



THE "RADICALIZATION PROCESS" IN PRISONS

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ABSTRACT

Prisons can play a critical role in both triggering and reinforcing the radicalization process. The prison's isolated environment, ability to create a "captive audience" atmosphere, its absence of day-to-day distractions, and its large population of disaffected young men, makes it an excellent breeding ground for radicalization. The goal of this presentation is to describe the internal radicalization process among prison inmates and understand the numerous challenges posed by radicalization behind bars.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

The “Radicalization Process” in Prisons

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Introduction

Prisons can play a critical role in both triggering and reinforcing the radicalization process. The prison’s isolated environment, ability to create a —captive audience atmosphere, its absence of day-to-day distractions, and its large population of disaffected young men, makes it an excellent breeding ground for radicalization. The goal of this presentation is to describe the internal radicalization process among prison inmates and understand the numerous challenges posed by radicalization behind bars. In the first part of the presentation, we will analyze those challenges and portray the current situation in European and American jails. We will then, explore a few case studies, including —the Shoe Bomber case involving Richard Reid, the —Jose Padilla case and the less familiar cases of Jose Emilio Suarez Trashorras and Safe Bourada and others. To conclude the presentation, we will suggest prospective policy options and recommendations to overcome this growing phenomenon.

Radicalization process among prison inmates

On September 19, 2006, the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs conducted a hearing entitled: Prison Radicalization: Are terrorist Cell Forming in United States Cellblocks? The aim of this study was to show that —American prison systems—federal, state, and local— are environments that are permissive to the proliferation of radical ideologies. That permissiveness, quite naturally, is exploited by those wishing to fill out their ranks and win new recruits to the cause. ¹

The strategy of these radicalists is to —buy hearts and minds by identifying feelings of frustration, marginalization and discrimination that are widely spread in prison and providing the

future potential recruit a sense of belonging, a peer group and offering them a sentiment of self-esteem and the ultimate redemption. To fully comprehend the phenomenon of Radicalization in prison —it is important to understand that incarcerated Muslims tend to stand out from others in the prison system both because they cluster in groups that afford them social support and protection and because they demand (and often receive) special treatment by virtue of their religious affiliation. ²

One of the main challenges of this radicalization process is the continuous interaction between the prisons and the outside world through a well-defined Da'wa infrastructure.

Upon release from prison, the newly radicalized are often absorbed by these structures and sometimes join a radical environment, as we will see with Richard Reid and other similar cases.

We can observe a parallel path in most of the radicalization cases:

- 1) Arrest for petty crimes
- 2) Radicalization or/and conversion in prison
- 3) Concluding their sentence, prisoners are often guided to a radical Da'wa infrastructure such as Mosques, Islamic Center, or Islamic Charity organization (Al Muhajiroun, Finsbury and Brixton Mosque, Hamas, Al Qaeda etc.).

Radicalization in the United States

In 2003, the British authorities seized an al-Qaeda training manual, which demands their operatives, while being incarcerated, to —actively recruit fellow inmates .³ As explained by former FBI director Robert Mueller: —prisons continue to be fertile ground for extremists who exploit both a prisoner's conversion to Islam while still in prison, as well as their socioeconomic status and placement in the community upon their release."⁴

Furthermore, the FBI's Deputy Director, John Pistole, testified —Some of these terrorists seek to exploit our freedom to exercise religion, we believe, 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.⁵

In addition, there is an evident abuse of freedom of worship in prisons as authorities have permitted clerics, to bring all sort of literature inside the penitentiary; —everything from copies of the Koran to anti-American leaflets highlighting the importance of jihad.⁶ The availability of hard copy material behind bars and the rise of web-based literature both ideological and operational is a growing challenge faced by the prison system and homeland security.

We can observe in most prisons, the rise of charismatic -Self-Made Imams- with a frequent Jihadi background. Most of them lack educational and spiritual knowledge and often preach radical ideology. As stated by Gregory B. Saathoff, Executive Director, of Critical Incident Analysis Group in his testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, —when in remote locations, it is more difficult to contract for qualified religious service providers. This is important with regard to religious radicalization, because it leaves a void that may be filled by poorly qualified religious practitioners who bring their own brand of religious radicalization within prison walls.⁷ The report —Out of the Shadow – Getting Ahead of Prisoner Radicalization explains —Prisoners with little training in Islam have been able to assert themselves as leaders among the prison population, at times misrepresenting the faith. “Jailhouse Islam”, based upon cut-and-paste versions of the Qur’an, incorporates violent prison culture into religious practice. Radical religious service providers in prisons are able to move from prison to prison while remaining under the radar of prison officials.⁸

Radicalization in Europe

The United States has not been immune to Islamic radicalization in its penitentiary, but the situation in Europe is underscore by the overrepresentation of Muslims in prison. However, —the majority of Europe's prisoners were not actively engaged in any religion before being locked up, but their confinement often spurs a religious awakening or reawakening . "In prison

individuals are confronted with existential questions in a particularly intensive way" and religion can offer a "possibility to escape prison" at least for one's mind and spirit, said Irene Becci, who has analyzed religion in Italian and German prisons .⁹

In France, Islam is the most represented religion in prison, hitting 80 percent of some prison in the suburb of Paris while the Muslims only accounts for 6 percent to 10 percent of the whole population. (This figure is difficult to estimate as in order to prevent discrimination; ethnics and religions affiliations are not identified during national census of most European countries). Pascal Maihlos, former director of the French Domestic Intelligence Agency -Renseignements Généraux- claimed that in prison, —a minority of radical Islamist terrorists hooks up with petty criminals who find their way back to religion under its most radical form"¹⁰

Case Studies

I. Richard Reid – Abdel Rahim – „The Shoe Bomber”

On December 22, 2001, Richard Reid, also known as the —Shoe Bomber , boarded American Airlines Flight 63, a Boeing 767 due to depart from Paris, Charles de Gaulle International Airport for Miami International Airport, U.S. During the flight, Reid unsuccessfully attempted to light explosives hidden in his shoes. In the proceeding confusion, Reid was subdued by other passengers and sedated by a doctor present on board. The plane was finally diverted to Boston, Massachusetts, and Reid was arrested and convicted to a life sentence in prison.¹¹

As soon as the law permitted, Richard Reid dropped out of high school before being incarcerated for the first time at the age of 17. In the mid 90s he was imprisoned for several petty crimes, for which he served sentences in different prisons, including Feltham Young Offender Institution & Remand Centre in West London where he was converted to Islam. By doing so, Richard Reid became part of the fastest growing religion in the United Kingdom. —It was long assumed that the growth of Islam in Britain was simply a function of immigration. But that underestimates the religion's appeal.¹² A chaplain in the United States Federal Penal system explains: —Islam is

most impressive for prison inmates because of its simplicity, comprehensiveness, universal egalitarianism and the brotherhood of its community. It has special appeal to those who are oppressed and are not tied to any privileged class. ¹³

After his release of prison, Richard Reid, like many converted, frequented the Brixton Mosque in Southern London and changed his name to Abdel Rahim. —There is speculation that at some point during his drift to a more extreme philosophy, he may have met Zacarias Moussaoui ¹⁴, who also attended the Brixton Mosque during the 90s and has been charged with conspiracy over the 9/11 attacks.

By December 1998, Reid "is believed to have embarked on an extensive travel program, which saw him visit seven countries including some of the world's so-called -terror capitals-." ¹⁵ II.

Jose Padilla – Abdullah Al Muhajir

On June 10, 2002, Jose Padilla, an American citizen —had been detained at O'Hare Airport and charged with taking part in an Al Qaeda plot to detonate a radioactive -dirty bomb- within the United States . He was carrying \$10,000, a cell-phone and an e-mail address of Al-Qaida Operatives at his arrest. Three years later, he was charged for being involved in —a -North American support cell- that worked to support violent jihad campaigns in Afghanistan and elsewhere overseas from 1993 to 2001. ¹⁶

Born in New York and raised in Chicago, Jose Padilla joined a local crime gang and was arrested many times for petty crimes. —He converted to Islam after serving time in a Broward County, Florida; jail where authorities suspect his Islamic radicalization began. ¹⁷ He changed his name to Abdullah Al Muhajir and attended the Al-Iman mosque. ¹⁸ Padilla is believed to have traveled to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan and Iraq. On his return, he was arrested and was declared by President George W. Bush as an —enemy combatant .

III. José Emilio Suárez Trashorras

On March 18, 2004, Jose Emilio Suarez Trashorras was detained and accused of supplying explosives to the authors of the Madrid Attack in March 11, 2004. —He also faced multiple counts of murder, as well as attempted murder, robbery and charges . ¹⁹ Trashorras, a former

miner, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for the death of 192 persons: 191 killed during the March 11, 2004 terrorist attack in addition to the policeman Francisco Javier Torronteras who died when seven key suspects of the Madrid attacks committed a group suicide during a police raid.²⁰

It is important to notice that Jose Emilio Suarez Trashorras was an informer of the National Police in Counter Narcotics – Provincial Brigades (Aviles). He followed the same radicalization path than Richard Reid and Jose Padilla. First arrested for minor crimes, then converted and radicalized behind bars.

IV. Safe Bourada

This can be demonstrated with the case of Safe Bourada, an Algerian citizen who was involved in the Paris’ terrorist attack in 1995. During his seven years of detention, Safe Bourada has indoctrinated a dozen of prisoners to Salafism. After their release from prison, they constituted the core of Bourada terrorist cell. Bourada was finally arrested in September 2006 and charged for planning to attack the Paris metro, airport and the DST- rough equivalent of the FBI-headquarters²¹.

Those four cases where former inmates who converted to Islam and who later pursue the cause of terrorism are a classical example of the radicalization process in American and European prisons. To conclude, William J. Bratton, the Chief of Police of the Los Angeles Police Department stated that Richard Reid, Jose Padilla and Jose Emilio Suarez Trashorras were —street thugs radicalized while behind bars. All were first encountered by local law enforcement before they were radicalized. And all plotted to kill. ²²

V. AMSTERDAM (Hofstad Group)

Mohammed Bouyeri’s journey to radicalism appears to have begun during his seven-month stay in prison—a sentence based on an assault charge. He became more religious and extreme in his views. After being released from prison, Bouyeri switched his academic pursuits from accounting to social work and began volunteering at his local community center. His friends say he began to wear —traditional clothing and grew a beard.

VI. LONDON (July 2005 Attack)

Germaine Lindsay had been strongly influenced by the extremist preacher Abdallah al Faisal (Jamaican origin) who served a prison sentence in the U.K. for soliciting murder, incitement to murder, incitement to racial hatred and distributing material of a racial hatred nature.

Recommendations and Policy Options

It is important to understand that —religious radicalization within prisons is a complex problem and therefore no one profession alone is equipped to analyze and recommend change. A multi-disciplinary approach that includes perspectives of religion, criminal justice, law, and behavioral sciences is vital for proactive analysis of the phenomenon .²³ Recommendations, based upon the above mentioned, would assist policy-makers in thwarting and controlling Islamic radicalization within US, EU prison systems, while respecting prisoners legitimate rights to the exercise of their religious beliefs while incarcerated. These recommendations should be implemented at two levels, namely, prevention and rehabilitation.

Prevention

- 1) Preventative measures would entail a more thorough in prison intelligence coverage (HUMINT, SIGINT), identify pockets of radicalization, activities and leaders of such process, vetting process of the clerics, contractors and NGO"S volunteers providing Islamic services (Halal food, Qura'n books, Qurbanic meats, and traditional sweets in Id Al- Fiter and Id Al- Adha holidays) to inmates. Prison authorities should provide all religious services in an institutionalized manner with supervision and prevention capabilities.

- 2) This would entail the implementation of training for corrections staff, allowing them to identify radicalization. Prevention would likewise entail the screening of all incoming Islamic literature, restrict and monitor Internet use (Jihdi web sites, forums), that its materials are disseminated within prisons. A general training in Islam for the prisons' employee along with better communications channel between the security agencies and the Muslim chaplains is an essential step to cope with this increasing challenge.
- 3) Restrict external NGO'S Islamic donations, lack of governmental budget will enable radical Islam penetration to fill the vacuum and provide the needs.
- 4) Identify and isolate/separate well known radicals from petit crime inmates in their first or second time detention, this latter population is known of its vulnerable status as an easy pray to be new recruits towards radicalization.
- 5) Restrict visits only to family members and forbid visits of external clerics, representatives of radical Islamic charities.

Rehabilitation

- 1) Rehabilitation would entail identifying inmates at-risk of being radicalized as well as individuals who have already been radicalized. To this end, it can be suggested that out-reach programs could be successfully implemented. The viability of such programs should be examined. There is a need to identify the steps to effectively integrate the ex-prisoners in the society in order to diminish the risks of absorption by the external radical Da'wa infrastructure.
- 2) Deportation failures. Prisoners may be radicalized while they are incarcerated, but they only become a danger to the public when they are released. And deportation failures could be leaving Europe exposed. In Italy, foreign prisoners are given five days to leave the country after their release, usually of their own accord. If they are caught in Italy after that time period, they are jailed for another 6 months to a year. While expulsion laws present a sad situation for the ex-convict who would like to improve his status in Europe,

or would leave but either doesn't have the means to do so or is afraid to return home in disgrace, the situation also poses a huge security question regarding who is and isn't in Europe, especially given the number of imprisoned foreign nationals. This challenge should be met by governments on the national level and not by the prison systems as the —last station as they return back to prison on immigration violations.

- 3) Monitor and avoid released inmates, identified in prison as radicalized or in process of radicalization, from being absorbed and —blend in the Da'awa institutions/organizations outside prison. The first period of their release is the most sensitive and vulnerable one with a very high potential risk for recruitment to Jihadi activities. A travel ban, for a certain period of time, interdicting traveling abroad, or to countries with high risk in addition with frequent obligatory meeting with a parole officer can be considered as well.
- 4) Counter radical Islamic Da'awa – released inmates should attend a compulsory one year long course that will include on one hand moderate mainstream Islamic studies within a well recognized and approved institution and certified clerics. In addition during this year in which the released inmate will be within this program, he will be part of the correction process that will provide him a vocational training course, which will provide and enhance skills to find an honest job (with assistance and eventually a limited allowance from the government).

4) The George Washington University study entitled "Out of the Shadows"- Getting Ahead Prisoner Radicalization concluded by calling for the creation of a set of “best practices” that can be used to develop an inclusive strategy to oppose the radicalization process at a national and international level and for the development of educational program and formation aimed at the prison's personnel.²⁴

Notes:

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