



# Department of Justice

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STATEMENT

OF

JOHN M. VANYUR  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS DIVISION  
FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITES STATES SENATE

CONCERNING

PRISON RADICALIZATION: ARE TERRORIST CELLS  
FORMING IN U.S. CELL BLOCKS

PRESENTED ON

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STATEMENT OF JOHN M. VANYUR  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMS DIVISION  
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September 19, 2006

Chairman Collins and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the efforts the Bureau of Prisons is taking to ensure we are preventing the recruitment of terrorists and extremists in our Federal prisons.

Of the roughly 2.2 million incarcerated persons in the United States, the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is responsible for the custody and care of 192,000 inmates confined in 113 Federal prisons and in facilities operated by private companies and by State and local governments. Our mission is to protect society by confining offenders in the controlled environments of prisons and community-based facilities that are safe, humane, cost-efficient, and appropriately secure; and to provide work and other self-improvement opportunities to assist offenders in becoming law-abiding citizens.

The BOP is committed to providing inmates with the opportunity to practice their faith while at the same time ensuring that Federal

prisoners are not radicalized or recruited for terrorist causes. The support that has been provided by the FBI, the agencies represented on the National Joint Terrorism Task Force (NJTTF), other components of the Department of Justice, and many other members of the law enforcement and intelligence communities has been invaluable in our efforts in this area.

We understand the importance of controlling and preventing the recruitment of inmates into terrorism. We also acknowledge that this is an evolving issue, especially as it relates to the relationships between terrorism, certain radical or extremist ideologies, and the penchant of those who adhere to these ideologies to recruit others to their positions.

We know that inmates are particularly vulnerable to radical recruitment and we must guard against the spread of terrorism and extremist ideologies. Our practices in institution security and inmate management are geared toward the prevention of any violence, criminal behavior, disruptive behavior, or other threats to institution security or public safety, including the radicalization of inmates.

Over the last several years, our agency has taken a number of significant measures, and we are actively engaged in several

ongoing initiatives to ensure that Federal inmates are not recruited to support radical organizations or terrorist groups. For example, we have eliminated most inmate organizations in order to control the influence that outside entities have on Federal inmates. We also have enhanced our information and monitoring systems, our intelligence gathering and sharing capabilities, and our identification and management of disruptive inmates.

For over a decade, we have been managing inmates determined to have ties to terrorism by confining them in secure conditions and by closely monitoring their communications. We have established a strategy that focuses on the appropriate levels of containment and isolation to ensure that inmates with terrorist ties do not have the opportunity to radicalize or recruit other inmates.

All inmates determined to have terrorist ties are clearly identified and tracked in our information systems. The most dangerous terrorists are confined under the most restrictive conditions allowed, and many of these inmates are housed in our most secure facility, the Administrative Maximum United States Penitentiary in Florence, Colorado.

We monitor and record all telephone communication (except attorney-client conversations) involving inmates with terrorist ties and, following established procedures, we share any relevant information with the FBI, the NJTTF, and other agencies. In addition, our institutions work closely with the local Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) to share information and intelligence about these inmates.

The Bureau has worked diligently, particularly since 9/11, to enhance our intelligence gathering and sharing capabilities in order to ensure a seamless flow of intelligence information between our agency and other law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies. We have two full-time employees assigned to the NJTTF to facilitate our involvement on this task force and to coordinate the exchange of intelligence related to corrections.

These two members of the NJTTF also manage the Correctional Intelligence Initiative (CII), a nationwide NJTTF special project involving correctional agencies at the Federal, State, and local levels, designed to detect, deter, and disrupt the radicalization and recruiting of inmates. This initiative involves training of correctional administrators by each local JTTF; exchange of intelligence; communicating best practices to local JTTFs in order to detect, deter, and disrupt radicalization; and

coordination of liaison and intelligence-sharing activities--  
between local JTTFs and corrections agencies.

Most importantly, through the CII, intelligence regarding any attempts by inmates, religious providers, or others to radicalize any segment of the population is gathered and shared, and appropriate interdiction action is taken by the proper correctional authority.

In addition to containing and isolating inmates who could attempt to radicalize other inmates, we help inmates become less vulnerable to any such attempts.

Experts have identified the societal marginalization of inmates as a key factor in their becoming radicalized. The Bureau of Prisons provides inmates with a broad variety of programs that have been proven to assist in the development of key skills, thereby minimizing the likelihood of the inmates being marginalized.

The programs we provide include work in prison industries and other institution jobs, vocational training, education, substance abuse treatment, religious programs, and other skills-building and pro-social values programs.

Moreover, we are well aware of the important role religious programs can play in preparing inmates to successfully reintegrate into society following release from prison.

Religious programs and chaplaincy services are provided to the approximately 30 faiths represented within the Federal prison population. Within the constraints of security, we provide worship services, study of scripture and sacred writings, and religious workshops; and we make accommodations to facilitate observances of holy days. Full-time civil service chaplains in the Bureau of Prisons lead worship services and provide pastoral care and spiritual guidance to inmates, and they oversee the breadth of religious programs and monitor the accommodations provided by contract spiritual leaders and community volunteers. The overwhelming majority of inmates participate in religious programs in a positive, healthy, and productive way.

We screen all of our civil service staff, volunteers, and contractors to avoid hiring or contracting with anyone who would pose a threat to institution security. Each BOP civil service chaplain must meet all the requirements for employment as a Federal law enforcement officer, including a field investigation, criminal background check, reference check, drug screening, a pre-employment suitability interview, and a panel interview. In

addition, chaplains must meet requirements unique to their employment and the scope of their duties. Like all BOP employees, chaplains are strictly prohibited from using their position to condone, support, or encourage violence or other inappropriate behavior.

Our religious contractors and volunteers are also subject to a variety of security requirements prior to being granted access to the institution including: criminal background checks; law enforcement agency checks to verify places of residence and places of employment; a fingerprint check; gathering information from employers from over the previous 5 years; and drug testing.

The Bureau continues to work closely with the FBI and the NJTTF with regard to the screening of religious service providers. Information on staff chaplains and on contractors and volunteers (whether the contractor or volunteer is being considered to help provide religious services or not) is checked against databases supported by the FBI. We have also enhanced the supervision of programs and activities that take place in our chapels over the last 3 years; and we have trained nearly all our staff on recognizing the signs of potential radicalization.



Chairman Collins, this concludes my formal statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other Members of the Committee may have.



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Statement of  
**Donald Van Duyn**  
 Deputy Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division  
 Federal Bureau of Investigation  
 Before the  
**Senate Committee on Homeland Security and  
 Governmental Affairs and Related Agencies**  
 September 19, 2006

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on the issue of prison radicalization in the United States.

Before I begin, I would like to emphasize that Islam itself is not the problem but rather how Islam is used by violent extremists to inspire and justify their actions. Additionally, the FBI does not investigate individuals for their religious beliefs. Rather, we investigate the activities of individuals who want to do harm to the citizens and interests of United States and those of our allies abroad. The FBI fully recognizes and is committed to protecting prisoners' civil liberties, including religious rights. These activities have led us to believe that prisons continue to present opportunities for the proselytizing of both Sunni and Shia forms of radical Islam. Moreover, domestic groups such as white supremacists recruit in prisons as well.

### The U.S. Prison Environment

FBI and the Bureau of Prisons analysis shows that radicalization and recruitment in U.S. prisons is still 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. Ideologies that radicalized inmates appear most often to embrace include or are influenced by the Salafi form of Sunni Islam (including revisionist versions commonly known as "prison Islam") and an extremist view of Shia Islam similar to that of the government of Iran and Lebanese Hizballah.

There are two groups of concern involved in prison radicalization and recruitment.

The first group consists of inmates, the majority of whom are minority group members. Although most are converts to Islam, there is a smaller number who were born into the Muslim faith. These radicalized inmates either feel discriminated against in the United States or feel that the United States oppresses minorities and Muslims overseas. The feeling of perceived oppression, combined with their

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limited knowledge of Islam, especially for the converts, makes this a vulnerable population for extremists looking to radicalize and recruit.

Radicalized inmates are of concern for a number of reasons:

- Influential inmates could urge other prisoners to attend certain mosques or Islamic centers in the United States or overseas upon their release from prison that may present opportunities for the proselytizing of radical Islam.
- Influential inmates could also pose a risk to prison security by urging inmates under their influence to disobey prison authorities and possibly incite violence within the facility.
- Inmates who have acquired skills used in terrorism activities could pass them on to other prisoners.

The second group consists of contract, volunteer, and staff personnel, the majority of which are imams, who enter correctional facilities with the intent to radicalize and recruit.

Particularly for Muslim converts, but also for those born into Islam, an extremist imam can strongly influence individual belief systems by speaking from a position of authority on religious issues. Extremist imams have the potential to influence vulnerable followers at various locations of opportunity; can spot and assess individuals who respond to their messages; and can potentially guide them into increasingly extremist circles.

Aside from individuals providing radical messages there is also extremist media in the form of literature and videos being circulated within the prison population that appears to be a significant factor in prison radicalization.

In some cases, these radicalization efforts expand beyond prison walls resulting in potential threats to society at large.

### **The Threat**

The majority of cases involving prison radicalization and recruitment have not manifested themselves as a threat to national security. There have been, however, instances where charismatic elements within prison have used the call of Global Jihad as a source of inspiration to recruit others for the purpose of conducting terrorist attacks in the United States.

In July 2005, the FBI became aware of a Sunni Islamic extremist group in California operating primarily in state prisons, without apparent connections or direction from outside the United States and with no identifiable foreign power nexus. Members of this group, the Jam'iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS), or the "Authentic Assembly of Islam," were

involved in almost a dozen armed gas station robberies in Los Angeles with the goal of financing terrorist operations in furtherance of JIS goals.

JIS founder Kevin Lamar James, an inmate in the California prison system, was the principal recruiter for the group. Recruitment of participants to the Los Angeles JIS cell began in prison with the recruitment of Levar Washington by James in December 2004. James allegedly instructed Washington to recruit five people to train in covert operations, acquire firearms with silencers, and find contacts with explosives expertise or who could learn to make bombs that could be activated from a distance. Upon release from prison, Washington recruited other co-conspirators, Gregory Patterson and Hamad Samana, to begin fulfilling James' wishes.

On August 31, 2005, James, Washington, Patterson, and Samana were indicted by a federal grand jury for conspiracy to levy war against the U.S. government through terrorism and conspiracy to possess and discharge firearms in furtherance of crimes of violence. Washington, Patterson, and Samana were also charged with conspiracy to kill members of the U.S. government uniformed services and conspiracy to kill foreign officials. Washington and Patterson were further charged with interfering with commerce by robbery and for using and carrying a firearm in connection with a crime of violence. All members are currently in custody awaiting trial.

The JIS case provides valuable insight into an increasing phenomenon in many of our terrorism cases here in the United States, as well as those around the world, and highlights the importance of cooperation at all levels of the law enforcement community in order to effectively fight terrorism.

### **The Response**

The FBI and the Bureau of Prisons have been actively engaged in efforts to detect, deter, and disrupt efforts by extremist groups to radicalize and recruit in U.S. prisons; since February 2003, these activities have been organized through the Correctional Intelligence Initiative (CII).

The CII program focuses on:

- Improving intelligence collection.
- Detecting, deterring, and disrupting efforts by terrorist, extremist, or radical groups to radicalize or recruit in federal, state, local, territorial, tribal, or privatized prisons.
- Providing training and support materials that can be used by field offices and Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) for training and outreach at state and local correctional institutions.

All of these elements have helped identify numerous factors responsible for the spread of radicalization and recruitment in prisons. A recent comprehensive assessment based on a survey of nearly 3,000 state and local correctional facilities identified the following trends:

- Most cases of prison radicalization and recruitment appear to be originated by domestic extremists with few or no foreign connections.
- Some radicalized Islamic inmates are current or former members of street or prison gangs, indicating an emerging "crossover" trend from gang member to Islamist extremist.
- Radicalization activity levels appear to be higher in high population areas on the West Coast and in the northeastern United States.

Aside from trends, the assessment identified "best practices" for correctional institutions to follow to combat the spread of radicalization and recruitment. Some of these are:

- Establish system-wide vetting protocols for all contractor and volunteer applicants;
  - The FBI provides assistance by conducting criminal history checks against all FBI indices for contract, volunteer, and staff personnel entering correctional facilities. Relevant information is passed on to correctional officials for appropriate action.
- Create system-wide databases of contractors and volunteers providing direct inmate services;
- Improve monitoring capabilities;
- Coordinate inmate transfers;
- Share information among all levels of law enforcement and correctional personnel. FBI Joint Terrorism Task Forces can facilitate this process.

Numerous FBI analytical products, as well as operational highlights, have been disseminated to foreign liaison partners, from classified products to unclassified assessments meant for a wide audience. The feedback from the latter has helped us better drive analytical perspectives and identify services where bi-lateral exchanges could prove beneficial on this issue.

At this time, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to address this important issue.