



*The House Committee on*  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**

*Peter T. King (R-NY), Chairman*

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**Statement of Chairman Peter T. King (R-NY)**  
**Committee on Homeland Security**  
**“Threat of Muslim-American Radicalization in U.S. Prisons”**  
**June 15, 2011**  
**Remarks as Prepared**

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“Today we hold the second in a series of hearings on radicalization in the Muslim American community; specifically, on the important issue of the threat of Islamic radicalization in U.S. prisons.

I welcome our distinguished panel of witnesses. They have first-hand insights into this problem, and we appreciate their willingness to share their experiences with the Committee.

This issue of Islamic radicalization in U.S. prisons is not new. In fact, this is the third Congressional hearing on this problem in recent years. It is a hearing which is necessary because the danger remains real and present, especially because of Al Qaeda’s announced intention to intensify attacks within the United States.

A number of cases since 9/11 have involved terrorists who converted to Islam or were radicalized to Islamism in American prisons, then subsequently attempted to launch terror strikes here in the U.S. upon their release from custody.

These radicalized terrorists have also carried out attacks overseas. Just last year, Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, released a report that said, quote, “Three dozen U.S. citizens who converted to Islam while in prison have traveled to Yemen, possibly for Al Qaeda training.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *S. Comm. on Foreign Relations, Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb*, 111th Cong (2010). Committee staff re-confirmed the current accuracy and salience of this 2010 intelligence report in an off-the-record discussion with a senior U.S. intelligence official on June 8, 2011.

I will say that again: Dozens of ex-cons who became radicalized Muslims inside U.S. prisons have gone to Yemen to join an Al Qaeda group run by a fellow American, Anwar al-Awlaki, whose terrorists have attacked the U.S. Homeland several times since 2008 and generally acknowledged to be Al Qaeda's most dangerous affiliate.

There are other cases such as Farah Mohamed Beledi, a 27-year-old Somali American from Minneapolis, who has been indicted in federal court for fighting in Somalia as part of al Shabaab, which is another Al Qaeda affiliate. According to family members and court records, Beledi was a gang member who had been convicted for a number of crimes including assault with a deadly weapon. Upon being released from prison after two years, he began attending the Abu Bakar As-Saddique Islamic Center in Minneapolis and was soon on his way to fight in Somalia.

The Obama Administration recognizes prison radicalization is a serious threat and that prisons are a fertile ground for recruitment.

Last week, the Department of Homeland Security announced that Secretary Janet Napolitano and other state and local anti-terror partners are, quote: "Collaborating to develop a mitigation strategy for terrorist use of prisons for radicalization and recruitment."

The reality of the radicalization threat emanating from our prisons was demonstrated again last month, when Michael Finton, who was radicalized in an Illinois State prison, pleaded guilty in Illinois to attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction. Finton was planning to assassinate our colleague, Representative Aaron Schock, and destroy the Federal courthouse and office building in Springfield.

And tomorrow, James Cromitie, who was radicalized in a New York prison, is scheduled to be sentenced in New York for his leading role in a conspiracy to attack troop transports at an Air National Guard base in Newburgh, New York, and attack a synagogue and Jewish community center in New York City.

Finton and Cromitie are not alone.

Today we will hear about Kevin James, a radicalized former Nation of Islam follower, who formed a jihadi group called JIS and hatched a terror plot from behind bars at California's Folsom Prison. It was not just aspirational – it was operational – spreading from the prison to a local mosque and resulting in a plot to attack a U.S. Military recruiting center on the 9/11 anniversary and a Jewish temple on Yom Kippur.

Jose Padilla, known as the "dirty bomb" plotter, converted to Islam in a Florida jail. While on the inside, Padilla met a fellow inmate who led him to a radical mosque.

Padilla eventually moved to the Middle East and joined Al Qaeda. Padilla was sent back to the U.S. in 2002 to attack our Homeland with a bomb made of radioactive material and ignite gas in apartment buildings to bring them down.

Finally there is the issue of too many prison chaplains having radical and/or serious criminal backgrounds. Vetting standards must be improved.

Prison radicalization is not unique to the United States. Last week, the British Home Secretary emphasized the growing threat of Islamic radicalization and unveiled its new counter-radicalization strategy to thwart terrorist recruitment behind bars.

Just as home grown Al Qaeda terrorist attacks in Britain- including the 2005 subway attacks in London, the 2006 liquid explosives plot to blow up American planes flying from Britain and the 2007 car bomb attack on the Glasgow Airport – were emulated several years later in the United States with the attempted New York subway bombings in September 2009, the Fort Hood murders in November 2009 and the attempted Times Square bombing in May 2010, we must assume the same with prison radicalization.

I have repeatedly said the overwhelming majority of Muslim Americans are outstanding Americans. Yet, the first radicalization hearing which this Committee held in March of this year was met with much mindless hysteria – led by radical groups such as the Council of Islamic Relations and their allies in the liberal media personified by the New York Times.

Countering Islamic radicalization should not be a partisan issue. I would urge my Democratic colleagues to rise above partisan talking points. I am here to work with the Obama Administration. Remember it was the President's own National Security Advisor Denis McDonough who said just three months ago that Al Qaeda is "increasingly attempting to recruit and radicalize people to terrorism here in the United States... The threat is real and it is rising... [Al Qaeda] is trying to convince Muslim Americans to reject their country and attack their fellow Americans."

And, as I mentioned previously, the Department of Homeland Security is formulating a comprehensive plan to stop terrorist radicalization and recruitment in America's prisons.

So I ask the Democratic members to join with the Obama Administration in acknowledging the reality and the security of these threats and work with us. We look forward to your assistance.

Again, I thank the witnesses and look forward to your testimony."

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