



THE STORY UNDERNEATH

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## POLITICS:

### A Textbook Tale of Two Reports

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**WASHINGTON, Mar 21 (IPS) - Iran's post-revolutionary education system continues to teach children to discriminate against women and religious minorities, according to a report released Tuesday by Freedom House, a Washington-based nonprofit group that seeks to encourage democracy in the world.**

While lauded by supporters for its candid look at the challenges facing Iran, the report, entitled "Discrimination and Intolerance in Iranian Textbooks", actually marks the second time in little more than a week that such a study was released inside the Washington Beltway.

The Hudson Institute, member of a closely-knit group of neoconservative policy institutes that frequently champion aggressive U.S. foreign policies, launched the first salvo last Monday with the help of the Centre for Monitoring Peace in the Middle East (CMIP).

The CMIP report, initially released in 2007, paints an alarmist picture of the Iranian regime, underscoring the ideological leanings of its authors and the organisation that promoted the study. Its title reads: "Iranian Textbooks: Preparing Iran's Children for Global Jihad".

The Freedom House report covers 95 of the most recent school textbooks, ranging from primary to high school. The study identifies a gender ideology that is built upon the "natural superiority" of men and a culture of discrimination whose existence is rooted in a "world view imbued with a religious and political project", according to its author, Saeed Peivandi, a professor of sociology at Paris-8 University in France.

Freedom House is best known for its flagship publication, the yearly "Freedom in the World" report, which rates countries according to their level of civil liberties and political rights. The Financial Times reported on Mar. 31, 2006 that the organisation was one of several selected by the State Department to receive funding for non-violent clandestine activities inside Iran.

The two reports, which presumably examine the same issue, curiously arrive at markedly different conclusions.

"The [report] sheds light on the bleak reality of a regime that indoctrinates its children for war against the West and Israel, in the name of Islam," said Meyrav Wurmser, during a panel discussion that included Arnon Groiss, director of research at CMIP, and Shayan Arya, who is a member of the exiled Constitutionalist Party of Iran and a Fellow at CMIP.

"It also shows us that this is a regime that very actively educates its youth to launch jihad against the West and its allies," she said.

Wurmser, a member of the elite clique of policy wonks who comprise the deflating neo-conservative movement, heads the Middle East policy wing at Hudson and co-founded the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), along with a former colonel in Israeli military intelligence named Yigal Carmon. In 1996, Wurmser participated in a study that led to a report, "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm", urging Israel to break off then-ongoing peace initiatives, and to help overthrow Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

Added Groiss: "The books reveal an alarming picture of an extremist and irrational regime bent on global war to the point of self-destruction."

In contrast, Peivandi's report takes a more nuanced approach: "If we accept the premise that the subject matter in the textbooks in every country or educational system portends the kind of people that that system wants to produce," he said through a translator, "we then see that studying the content of the Iranian textbooks will show us what kind of language of society future generations the Islamic Republic wants to produce."

And unlike CMIP report's authors', Peivandi did not focus on the Iranian "death cult" that neoconservative pundits seem so eager to portray in their attempts to push for more aggressive action against Iran.

"When I was a teacher in schools when we were teaching arithmetic we would say 'how many guns would two guns and three guns make,'" said Peivandi.

But in the 20 years since the Iran-Iraq war, he said, "the militarisation of textbooks has actually stopped", partly a consequence of revision and reform undertaken under the administration of former President Mohammad Khatami, in the 1990s. However, he said, "Glorification of the martyr and martyrdom continues."

Peivandi says the Iranian regime's approach to education more importantly reflects the shortcomings of top-down Islamisation of society, the attempt to control and emphasise ideal societal traits for Iranian youth through rigid educational programmes which are imposed, and which students have and will rebel against.

"In reality, the big mistake is that they think children are a tabula rasa [clean slate], but they interact dynamically with the material, and some of it doesn't stick," said Peivandi. "This type of education is backwards looking and has no relationship to the future."

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