

Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ted Poe (R-TX), Chairman**  
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade Hearing:  
“Saudi Arabia’s Troubling Educational Curriculum”  
July 19, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Saudi Arabia is a crucial ally in the fight against terrorism. Many of the same terrorist organizations that threaten the United States also desire to overthrow the Saudi government and break our partnership. It’s a key member of the coalition to fight ISIS, with its pilots flying alongside Americans since day one of the campaign in Syria. Last year, Riyadh adopted strict laws prohibiting fundraising for terrorism, jointly designating support networks for al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Saudi intelligence has assisted in preventing terrorist plots targeting the U.S. In 2010 Saudi assistance helped foil an attempt by al-Qaeda to conceal bombs on a cargo plane en route to the United States. The Saudis are also battling Iranian-backed rebels in Yemen. These rebels not only threaten the Kingdom but also targeted our own warships and destabilize the Red Sea trade routes. The current diplomatic standoff between Saudi Arabia and Qatar demonstrates that Riyadh is willing to take a stand against state sponsorship of terrorism in the region.

This is all encouraging. However, the Saudis still have much more they need to do at home to counter the sources of extremism in the region. The battle against terrorism will ultimately have to be fought and won on the battlefield of ideas. Saudi Arabia has simply not done enough to defeat extremist ideology. The Kingdom is playing the role of both arsonist and firefighter when it comes to Islamic extremism. Nowhere is this more evident than the textbooks Saudi Arabia produces to teach its youth. For far too long Saudi Arabia’s education curriculum has inspired the very ideology that is at the root of many terrorist organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda. Saudi textbooks are full of anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories, and calls to violence that have incited students both at home and across the world. This poisonous ideology has provided the groundwork for generations of radicalization and extremism. In fact, ISIS adopted official Saudi textbooks for its schools in 2015 until the terrorist group could publish its own. Moreover, its export of hateful material through Saudi-funded schools abroad has helped spread the toxic ideology to more tolerant and open Muslim communities in countries such as Kosovo and Indonesia.

While the Kingdom has repeatedly pledged to remove extremist content from its curriculum, troubling language remains in many of the most recent editions of Saudi textbooks. In 2006 the Saudis committed to eliminate all passages that promoted hatred towards any religion by 2008. Yet even today textbooks include content that discourages befriending “infidels,” claims the goal of Zionism is world domination, and encourages “fighting” any polytheist or infidel who refuses to submit to the supremacy of Islam. This intolerance is unacceptable and directly contributes to the widespread persecution of religion minorities that plagues the Middle East. Another passage in a current Saudi textbook for middle school students states that “the mujahideen who are doing good deeds for the sake of Allah... should be given transportation, weapons, food and anything else they may need to continue their jihad.” Messages such as this undermine the Saudis own counterterrorism efforts. By indoctrinating children into the belief

that people of other faiths are inferior or are a threat to Islam, Saudi Arabia is ensuring future generations of extremists that will join the ranks of terrorist groups.

This is not to ignore that some positive steps have been taken. In recent years the Kingdom has introduced passages that denounce terrorism and encourage dialogue with other faiths. But these steps only send mixed messages to easily influenced young minds so long as the more extreme messages remain. The State Department and previous administrations have also failed to hold their Saudi counterparts to past pledges. The State Department has even refused to publish reports that shed light on these troubling textbooks for fear of embarrassing our Saudi partners.

While we appreciate Riyadh's contribution to our overall counterterrorism efforts in the region, we must hold them accountable for their role in fueling the very extremism we are trying to combat. It is in both our countries' interest. In the fight against terrorism, we all need to be on the same page. And that's just the way it is.