

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
“Combating Terrorism Through Education: The Near East and South Asian Experience”
April 19, 2005

Today, the Foreign Relations Committee meets to discuss American education assistance programs in the Near East and South Asia and their contribution to U.S. national security. Outdated and poorly-funded education systems in many Near Eastern and South Asian countries have led to an education deficit. This gap has contributed to the rise of extremist ideologies that have provided fertile ground for terrorist recruitment during the last decade. It is imperative that we focus sufficient attention and resources on promoting strong education systems as a way to counter extremism at its roots.

The 2003 Arab Human Development Report by the UN Development Program highlights this “knowledge deficit” and concludes that overhauling the region’s education systems should be a critical priority. It notes that these changes should come from within the region, drawing from its rich cultural, linguistic, and intellectual heritages.

The lack of educational opportunities for women in the Near East and South Asia is of particular concern. Statistics show that while 73 percent of men in Arab states are literate, only 50 percent of women in these countries can read and write. In Pakistan, only 39 percent of women are literate compared to 63 percent of males, with the largest disparities in rural areas. Finding ways to encourage the education of girls and women, while respecting cultural norms, is crucial to fostering economic growth, democracy, and stability.

The Bush Administration and Congress have established the Middle East Partnership Initiative, the Millennium Challenge Account, and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative to promote reform. These efforts complement our bilateral education assistance programs in countries like Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Today, we want to assess the effectiveness of these efforts and ask what can be done better.

About 3 percent of total U.S. foreign aid to Near Eastern countries (excluding Israel) is devoted to education. Can we achieve better results if we shift aid resources from traditional forms of economic assistance to education? The United States recently has tripled its education spending in Pakistan, where the connections between the education system and the development of extremism are particularly acute. We need to assess whether national security benefits could be achieved by taking similar steps in other nations.

I encourage the Administration to devise and implement programs under the new authorities provided by the National Intelligence Reform Act, signed in December, to expand educational and cultural exchanges. Last October, the Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing to examine the impact of our visa policies on foreign students studying in the United States. Several leaders of prominent U.S. universities testified on the benefits of international educational exchange programs and on the importance of maintaining these programs despite new visa restrictions. The Committee hosted two roundtables that focused on ways to ameliorate the problem of visa delays without sacrificing national security. I believe it is essential that we expand student exchange programs – not

scale them back – as they not only serve our national security interests, but also enrich our own society and culture.

In June of last year, I introduced S. Res. 375 supporting reform and modernization initiatives in the Greater Middle East, including a Twenty-First Century Trust. This resolution acknowledged that advancement in educational opportunities has yet to reach large percentages of the people in the Near East and South Asia regions. It further noted that reform and modernization must come from the people of the region and cannot be imposed from the outside.

Next month an Education Ministerial meeting in Jordan will bring together leaders from the G-8 and the Greater Middle East and North Africa to address challenges of modernizing education through collaborative partnerships. I applaud this as an excellent example of regional coordination.

We have two distinguished panels for today's discussion. On the first panel, we will hear testimony from Dr. Bassem Awadallah, former Minister of Planning and newly-appointed Finance Minister of Jordan; Shahid Javed Burki, former Finance Minister of Pakistan and now a consultant with Nathan Associates; Dr. Samina Ahmed, South Asia Project Director for the International Crisis Group based in Islamabad, Pakistan; and Mr. Frank Method, Director of International Education and Policy Systems at the Research Triangle Institute. Each of these witnesses has been active in education reform efforts in the Near East and South Asia. The Committee looks forward to their unique perspectives.

On the second panel, we will hear from two Administration officials. Ms. Liz Cheney is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs and the point-person for the Middle East Partnership Initiative. Mr. James Kunder is the Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East at USAID. Both Ms. Cheney and Mr. Kunder bring a wealth of expertise on today's topic, and we welcome them to the Committee.

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