's a huge problem when you consider that six million students are reading these textbooks in Saudi Arabia every year -- 200,000 of whom are streaming into the U.S. as part of the Saudi education program.

Across Algeria, Austria, Indonesia, Thailand, Somalia, China, France, Tanzania, and other countries, older versions of the textbook are still being used -- and in many places, it's destroying the tolerant Islamic tradition. The moderate voices that could bring about change and progress are being stamped out by a chilling return to fanaticism. Unfortunately, this problem is nothing new. Back in the mid 1990s, Saudi Arabia was funneling these textbooks into Afghanistan, turning an already tenuous situation into a breeding ground for the Taliban.

In the Trump administration, Ambassador Sam Brownback and others keep raising this issue -- in part because other countries are asking for our help in keeping the curriculum out. "It would be very easy," Kristina argued, "for Saudi Arabia to recall these textbooks and print others." But America's relationship with its biggest Arabian ally is complicated. It's become less so thanks to President Trump, who recognizes the importance of making the U.S. independent from foreign oil. After all, that's where the wealthy Saudis get their money to build madrassas and distribute their curriculum all over the world.

It's time, the president insisted last year, for Saudi Arabia to start "honestly confronting the crisis of Islamist extremism and the Islamist terror groups it inspires." And textbooks, USCIRF would tell you, are the ideal place to start.

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*Tony Perkins' Washington Update is written with the aid of FRC senior writers.*