



The Program for Learning in Partnership  
**Education Reform in Arabic  
speaking countries**



*For the past several decades, the poor state of education in Arabic speaking countries has received widespread Western attention, both with respect to its overall failings and, more specifically, the teaching of intolerance in its curricula. Despite intensified Western calls for reform in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and significant Western and international financial support for those reform efforts, the state of education in Arabic speaking countries remains problematic. On the other hand, after nearly two decades of resistance to Western calls for reform by Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom as well as the United Arab Emirates have implemented a successful program to reform their schools curricula and remove problematic lessons.*

*To discuss the state of education in Arabic speaking countries, challenges facing reform efforts in the region, and the lessons of its success stories, the Center for Peace Communications convened an unprecedented webinar bringing together education experts and others from Iraq, Israel, and Tunisia: Talal Al Hariri, an Iraqi politician and activist; Marcus Sheff, Chief Executive Officer of the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-Se), and Chadoua Jabli, a Tunisian civil society activist. The discussion was organized and moderated by Samuel Tadros, Director of CPC's Program for Learning in Partnership.*

## The Crisis of Arab Education

The problems confronting the education system in post-colonial Arabic speaking states are numerous. With the population explosion those countries have witnessed in the past several decades, the education system has failed to keep up with the numbers as well as broader developments in education. With the exception of oil-rich Gulf countries, schools across Arabic speaking countries are overcrowded, typically with 50 to 60 students to a classroom; and severely underfunded, with students resorting to private lessons to make up for what they do not learn in school. Rote learning remains central to education, critical thinking skills are not adequately instilled, and on the whole, education systems do not prepare students to participate in the global economy.

A case in point is Tunisia, which once prided itself in an exceptional education system under President Habib Bourguiba. Following his ouster, President Ben Ali, "appealing to popular demand for greater school access, through a 1991 reform, annulled the secondary-school entrance exam, and made it easier for secondary school graduates to enter universities. With

the 2002 reform, which made it even easier for students to pass the baccalaureate exam, the universities became suppliers of degrees that no longer represented the level of accomplishment they once did.”<sup>1</sup>

The results have been harmful. As a report by *Arab Barometer* highlights, “Tunisia is facing a severe learning crisis among the majority of its students. The rise in the quantity of graduates was not accompanied by a commensurate improvement in quality. The standard of education has declined drastically according to international metrics such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). In the 2015 PISA evaluation, Tunisia ranked 66<sup>th</sup> out of 70 participating countries, and the majority of the participating students scored below the proficiency level.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, according to Ministry of Education data, “as many as 100,000 students stop their studies prematurely on an annual basis.”<sup>3</sup> The natural result of these problems is severe dissatisfaction among the Tunisian people with the education system: “Seventy percent of Tunisian respondents are dissatisfied whereas only 29 percent are satisfied.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these problems, education systems in Arabic speaking countries feature textbooks which, with few exceptions, teach intolerance. This includes general incitement against the “other,” antisemitism, anti-Western tropes, and demeaning portrayals of women. These ideas find expression in more than just a few passages; they are typically the overall framework of some countries’ textbooks, often endorsed by their teachers.

A case in point is Iraq. As Iraqi discussant Talal Al-Hariri observed, after the country’s 1958 coup, educational opportunities were prioritized for party members and Palestinians while

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<sup>1</sup> della Raguine, Tiziana, “Education Reform in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia,” Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 29 November 2020, available at:

<https://dayan.org/content/education-reform-post-revolutionary-tunisia-between-covid-19-and-divided-civil-society>

<sup>2</sup> Bouhlila, Donia Smaali, “Education in Tunisia, Past progress, present decline and future challenges,” Arab Barometer, 25 March 2021, available at:

<https://www.arabbarometer.org/2021/03/education-in-tunisia-past-progress-present-decline-and-future-challenges/>

<sup>3</sup> “Tunisia’s Education Sector to be overhauled,” Oxford Business Group, available at:

<https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/track-series-reforms-are-set-overhaul-sector>

<sup>4</sup> Bouhlila, Donia Smaali, “Education in Tunisia, Past progress, present decline and future challenges,” Arab Barometer, 25 March 2021, available at:

<https://www.arabbarometer.org/2021/03/education-in-tunisia-past-progress-present-decline-and-future-challenges/>

denied to the country's Kurdish population,<sup>5</sup> and both the text and the teachers denied the diversity of Iraq's ethnic and religious composition and attempted to force Saddam Hussein's brand of revolutionary Ba'athist ideology on the children.

The indoctrination in Iraq's education system took an even darker turn with the regime's unleashing of its "Faith Campaign" in 1993. "This resulted in the Islamization of educational curricula," Hariri observed. With respect to the impact on religious minorities in the country, as an activist from Iraq recounts, during the "first week of her first-grade year, a classmate called her a kafir, or an infidel, upon learning that she was Christian. 'He told me I would burn in hell.'"<sup>6</sup> Another activist added, "When you don't see any of yourself or your community's native history in the school books you read, you feel like a foreigner, a stranger, in your own country."<sup>7</sup> Iraqi Nobel laureate Nadia Murad, a survivor of the Islamic State's genocidal campaign against Yazidis, observed, "State curriculum [during Saddam Hussein's reign] was clear about who was important in Iraq and what religion they followed. Yazidis didn't exist in the Iraqi history books I read in school. I later thought that those books must be one reason why our neighbors joined ISIS or did nothing while the terrorists attacked Yazidis. No one who had been through an Iraqi school would think that we deserved to have our religion protected."<sup>8</sup>

According to IMPACT-Se President Marcus Sheff, Tunisian textbooks never quite sank to these levels.<sup>9</sup> Yet his co-discussant in our webinar, Tunisian activist Chadoua Jabli, shared memories of her schooling as a child growing up in a Jewish neighborhood in Tunisia which bore striking resemblance to Hariri's description of Iraq: "I came out of the lessons afraid that the Jew is my enemy. He will kill me. He is a monster." Her fellow Christian students in Tunisia, she added, learn that they are "infidels" while their classmates are taught that "it is forbidden to mix with

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<sup>5</sup> Levkowitz, Joshua & Salah Abdulrahman, "In Iraq Activists aim to reform education to build collective identity," USIP, 16 February 2021, available at:

<https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/02/iraq-advocates-aim-reform-education-build-collective-identity>

<sup>6</sup> Levkowitz, Joshua & Salah Abdulrahman, "In Iraq Activists aim to reform education to build collective identity," USIP, 16 February 2021, available at:

<https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/02/iraq-advocates-aim-reform-education-build-collective-identity>

<sup>7</sup> Levkowitz, Joshua & Salah Abdulrahman, "In Iraq Activists aim to reform education to build collective identity," USIP, 16 February 2021, available at:

<https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/02/iraq-advocates-aim-reform-education-build-collective-identity>

<sup>8</sup> Levkowitz, Joshua & Salah Abdulrahman, "In Iraq Activists aim to reform education to build collective identity," USIP, 16 February 2021, available at:

<https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/02/iraq-advocates-aim-reform-education-build-collective-identity>

<sup>9</sup> Cite the webinar to make it clear where he said this.

them, as they are impure.” Hariri replied that indeed in Iraq as well, “the first thing the student learns, unfortunately, is to call Jews and Christians infidels.”

## Western Calls for Reform

For decades, the role education played in fomenting hate toward the other and building support for terrorism in Arabic speaking countries was largely ignored in Western countries outside of a few activists and organizations. The situation changed in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. As the *Boston Globe* noted in 2002, “The more divisive question between the awkward Saudi and US allies is what role the system itself may have played in shaping the beliefs of Osama bin Laden’s followers — specifically the 15 young Saudi men who joined his Al Qaeda network to carry out the Sept. 11 attack on America.”<sup>10</sup> The extent of the problem became apparent as research organizations began to release English translations and studies of Saudi textbooks.

Saudi textbooks were rife with hatred of others, be they Christians and Jews who were described as apes and swines, or Muslim sects viewed as divergent by the Saudi religious establishment such as Shia. They denigrated women and taught that beating them was permissible, and stated that the punishment for homosexuality was death. Western-style education was derided as an attempt to convert Muslims, the punishment for which should be death, and calls for violence against the other were widespread across the entire curriculum. Jews were a special obsession — with the texts rife with antisemitism, including an endorsement of the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion and blood libels against the Jewish people.<sup>11</sup>

As a result of such reports, various bodies of the U.S. government began to take action. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) led the charge,<sup>12</sup> but it

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<sup>10</sup> Sennott, Charles M., “Saudi Schools fuel anti-US anger,” *The Boston Globe*, 4 March 2022, available at: [http://archive.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/news/driving\\_a\\_wedge/part2.shtml](http://archive.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/news/driving_a_wedge/part2.shtml)

<sup>11</sup> Nina Shea, “Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia’s Textbooks still promote religious violence.” Hudson Institute, 11 September 2011, available at: <https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/researchattachments/attachment/931/sauditextbooks2011final.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> “U.S. religious freedom body urges Saudi to prioritize textbook reform,” *Reuters*, 25 March 2018, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-education/u-s-religious-freedom-body-urges-saudi-to-prioritize-textbook-reform-idUSKBN1H10NW>

was Congressional action through hearings<sup>13</sup> and legislation<sup>14</sup> that became the key feature of U.S. pressure on Saudi Arabia to reform its education system and especially its textbooks. As a statement by former Treasury undersecretary Stuart Levy highlights, the U.S. government was not only well aware of the problem, but actively seeking to pressure Saudi Arabia on the matter: “We must focus on education reform in key locations to ensure that intolerance has no place in curricula and textbooks. Unless the next generation of children is taught to reject violent extremism, we will forever be faced with the challenge of disrupting the next group of terrorist facilitators and supporters.”<sup>15</sup>

At the time, Saudi Arabia largely resisted those calls. Saudi officials made repeated promises to the United States that the textbooks had been changed or will be changed in the near future. “In July of 2006, the Saudi Government confirmed to us its policy to undertake a program of textbook reform to eliminate all passages that disparage or promote hatred toward any religion or religious groups. Furthermore, the State Department letter reported that this pledge would be fulfilled in time for the start of the 2008 school year.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, they “cautioned against Western arrogance, noting that Christian fundamentalism has preached its own brand of intolerance,”<sup>17</sup> with the Saudi Sheikh Saleh Al Fawzan claiming that the calls for reform were a conspiracy against Islam by Jews and Christians who “have shown their heartfelt hatred and try to prevent us from the true path of God. They want to change our religion and our teaching to disconnect us from Islam so they can come and occupy us with their armies.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Senate, Committee on Judiciary, Hearing, “Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe in the War on Terror?”, 8 November 2005, available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CHRG-109shrg34114/CHRG-109shrg34114> & House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Congressional Hearing, “Saudi Arabia’s Troubling Educational Curriculum,” 19 July 2017, available at:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CHRG-115hhrg26312/CHRG-115hhrg26312>

<sup>14</sup> “Saudi Educational Transparency and Reform Act,” 21 June 2021, available at:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2142>

<sup>15</sup> Nina Shea, “Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia’s Textbooks still promote religious violence.” Hudson Institute, 11 September 2011, available at:

<https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/researchattachments/attachment/931/sauditextbooks2011final.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Nina Shea, “Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia’s Textbooks still promote religious violence.” Hudson Institute, 11 September 2011, available at:

<https://www.hudson.org/sites/default/files/researchattachments/attachment/931/sauditextbooks2011final.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Sennott, Charles M., “Saudi Schools fuel anti-US anger,” The Boston Globe, 4 March 2022, available at:

[http://archive.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/news/driving\\_a\\_wedge/part2.shtml](http://archive.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/news/driving_a_wedge/part2.shtml)

<sup>18</sup> Sennott, Charles M., “Saudi Schools fuel anti-US anger,” The Boston Globe, 4 March 2022, available at:

[http://archive.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/news/driving\\_a\\_wedge/part2.shtml](http://archive.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/news/driving_a_wedge/part2.shtml)

While the country paid lip service to the idea of reform, and despite some “changes following the 9/11 attacks and the realization that this curriculum may have played a role in the radicalization of many of the Saudi-national hijackers, the themes of intolerance and hostility remained.”<sup>19</sup> Studies by both USCIRF and the Anti Defamation League in 2018 noted that “the current books contained not only numerous intolerant and inflammatory passages but also several passages specifically thought to have been removed from earlier books,”<sup>20</sup> and that “prolific anti-Semitism and other intolerant material unfortunately still remains.” New books continue to teach hatred or even violence against Jews, Christians, Shiites, women, gay men and anybody who mocks or converts away from Islam.”<sup>21</sup>

## Failed Reform Efforts

Saudi Arabia was not the only example of the failure of the push for reform. Other Arabic speaking countries have attempted to reform their education systems. In both Tunisia and Iraq, an attempt was launched to overhaul the education system, remove problematic textbook content, and introduce values of tolerance into the curriculum.

Following the Tunisian revolution, successive Tunisian governments have promised to reform the education system with little success. In 2016, the new government of Youssef Chahed introduced the Strategic Plan for the Educational Sector (2016-20) with the goal of “improving quality standards through improved teacher training, upgraded curricula and infrastructure, as well as an enhanced framework for private sector partnerships.”<sup>22</sup> But as our Tunisian webinar participant Chadoua Jabli recalled, the reform attempt was thwarted by the educational bureaucracy and teachers’ unions. This failure came despite international financial support from the World Bank. As a result, “despite all these political initiatives, a comprehensive education

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<sup>19</sup> Sheff, Marcus, “Saudi Arabia is changing its face, one textbook at a time,” The National Interest, 1 December 2021, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/saudi-arabia-changing-its-face-one-textbook-time-197169>

<sup>20</sup> “U.S. religious freedom body urges Saudi to prioritize textbook reform,” Reuters, 25 March 2018, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-education/u-s-religious-freedom-body-urges-saudi-to-prioritize-textbook-reform-idUSKBN1H10NW>

<sup>21</sup> Weinberg, David, “Saudi Textbooks still foment Hate.” ADL, 4 December 2018, available at: <https://www.adl.org/news/op-ed/saudi-textbooks-still-foment-hate-the-kingdoms-education-materials-are-rise-with-anti>

<sup>22</sup> “Tunisia’s Education Sector to be overhauled,” Oxford Business Group, available at: <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/track-series-reforms-are-set-overhaul-sector>

reform has not yet materialized.”<sup>23</sup> As Jabli observed, “The most racist and radical generation is my generation – the ones who are now in their forties – because we were raised on racist ideas.”

In Iraq, Talal Al-Hariri argued, “The American administration [of Iraq] tried to improve the curriculum. In 2003 and 2004, for the first time, there were curricula that talked about human rights, curricula that talked about shared humanistic values, bringing religions closer together.” This reform effort proved short-lived. By 2006, USAID had ended its support for Iraqi education.<sup>24</sup> According to Hariri, “After power was handed over to Shia Islamic parties loyal to Iran, there started an organized effort to change and create radical curriculums.”

## Successful Reform in the Gulf

In recent years, two bright spots emerged for education reform in Arabic speaking countries: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. After nearly two decades of resisting calls for reforming its education system and removing problematic material, Saudi Arabia embarked in 2020 on a serious change of course. “The Ministry of Education has worked to accelerate changes in curricula by screening out content that preaches hatred for anything different from the traditional Saudi social fabric and replacing it with content characterized by humanistic and moderate Islamic notions.”<sup>25</sup> The change was drastic. “Recent reports from the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) have highlighted these shifts in a crucial area, that of education policy, finding that a dramatic leap forward has been documented along the moderating path and that “the trajectory has become ... well-defined, encompassing the entire curriculum.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> della Raguine, Tiziana, “Education Reform in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia,” Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 29 November 2020, available at:

<https://dayan.org/content/education-reform-post-revolutionary-tunisia-between-covid-19-and-divided-civil-society>

<sup>24</sup> Zehr, Mary Ann, “U.S. withdraws from education reform in Iraq,” Education Week, 25 August 2006, available at: <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/u-s-withdraws-from-education-reform-in-iraq/2006/08>

<sup>25</sup> al Soudeir, Zaki, “Saudi education reform progressing but not without resistance,” The Arab Weekly, 9 February 2020, available at: <https://the arabweekly.com/saudi-educational-reform-progressing-not-without-resistance>

<sup>26</sup> Sheff, Marcus, “Saudi Arabia is changing its face, one textbook at a time,” The National Interest, 1 December 2021, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/saudi-arabia-changing-its-face-one-textbook-time-197169>



By 2021, Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman had “launched a major program to shake up education, teach the values of global citizenship, and adapt the kingdom to a changing world.”<sup>27</sup> In launching the program, Bin Salman declared his hope that “the program will instill the values of moderation and tolerance, determination and perseverance, discipline and expertise in Saudi citizens.”<sup>28</sup> The reform efforts would culminate in 2022 with the introduction of new curriculum “which involves a reduction of hours devoted to religious studies. As part of the reform, Qur’an and Islamic studies have been merged into a single subject and the number of classes devoted to these two topics has been reduced from 34 to 15 weekly classes in middle school and from 38 to 30 weekly classes in primary school.”<sup>29</sup> Though met with some local resistance from the bureaucracy and religious establishment, the reforms have moved forward.<sup>30</sup> As one Saudi educational researcher observed, “The goal of quickly reforming and developing the curriculum is to create a generation of patriotic and tolerant Saudis who appreciate the diversity of our world and deal with it according to a humanitarian, Islamic and moderate approach, a generation that does not reject renewal, does not rely on prejudice, does not try others but, rather, coexists with them, showing great tolerance.”<sup>31</sup>

While it is true that “problematic content persists in Saudi textbooks in many important areas,”<sup>32</sup> the extent of the change and the fact that it is driven by a ruler, poses problematic questions for U.S. policy makers interested in seeing similar changes across the region. As Marcus Sheff argued in our webinar, “Saudi Arabia is a telling example of how the outside world may call for reform and the state rejects it, but when the state itself wants to reform, it actually happens.”

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<sup>27</sup> Nihal, Mariam, “Saudi Crown Prince launches education reform to teach global values,” The National, 16 September 2021, available at: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/saudi-arabia/2021/09/16/saudi-crown-prince-launches-education-reform-to-teach-global-values/>

<sup>28</sup> Nihal, Mariam, “Saudi Crown Prince launches education reform to teach global values,” The National, 16 September 2021, available at: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/gulf-news/saudi-arabia/2021/09/16/saudi-crown-prince-launches-education-reform-to-teach-global-values/>

<sup>29</sup> “Saudi Arabia reforms school curriculum, cuts religious classes, journalists, intellectuals praise the decision,” MEMRI, 25 August 2022, available at: <https://www.memri.org/reports/saudi-arabia-reforms-school-curriculum-cuts-religion-classes-journalists-intellectuals>

<sup>30</sup> al Soudeir, Zaki, “Saudi education reform progressing but not without resistance,” The Arab Weekly, 9 February 2020, available at: <https://theArabweekly.com/saudi-educational-reform-progressing-not-without-resistance>

<sup>31</sup> al Soudeir, Zaki, “Saudi education reform progressing but not without resistance,” The Arab Weekly, 9 February 2020, available at: <https://theArabweekly.com/saudi-educational-reform-progressing-not-without-resistance>

<sup>32</sup> Sheff, Marcus, “Saudi Arabia is changing its face, one textbook at a time,” The National Interest, 1 December 2021, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/saudi-arabia-changing-its-face-one-textbook-time-197169>

Replicating this outcome requires that more of the region's rulers "realize themselves that the future of their societies is dependent on tolerant and peaceful populations. It is as simple as that. There is a direct link between educating children to accept the other and the prosperity of a country, ten, 15, 20 years down the line."

Similar reforms have been undertaken in the United Arab Emirates. While the country's curriculum was never as problematic as that of Saudi Arabia, the changes there were even more remarkable because they took a holistic approach to reform. "What they did in the UAE," Sheff observed, "wasn't a matter of inserting a bit of peace and tolerance there and a bit of respect for the other there. It absolutely permeates the whole school curriculum and this is where you see the difference." The driver for change here was again the ruler, Mohamed bin Zayed, whom Sheff identified as central to the reform effort: "He understood [the] importance [of textbooks] and he also said he understood the importance of getting rid of problematic teachers."

## A new U.S. approach to education reform

The success of education reform in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the failure of attempts at reform in Iraq and Tunisia, and the lack of interest in initiating reform in other countries across the region, raise questions as to how the United States can more effectively foster positive trends. If reform only succeeds where there is local buy-in by the ruler or the country's elite in general, how should the U.S. address those Arabic speaking countries – particularly its allies – where no such convictions exist? As Iraqi webinar participant Talal Al-Hariri remarked about his own country, "Until now they do not understand – neither the decision makers nor unfortunately the elites – that the greatest resource for countries is the free educated human being."

One approach may be to more effectively appeal to a given leadership's self-interest. As Marcus Sheff told the webinar, "School education is the key to fostering the development of peaceful, tolerant, stable societies of the future, the kind of societies that we all want to live in." Tunisian participant Chadoua Jabli echoed those sentiments: "Those countries that will remain backwards, like Tunisia, in education, will be the ones that produce a new, radical ISIS generation." For that matter, Sheff added, "If you have a curriculum that essentially deletes,

eliminates 50 percent of your population – women – from being members of your workforce or having equal rights and equal opportunities, you are absolutely limiting the possibility of your country to be successful in the future.”

Another approach may be for the United States to work through countries that share a vision of positive education reform in the region to appeal to those countries that do not. Both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have wide leverage across the region for a variety of reasons. The United Arab Emirates is viewed in the region as a model that countries wish to follow. Saudi Arabia has significant religious clout and prestige. Both countries are generous aid givers to other countries across the region and enjoy significant leverage on those countries’ elites and bureaucracies. Partnering with them could significantly aid U.S. efforts to reform the educational sectors of countries like Tunisia and Egypt.

While those partnerships may alter the course of education reform in some places where the U.S. has failed in the past, they will not work everywhere. In a country such as Iraq, the ruling elite is beholden to Iran and its negative influence across the region and will be resistant to change.

In those countries, the United States can help circumvent the unreformed bureaucracy and recalcitrant elites by working directly with civilians who share a vision of positive educational reform. In Iraq, for example, “the Alliance of Iraqi Minorities (AIM) has been working to advocate for a primary school curriculum that better represents Iraq’s diversity.”<sup>33</sup> The U.S. should partner with AIM and other like-minded groups and individuals in developing such curriculum and making it available to the general public. “AIM has initiated two campaigns to advocate for reforms to the primary and secondary school curriculum systems in Iraq and the semiautonomous Kurdistan Region,”<sup>34</sup> and the U.S. should be supportive of such campaigns. Citizens of Arabic speaking countries are hungry for change and well aware of the price they pay for their failing education systems. Some turn to the Internet as a major source of alternative

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<sup>33</sup> Levkowitz, Joshua & Salah Abdulrahman, “In Iraq Activists aim to reform education to build collective identity,” USIP, 16 February 2021, available at:

<https://www.usip.org/blog/2021/02/iraq-advocates-aim-reform-education-build-collective-identity>

<sup>34</sup> Levkowitz, Joshua & Salah Abdulrahman, “In Iraq Activists aim to reform education to build collective identity,” USIP, 16 February 2021, available at:

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information and learning modules for their children. Making new curriculums available online offers a viable means to reach those citizens and begin the process of educational reform in those societies.

Israeli educational organizations can play a supportive role in such efforts. Their research cadres have honed the practice of identifying problematic texts and pedagogy in the region, as well as developing alternative curricula that promote peace and tolerance. A coalition of American, Israeli, and Arab educational reformists can together overcome some of the traditional obstacles to reform of failing Arab education systems, as well as develop alternative virtual learning platforms for countries where such reform remains unfeasible. Abraham Accords countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco can play an instrumental role in forging such coalition, overcoming the gap in connectivity between citizens of normalized and unnormalized Arab states. Consider the educational achievements of Morocco, which recently integrated Moroccan Jewish history into its textbooks and curricula. Such curricula can be expanded to cover broader North African Jewish history and culture, in partnership with citizen educators in Algeria, Libya and Tunisia, then promulgated safely online to overcome official opposition.

This new approach, building on new and promising alliances in the wake of the Abraham Accords, can significantly improve prospects for U.S.-led efforts to reform educational sectors in Arabic speaking countries.



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