



TERRORISTS IN PRISON: The Challenge Facing Corrections

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges facing corrections is the incarceration of al-Qaeda terrorists. Terrorists do not stop being terrorists simply because they are in prison. They continue to view themselves as soldiers in a divine war. They view corrections personnel as soldiers in the opposing army in this war. All corrections personnel must be trained in the indicators of radicalization and terrorist organization in prisons, the warning signs of an impending terrorist attack, al-Qaeda attack tactics, and proper emergency response to a terrorist attack.

ARRT photo by Pete Souza/Chicago Tribune

“I take this opportunity to address our prisoners. We have not forgotten you. We are still committed to the debt of your salvation . . . until we shatter your shackles.”

Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, from Al-Sabab interview on the 4th anniversary of 9/11

Al-Qaeda video clips have consistently addressed and encouraged terrorist prisoners and detainees. Gas station robbers planning terrorist attacks in California were traced back to inmate radicalization and recruitment in the New Folsom corrections facility. Twenty-three terrorist prisoners escaped from a Yemeni maximum custody detention facility. A homegrown terrorist cell in the United States was accused in a federal indictment of conducting surveillance on the Federal Detention Center in Miami, Florida. What do all of these indicators tell us? There is a new challenge facing corrections: terrorists in prison.

It is Not What You Think You Are: It is What the Terrorists Think You Are

Al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-like terrorists, in and out of prison, view themselves as soldiers in a divinely appointed war. Those in corrections might be surprised to learn that, whether they like it or not, they are viewed by al-Qaeda operatives as soldiers in the opposing army in their war of good versus evil. This places corrections personnel at great risk. Corrections professionals must become educated in the world view and attack tactics of al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-like terrorists. Corrections staff must also remain alert to the indicators of prisoner radicalization and terrorist organization in prisons.

Inmate Radicalization: A Concern for Corrections

Inmate radicalization in correctional facilities was identified as a major concern of the U.S. Congress after September 11, 2001. John S. Pistole, the assistant director of the Counterterrorism Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, gave this testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security on October 14, 2003: "In my opinion, al-Qaeda remains the greatest threat to the United States.

. . . These terrorists seek to exploit our freedom to exercise religion to their advantage by using radical forms of Islam to recruit operatives. Unfortunately, U.S. correctional institutions are a viable venue for such radicalization and recruitment. . . . Recruitment of inmates within the prison system will continue to be a problem for correctional institutions throughout the country."

Prison Recruitment for Terrorism and the Correctional Intelligence Initiative (CII)

In the 2004 Office of the Inspector General's *Report to Congress*, 16 recommendations were made to assist the Federal Bureau of Prisons in improving its process for selecting, screening, and supervising Muslim religious services providers. Donald Van



Duyn, the deputy assistant director of the Counterterrorism Division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, reported on the status of the corrective action to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and Related Agencies on September 19, 2006: "FBI and the Bureau of Prisons analysis shows that radicalization and recruitment in U.S. prisons is an ongoing concern. Prison radicalization primarily occurs through anti-U.S. sermons provided by contract, volunteer, or staff imams, radicalized inmates who gain religious influence, and extremist media."

The deputy assistant director then described the case of Jam'iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS). Levar Washington and other recruited members of JIS were allegedly involved in several gas station robberies in Los Angeles, California. Investigation revealed that the putative purpose of this string of robberies was to finance terrorist activities in California against U.S. military and Israeli targets. The founder of JIS, Kevin Lamar James, is an inmate in the California correctional system. He allegedly recruited Washington while at New Folsom prison and, upon release, Washington reportedly recruited the other cell members.

Deputy Assistant Director Van Duyn then went on to describe the Correctional Intelligence Initiative (CII) as a program started in February 2003 that focuses on three areas of anti-terrorism:

- Improving intelligence collection
- The detection, deterrence, and disruption of terrorist groups and other radicalization in prison
- Dissemination of training and supporting material to FBI field offices and Joint Terrorism Task Forces to aid in training at state and local correctional facilities

An important mission of the CII is to facilitate the sharing of information relating to terrorists and radicalization among all levels of law enforcement and corrections.

"Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization"

On September 19, 2006, a special report was issued by The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute and The University of Virginia Critical Analysis Group entitled "Out of the Shadows: Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization." This report detailed examples of connections between former prisoners and terrorism in the past and includes the El

Rukn connection to Libyan terrorism plans in the United States, the Covenant/Sword and Arm of the Lord group's stockpiling of weapons and cyanide, Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman's statements from prison advocating attacks against U.S. interests, the radicalization of Richard Reid (later known as "the shoe bomber") in prison, and the alleged JIS terrorism conspiracy. This report further stated: "Investigation of radicalization in prisons must become a homeland security and counterterrorism priority."

Washington Post: "Detainees Used Al-Qaeda Prison Manual"

On July 20, 2006, a *Washington Post* article by Walter Pincus stated that a classified Central Intelligence Agency document from August 2002 had recently been made public on the Internet. This report's authenticity was neither confirmed nor denied by the CIA. The report's title is "Terrorists: Recruiting and Operating Behind Bars." The document reportedly describes the organization of al-Qaeda networks in prisons, stating: "Authorities at GTMO (Guantanamo) noted that detainees while at Camp X-Ray . . . created this structure and took on these roles."

Attacks on U.S. Prisons: The Warning Signs

On December 21, 1996, three letter bombs disguised as greeting cards were sent to the U.S. Penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kansas, from Egypt. No correctional employees were hurt. Although the perpetrators have not been arrested, some believe that terrorists of the Egyptian Islamic Group sent the mail bombs in protest of the incarceration of their spiritual leader, Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman.

On June 22, 2006, a federal indictment in the Southern District of Florida alleged that members of a homegrown terrorist cell, recruited and supervised by Narseal Batiste, organized and trained for a mission to wage war against the U. S. government. This indictment states that members of this cell "met with the 'al-Qaeda representative' to review and discuss photographs"

taken of the Federal Detention Center in Miami, Florida.

On April 27, 2007, the CBS/Associated Press reported that the Saudi Arabian government arrested 172 Islamic extremists. It was alleged by the Saudi government that some of those arrested planned to "break militants out of jail." This strategy is consistent with past al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-like group operations against prisons in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen. It is reasonable to conclude that al-Qaeda operatives would similarly view U.S. corrections facilities as legitimate targets for attack in order to facilitate the escape of those incarcerated terrorists they view as prisoners-of-war.

“ Al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda-like terrorists, in and out of prison, view themselves as soldiers in a divinely appointed war. Those in corrections might be surprised to learn that, whether they like it or not, they are viewed by al-Qaeda operatives as soldiers in the opposing army in this war of good versus evil. ”

Lessons for Corrections Professionals

We have examined three areas of great concern to corrections staff:

- The potential for inmate radicalization in prisons
- The potential for terrorist organization in prisons
- The potential for terrorist targeting of correctional institutions

We have also learned that terrorism is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges facing corrections today and in the years to come. Whether corrections personnel consider themselves to be targets or not, it is what *the terrorists* believe that is pertinent.

All corrections staff must be thoroughly trained in detecting the warning signs of an imminent terrorist attack, in al-Qaeda attack tactics, and in the proper emergency response to a terrorist attack. They must also be trained in and remain alert to the indicators of inmate radicalization and terrorist organization in prisons.

What is another vital lesson to be learned? Active cooperation between local, state, and federal corrections and law enforcement organizations involved in anti-terrorism efforts is *essential*. After all, radical Islamic terrorist groups of many doctrines (sometimes contradictory) have been adept at working together against common enemies. Should we expect any less of law enforcement and correctional professionals involved in anti-terrorism activities?

After examining all the indicators, we find that there is, indeed, a new challenge facing corrections: terrorists in prison.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Federal Bureau of Prisons or the Department of Justice.

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Learning Objectives

Study of this article should provide a better understanding of these concepts and their application in the correctional facility:

- 1.) The worldview of al-Qaeda terrorists influences attitudes toward corrections personnel.
- 2.) Three areas are of great concern to corrections staff.
- 3.) The Correctional Intelligence Initiative addresses three areas to combat terrorism.

CE Test for "Terrorists in Prison: The New Challenge Facing Corrections"

- 1.) Al-Qaeda terrorists sincerely believe they are fighting
 - A. a political battle.
 - B. a divine war.
 - C. a war of Marxist liberation.
 - D. an inner struggle.
- 2.) Three areas of concern related to terrorism facing corrections today are
 - A. overpopulation, intelligence collection, and letter writing.
 - B. living conditions, language barriers, and prayer recitation.
 - C. inmate radicalization, terrorist organization, and terrorist attacks.
 - D. communication, recreation, and education.
- 3.) Three areas that the Correctional Intelligence Initiative focuses on are
 - A. overpopulation, intelligence collection, and letter writing.
 - B. living conditions, language barriers, and prayer recitation.
 - C. communication, recreation, and education.
 - D. improving intelligence collection, detection, deterrence, and disruption of terrorist groups and other radicalization in prison and training and support material generation and dissemination.
- 4.) One convicted terrorist who was reportedly radicalized in prison is
 - A. Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman.
 - B. Richard Reid.
 - C. Khalid Shaik Mohammed.
 - D. Ramzi Yousef.
- 5.) In what prison did the JIS radicalization allegedly occur?
 - A. U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas
 - B. Federal Detention Center, Miami, Florida
 - C. New Folsom, California
 - D. Inter-services Intelligence Detention Center, Islamabad, Pakistan

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