

**Statement for the Record of**

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**“PRISON RADICALIZATION: ARE TERRORIST CELLS FORMING IN U.S.  
CELL BLOCKS?”**

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Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share perspectives from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on the topic of prison radicalization. Since 2004, a spate of terrorist activities in Western Europe carried out or supported by radicalized “homegrown” Sunni extremists, including the Madrid and London attacks, focused national attention on the overseas phenomenon. More recent developments in the United States and Canada, including the disrupted California prison-based Jam-iyyat ul-Islam As-Saheeh (JIS) cell and the “Toronto 17”-- have focused attention on the phenomenon in North America. Against the backdrop of our larger efforts to understand radicalization here, activity occurring in some prison systems--such as last year’s incident with the JIS--has become of keen interest.

## **DHS RADICALIZATION STUDY**

In early 2006, Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis formed a team to develop a comprehensive intelligence-focused project that seeks to address how, why, and where radicalized ideas and beliefs develop over time in the United States. This OI&A project is part of a broader DHS approach in addressing the issue of radicalization, and will inform the Department-wide effort to understand and mitigate the phenomenon. We are conducting our study in a phased approach, focusing on examining radicalization dynamics in key geographic regions throughout the country. Our first phase focused on assessments in California and the New York/New Jersey area, while our second phase focuses on the Midwest and National Capital Region. We hope to conduct other regional or state assessments in future phases, with the goal that these will provide the building blocks for a broader national assessment.

We are identifying and examining the various entities--which we describe as “nodes”-- that individuals or groups pass through or come in contact with during the radicalization process. Nodes may be physical institutions, virtual communities, charismatic individuals, written or recorded material, or even shared experiences. Prisons, and the

spread of various interpretations of Islamic extremist beliefs within them, in particular have emerged as a key issue of interest.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

Thus far we have found that relationships between radicalization nodes and radical actor/groups vary across ideological and ethno-religious spectrums, different geographic regions, and socio-economic conditions. Further, we have found several, diverse “pathways” to radicalization in the United States through an examination of various “nodes”. From our perspective, nodes are conduits that facilitate and support the radicalization process, and may be physical institutions, virtual communities, charismatic individuals, written or recorded material, or even shared experiences. Further, we are finding that radicalization is not a “one- way street,” and that individuals and groups can radicalize or “de-radicalize” based on a variety of factors. This holds particularly true when examining the prison radicalization issue.

Our research and discussions indicate that radicalization within prisons has occurred predominantly--but not exclusively--among the African-American inmate population and those affiliated with gangs. Inmates have been radicalized through charismatic, religiously radical inmates; clerics, contractors, and volunteers who serve as religious authorities; and extremist propaganda created both inside and outside of the prison walls. As a result, there appear to be both “bottom-up” and “top-down” influences shaping the prison radicalization dynamic, although it is difficult to assign percentages as to which influence is greater.

We judge that current radicalization dynamics in some U.S. prison systems, while of concern and keen interest, do not yet present the level of operational threat that seen in other parts of the world; that said, last year’s incident with the JIS in California suggests that small, motivated clusters of like-minded individuals exposed to radical beliefs within prisons could potentially cause harm once released.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

We have worked with partners at the Federal, State, and local level to enhance our understanding on prison radicalization. At the Federal level, we have worked with the Department of Justice (DOJ), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), amongst others. At the State and local level, we have held discussions with officials in New York, California, Illinois, and Ohio regarding their perspectives on prison radicalization, and will soon hold similar meetings with representatives from Texas, Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, DC. We are studying ways to strengthen our partnership with officials from these varied constituencies on prison radicalization.

### **CONCLUSION**

Our work on radicalization-- including our examination of the extent and depth of the phenomenon within prisons in the US-- is preliminary and by no means complete. Continued dialogue and relationship-building with Federal, State, local, and even foreign partners, are critical aspects of this work. We hope our efforts on radicalization will help enhance the Department's perspectives on this issue, and help policymakers make the most informed judgments about how best to address the phenomenon inside the United States.

Madam Chairman, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak with you and the members of the Committee. I welcome your questions.