

Teaching Jihad?

By Khody Akhavi

Iran's post-revolutionary education system continues to teach children to discriminate against women and religious minorities, according to a report released March 11 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," was actually 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 report on March 10 with the help of the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (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 organization that promoted the study. The Hudson Institute forum on CMIP's survey was entitled, "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 March 31, 2006 that the organization 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, arrive at markedly different conclusions.

"The [Hudson Institute 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 Hudson's panel discussion, which 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 neoconservative movement, heads the Middle East policy wing at Hudson and cofounded the [Middle East Media Research Institute](#) (MEMRI). In 1996, Wurmser participated in a study that led to the 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 for Freedom House 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 the authors of the CMIP report, 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 militarization 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 the top-down Islamization of society, the attempt to control and emphasize ideal societal traits for Iranian youth through rigid educational programs. But students rebel against the approach.

"In reality, the big mistake is that they think children are a *tabla rasa*, 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."

Khody Akhavi writes for the Inter Press Service.

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