



**VISION
UPDATE
05-03-04**

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**PUBLICATION DATE:
05-03-2004**

FBI NEW YORK

OFFICE OF INTELLIGENCE



LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE

Prison Radicalization

The American prison system represents a sizeable pool of individuals vulnerable to radicalization. In the context of this assessment, radicalization is defined as the process of attracting and possibly converting inmates to radical Islam.

Our information indicates prison radicalization occurs predominantly among the minority inmate population. Radical imams or volunteers can target a minority inmate's feeling of discrimination in the US or perceived American oppression of minorities and Islam overseas. Many inmates possess at least some of the characteristics that an extremist would desire, such as:

- hostility toward authority, particularly the US government;
- longing for acceptance into a group for social interaction and/or protection;
- violent predisposition;
- seeking power and influence, possibly to right the wrongs the inmate perceives he/she suffers.

In addition, upon release some inmates have essentially nowhere to go, inducing a sense of vulnerability an extremist could exploit, possibly enticing the recently released convict to a particular mosque or Islamic center. At this time, we have not identified an American inmate that has been recruited into a terrorist organization *while in prison*.

The individuals suspected of radicalizing inmates represent all races and backgrounds, including individuals from Islamic-majority countries. The FBI and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, working with the National Joint Terrorism Task Force, are engaged to prevent extremists' access to prison facilities. We are also working together to detect, deter, and interdict extremist efforts to radicalize and recruit among all federal, state, and local prison populations.

An additional concern is inmates radicalizing other inmates. Prison officials must be alert to the possibility of charismatic, religiously radical inmates spreading radicalization throughout the prison. Inmates incarcerated for crimes connected to terrorism or inmates with overseas religious instruction may possess extra credibility with other inmates, enough to gain a religious following inside the prison. These charismatic and/or credible inmates could direct their followers to attend radical mosques or Islamic centers overseas upon release, as well as possibly pose a risk to prison security due to their religious influence over other inmates. Another way of an inmate gaining influence over others is through his/her selection by a prison chaplain to serve as the chaplain's assistant, and/or being allowed to lead Islamic services.

Any questions or comments can be addressed to the Domestic Sunni Extremist Analysis Unit, IA Ryan McCoy, 202-324-0521, or IA Matthew Johnson, 202-324-1047.

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