

Testimony of

Mr. John Pistole

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Statement for the Record

John S. Pistole

Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division,

Federal Bureau of Investigation

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Good Morning Chairman Kyl, and other distinguished members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the FBI, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address the FBI's role in the prevention of terrorist recruitment within the United States correctional system and the FBI's role in the recent arrests related to Guantanamo Bay detainees. I will discuss the FBI's role in limiting the ability of terrorists to recruit in the United States penal system. I will conclude with information concerning the FBI's response to the recent arrests surrounding a Guantanamo Bay chaplain and translators.

FBI CHANGE IN FOCUS

As Director Mueller stated during his June 18, 2003 testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, the FBI must transform its "intelligence effort from tactical to strategic..if [it] is to be successful in preventing terrorism and more proactive in countering foreign intelligence adversaries and disrupting and dismantling significant criminal activity."

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the FBI changed its focus, making counterterrorism its highest priority and redirecting resources accordingly. The emphasis was placed on intelligence with prevention as our primary goal. Counterterrorism investigations have become intelligence driven. Criminal investigations into these matters are considered tools to achieve disruption, dismantlement, and prevention.

INTERVENTION IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In my opinion, Al-Qa'ida remains the greatest terrorist threat to the United States and our allies' interests around the world. Certainly, this terrorist organization is seeking to recruit human sources within the United States, as demonstrated by their training manuals. 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.

Other extremist groups have been following this blueprint. Since 1979, the Aryan Nations, a violent, neo-Nazi, white supremacist organization, has been engaged in prison recruiting. This is an important aspect of the Aryan Nations' agenda given that many of its members are serving lengthy prison sentences. The Aryan Nations conduct extensive prison outreach through correspondence from area chapter members. Their leaders visit prison facilities specifically for the purpose of recruiting members, promoting racial intolerance and hatred, and spreading neo-Nazi propaganda.

Terrorist sympathizers may do the same. One such instance involved Warith Deen Umar, the Administrative Chaplain for the State of New York Department of Corrections. A Radical Muslim, Umar denied prisoners access to mainstream imams and materials. He sought to incite prisoners against America, preaching that the 9/11 hijackers should be remembered as martyrs and heroes. Umar has since been banned from ever entering a New York State prison. To assist in ferreting out potential terrorist radicalization issues within the Federal Bureau of Prisons system, the Federal Bureau of Prisons maintains a presence on the National Joint Terrorism Taskforce.

Recruitment of inmates within the prison system will continue to be a problem for correctional institutions throughout the country. Inmates are often ostracized, abandoned by, or isolated from their family and friends, leaving them susceptible to recruitment. Membership in the various radical groups offer inmates protection, positions of influence and a network they can correspond with both inside and outside of prison.

GUANTANAMO BAY ISSUES

The FBI is working directly with the Department of Defense on issues surrounding the recent arrests of translator, Senior Airman Ahmad I. al-Halabi on July 23, 2003 in Jacksonville, Florida; chaplain, Captain James J. Yee on September 10, 2003; and translator, Ahmed Fathy Mehalba on September 29, 2003. The FBI considers these matters potentially serious breaches of national security and will continue to work jointly with the Department of Defense in order to successfully resolve these matters and limit the damage they may have caused.

The FBI is also working with both the Department of Defense and the Federal Bureau of Prisons to assess the mechanisms by which chaplains and translators are vetted for employment. In addition, the FBI is evaluating the protocols for ongoing security assessments of such employees during sensitive assignments, such as more frequent polygraph examinations.

CONCLUSION

Terrorism represents a global problem. The solution is grounded in what we have experienced since September 11, 2001, unprecedented international cooperation and coordination. The threat terrorism poses must always be considered imminent. The FBI must constantly look at mechanisms to gather intelligence, and, in forging partnerships with local, state, and federal law enforcement and correctional agencies, the FBI has made considerable progress toward achieving and implementing these abilities.

Again, I offer my gratitude and appreciation to you, Chairman Kyl and the distinguished members of the Subcommittee, for dedicating your time and effort in addressing this vitally important issue. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.