

Statement of
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Before the
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“The Threat of Muslim-American Radicalization in U.S. Prisons”

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I. Introduction

Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Los Angeles Police Department's (LAPD) view and strategy of this most important phenomena relating the evolving threat of Muslim-American radicalization in United States prisons.

II. Background

Much has been written about prison radicalization over the last five or six years and just as we have seen a surge in homegrown violent extremists targeting innocent civilians with violence or plotting against the United States, we have also seen a surge in both converts and a radicalization of those converts toward violent acts. Fortunately this still remains a phenomenon of low volume; however, the radicalization of even a small fraction of this population holds high consequence for Americans and innocent people around the world. The United States has the highest incarceration rate (701 out of every 100,000) and the largest prison population (over 2 million – 93% of whom are in state and local prisons and jails) of any country in the world.¹ Prisoners by their very nature, are at risk and susceptible to recruitment and radicalization by extremist groups because of their isolation, violent tendencies, and cultural discontent. Nearly 300 federal prisoners are serving sentences on terrorism related charges in the United States. The Bureau of Prisons incarcerates nearly two dozen al-Qaeda terrorists, including men involved in the 1993 World Trade Center, the 1998 East African embassy bombings, the 1999 millennial plot to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport, and the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole. New York is holding an additional fifteen al-Qaeda members awaiting trial.

Los Angeles is known for its outreach and engagement with Muslim communities and the commensurate strategy to overlay the community policing enterprise on top of communities who are either isolated, balkanized, feel oppressed, or are not integrated into the social fabric of society. And in this context, we have come to recognize Islam expresses itself differently than it does in New York, Minnesota, or even San Diego. There is no one organization, institute, or individual that speaks on behalf of the Ummah (the global Muslim community). Dealing with the motivational aspects to terrorism has been a great part of the Los Angeles Police Department's focus in delivering a counter-terrorism strategy. The expression of Islam in the prison system is a subject which brings great concern.

IV. Prison Converts

It is generally understood that the majority of prison converts assimilate back into what they were doing prior to going to prison, however, it is the exception cases that have and will continue to strike fear in the hearts of Americans. It was estimated that seventeen to twenty percent of the prison population, or approximately 350,000 inmates comprise of Muslim inmates in 2003, and that 80% of the prisoners who convert while in prison, convert to Islam.² It is further estimated that 35,000 inmates convert to Islam annually. A Senate Foreign Relations Committee report

¹ Roy Walmsley, World Prison Population (5th Ed.) (Home Office, Publication234, 2003)

² "Testimony of Dr. J. Michael Waller". United States Senate, Committee on Judiciary. 2003-10-12 http://judiciary.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?id=960&wit_id=2719. Retrieved 2010-06-05

released in 2010 announced that up to three dozen Americans who converted to Islam in prison have travelled to Yemen, to train with al-Qaeda.³

III. The Evidence and Explanation

I will leave the examination of these cases to my academic colleagues who have studied and analyzed the individuals and will be testifying before this committee. There are more than a few cases of concern:

- Jam’iyyat Ul-Islarn Is-Saheeh (JIS), Arabic for Assembly of Authentic Islam - a radical prison organization led by a Rollin 30 gang member, Kevin James, who is serving time for robbery convictions at the New Folsom Prison near Sacramento, California. He recruited prisoners including a Rollin 60 gang member and preached the duty of members to target enemies of Islam, or “infidels,” including the United States government and Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of Israel. The JIS network was large and crossed prison boundaries. In 2005 the Joint Terrorism Task Force thwarted the plot to attack military institutions and synagogues.
- Jose Padilla, a former Chicago gang member, arrested in 2002, converted to Islam while in prison and was recruited at a mosque to become a mujahedeen fighter. He was accused of plotting to detonate a radioactive “dirty bomb” but was convicted of unrelated terror support charges.
- Richard Reid, a British citizen and follower of Osama Bin Laden, was a prison convert in England and become involved with militants after he was freed. He was apprehended while attempting to detonate a bomb on a United States commercial flight in December 2001. He is believed to have been radicalized by an imam while incarcerated in England. He is serving a life sentence at a maximum –security prison in Colorado.
- Michael Finton, a United States Citizen, a prison convert to Islam, attempted to bomb the Paul Findley Federal Building and the adjacent offices of a Congressman in downtown Springfield, Illinois on September 24, 2009. He pled guilty on May 9, 2011 and sentenced to 28 years in prison.

There are several ongoing cases whose story is yet to be told, however, the common denominator is conversion to a radical form of Islam while in prison.

If Islam expressed itself in the California Prison system as it does in the Los Angeles region, we would be talking about the strength and value that Islam brings to prisoners in terms of behavior and value based living. However, this is not the case and it is not the case because of the manner in which many prison populations are exposed to Islam, carrying the disguise of dysfunction, danger, and exploitation. Instead of providing a balanced, peaceful, contemporary perspective of one of the great and peaceful religions of the world, we are left with a hi-jacked, cut and paste version known to the counter-terrorism practitioners as Prislam, as my good friend Frank Cilluffo coined the phrase. This has been allowed to propagate through the three dynamic dimensions of People, Materials, and Places of Association.

People: Budgets for religious services in correctional facilities have fallen to economic shortcomings, enhancing opportunities for radical prisoners to conduct their own services and

³ “Al-Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb.” A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate. January 21, 2010, p. 4.

support system. As a matter of smart practices, the American Correctional Chaplains Association recommends one chaplain per 500 inmates. In California, there is one chaplain for every 2,000 inmates, and some Texas prisons the ratio is one to 2,500.⁴ It is essential that a thorough background investigation process for anyone entering a correctional institution be completed before access is granted. Additionally, consistent standards of qualification should be developed and adopted. There are numerous cases where on spiritual advisor or chaplain is denied access to a correctional facility and then admitted into another.

To better understand the competencies and qualifications of a Chaplain, consideration should be given to the following questions: What is the particular religious denomination to be supported by the individual? Is there a sponsoring religious institution associated with the individual? Is that institution locally established? Has the individual met any standards or permissions associated with the position they are seeking? Does the denomination advocate violence? Has the individual had recent travel outside of the United States? If so, where and when? Is there a foreign government sponsorship of this individual? Does the individual maintain any professional, regional or national associations that might evidence their legitimacy? In what manner are they involved with any such organization? Will the services be conducted in English or another language? If other than English, what language?

Materials: It is essential that effective policies and practices are designed to create an understanding of what prospective faith-based staffers may utilize by way of materials to facilitate their purpose. Frequent audits of books, video, audio, and other related material should be conducted to determine permissibility under existing facility security policies. These policies should be consistent throughout the prison system. *Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization*, a special report by the George Washington University, Homeland Security Policy Institute, published in September 2006 stated the following: “Radical literature and extremist translations and interpretations of the Qur’an have been distributed to prisoners by groups suspected or known to support terrorism. The Noble Qur’an, a Wahabbi/Salafist version written in English, is widely available in prisons. A recent review in the Middle East Quarterly characterized this version as reading “...like a supremacist Muslim, anti-Semite, anti-Christian polemic than a rendition of the Islamic scripture.” Of particular concern is its appendix, entitled “The Call to *Jihad* (Holy Fighting in Allah’s Cause).”

Anwar al-Aulaqi, a prominent United States born Islamic scholar of Yemeni descent and internet radicalizer is wanted by the United States for Terrorism prosecution. His radical literature has found its way into the prison system and has been used by known extremists to facilitate recruitment and radicalization activities within prisons.

Differences Between the Shee’ah and Muslims Who Follow the Sunnah, written in plain English, is another such example of radical material. Examinations of materials should not be limited to that which is brought in by faith-based service providers. Effective procedures and processes of screening inmate mail can be quite useful as prevention measures to discover prohibited, controversial or materials advocating violence, entering or leaving local correctional

⁴ Drum, V.L., “Professional Correctional Chaplains: Facts and Fiction,” presented at the American Correctional Association 137th Annual Congress of Corrections, Kansas City, Mo, August 13, 2007.

facilities. Other items of interest would be military manuals, training manuals, and documentation advocating the overthrow of the U.S. Government. Communicating this information throughout the law enforcement network will prove to be effective in preventing further mobilization toward violence.

The spiritual philosopher of al Qaeda, Sayyid Qutb, wrote the radical Islamist manifesto *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* (Milestones Along the Road) while in an Egyptian prison. Copies of this document exist in the prison system and contribute to radicalization.

Meetings: Are inmate meetings and gatherings taking place using religion as a ruse for other activities? Religious and other gatherings of inmates within correctional facilities present challenges and opportunities for inmates, service providers, and correctional staff. Staff members should make the time to monitor inmate gatherings. Audio and video equipment may be effectively used for these purposes. Regimented activities of inmates may be indicators that activities incongruent with religious services are taking place. The principles of direct supervision, a contemporary method of inmate management that is currently in use in many local detention facilities, is also supportive of correctional staff presence in inmate gatherings and activities.

IV. Aligning People, Purpose, and Strategy/Leaning Forward

In the policing world, the efforts to reduce crime, mitigate risk, and teach communities how to build crime resistant neighborhoods, focus on targeting stakeholder resources around three thematic areas; High Risk People, High Risk Places, and High Risk Activity. This model also looks at ten percent of the victims who are victimized forty percent of the time because they expose themselves to high risk people, high risk places, and high risk activity. While it is understood that prisons are certainly different than a free society or a community in an urban or rural area, they do represent a type of community with resources at their disposal. In the same manner that police address the above crime model to include partnership, problem solving, and prevention, prisons should continue to lean forward in terms of managing risk with an eye toward People, Materials, and Places. Furthermore, this needs to be looked at from a whole of government/whole of community approach, utilizing non-governmental offices, vetted community volunteer groups and leadership organizations.

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the prison system, and while the majority of converts are African American, other minority groups are converting in prison as well. Would the Muslim-American Ummah in the United States be proud of what converts in prison are learning about Islam. I would say in some cases, they would be shocked and dismayed.

As a law enforcement executive, one who has worked in Los Angeles for over twenty-nine years with a primary focus on counter-terrorism for the last six years, one of my greatest concerns is the issue of convergent threats. We are beginning to see convergence in the areas of gangs, narcotic cartels, organized crime, terrorism, and human trafficking.

Los Angeles gained a reputation for being the gang capital of the United States and much of the prison structure is made up on gangs, i.e., Bloods, Crips, Mexican Mafia, Black Guerilla Family, Aryan Brotherhood, and Violent Ideological Extremists (Violent Islamic Extremists).

Just as isolated, and balkanized communities can become incubators of violent extremism, so too can prisons. If left unchecked prisons can and do become incubators of radicalization leading to violent extremism.

While I am certainly not advocating “thought policing” there is a lot that can be done to insulate prisons from the elements that create high risk environments that we are seeing today.

One major role that law enforcement can play in the fight against violent ideological extremism is that of educator. Teaching all communities about the dangers of extreme ideologies can dispel harmful rumors and myths that alienate already pressured communities. We have learned from the European experience how these alienated communities become a breeding ground for violent extremism and a safe haven for potential terrorists to hide among the population. Prisons are no exception.

Granted, the U.S. does not have the same types of problems as England, France, Germany, or Israel. While the tactics terrorists employ are learned behaviors that migrate across national boundaries – through groups, training camps, and the Internet – the underlying motivations for these violent acts are unique to the host countries. Consequently, the remedies (i.e., jailhouse de-radicalization in Malaysia, the Channel Project in northern England, and the BIRR Project in Australia) are often contextually bounded and dependent on the depth, strength, national allegiance and identity of the native Muslim community.

In Los Angeles, for example, there are many Muslim communities that do not share the same risk profile as those in the United Kingdom as they are much more integrated into the larger society. That said, the European example does provide U.S. law enforcement with a starting point when searching for early indicators of radicalization.

V. Strategies and Initiatives

- Our outreach to the Muslim and non-Muslim communities has combined education with prevention. We now have Terrorism Liaison Officers (TLOs) at all of our divisions and Fire Stations who serve as the principal points of contact for terrorism information and intelligence. These liaison officers educate Department personnel and the broader community about the indicators of violent extremism and have proven to be critical assets when it comes to raising the level of terrorism prevention and preparedness. The TLO program has been integrated into the California prison system with the effect of casting an ever-wider safety net to train more people in the state to be public data collectors and First Preventers.
- We have taken our model and counter-terrorism strategy for Los Angeles and as much as possible applied these principles to prisons: Terrorism Liaison Officer, Suspicious Activity Reporting (SARS) or Tips and Leads, Capitalize on the Fusion Center Structure and Capabilities, Integrate information and analysis, and disseminate value added intelligence, Prison Radicalization Team assigned to the Fusion Center and aligned with a Joint Terrorism Task Force Vetting Squad.

Note: I have an officer assigned to this Joint Terrorism Task Force Squad and the volume of Tips and Leads relative to Prison Radicalization in the seven county footprint, is fifteen to twenty tips a month which are vetted by the JTTF squad developing into three to four open investigations/year where there is a reasonable suspicion that an individual or group of individuals are actively engaged in developing operational capability and motivation to conduct a terrorist act. Initial investigations conducted by this squad show that most of the extremists interviewed, generally, have no interest fighting in the United States; however, there is interest in fighting overseas in the name of Islam.

- Working in concert with our seven county regional and federal partners, we continue to build capacity to collect, fuse, analyze, and disseminate both strategic and operational intelligence. We are aligning our intelligence collection and dissemination process with an eye toward accountability and ensuring that our First Preventers have the information they need when they need it.

VI. Recommendations

- Prison Officials are stretched thin trying to maintain order in overcrowded and underfunded facilities. Funding and organizational structure needs to be a priority so we stay on the front end of prison radicalization.
- Effectively monitor materials coming in, and provide enough qualified, vetted clerics to meet inmates' spiritual needs. Clear policy and regulations should be established, and should apply to both volunteer leaders of religious services and extremist inmates within the prison system.
- Prisoners are highly vulnerable upon release. Offer them social support at that moment to help reintegrate them into the community. Don't let them be easy prey for recruiters with malicious intent. Budget shortfalls spurring early release programs and early parole only exacerbate the challenge, as the potential for more radicalized prisoners being paroled increases. This becomes even more important considering the issue of convergent threats – when gangs and drug cartels consider connecting with terrorist networks.
- From the parole officer to the prison guards, we need to articulate and educate as to the nature of the threat and how to best counter it.
- State correctional officers should notify law enforcement of the pending release of a violent extremist, allowing law enforcement officers to monitor the released inmate's outside activities. The Federal Bureau of Prisons already has a warning system in place to alert the FBI about the release of violent extremists in federal institutions. Several FBI field divisions sponsor intelligence sharing working groups with State and Federal correctional investigators that have helped improve coordination. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in Los Angeles hosts a monthly prison radicalization meeting that brings correctional officers, local, state, and federal law enforcement together to share intelligence on violent extremist prison groups and provides advance notice of a violent

extremist reentry into the community. Other state prison officials may see a benefit in promoting the establishment of local prison radicalization working groups in their regions.

VII. Conclusion

The natural question is: What factors put a community at-risk? Taking a page from the European experience, diaspora communities are in transition from one culture to another, making its members particularly vulnerable to identity crises which may be very easily subverted by ideologues. As Eric Hoffer wrote in his book, “The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements”: “Faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for the lost faith in ourselves.” If there is a real or perceived threat of discrimination between the new community and the host, then an “us against them” mentality may prevail making that final step towards radicalization that much easier. Some Muslim communities may view any local discrimination as linked to Muslim causes globally, and vice versa, any discrimination against the *Ummah* (the global Muslim community) may be felt locally. Prisons are in fact communities at risk.