

Analysis: Militant Islam in U.S. Prison System
*Plans to Attack Military Facilities and Jewish Targets in Los Angeles Area
Originated in California State Prison System*

Summary:

- Federal grand jury indicts head of a militant Islamic prison gang and three other men on charges of planning terrorist attacks against military facilities, the Israeli Consulate, and Jewish synagogues in Los Angeles
- Cell conspired to wage war against the U.S. and murder military personnel and foreign officials
- Kevin James, an inmate at California State Prison—Sacramento and founder of Jam’iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS), conceived and organized the plan
- Attacks believed to be planned for Sept. 11, 2005 and/or the Jewish holidays in October 2005
- Cell committed 11 gas station robberies in Los Angeles and Orange County to finance the plot
- Suspects apprehended while robbing a gas station; police uncovered jihadist literature, bulletproof vests, and lists of potential terror targets upon subsequent search of their apartment

Profiles of Suspects:

- Kevin James: cell leader, 29, aka “Shakyh Shahaab Murshid”, U.S. national, criminal record
- Levar Haley Washington: cell member, 25, aka “Abdur Rahman”, U.S. national, criminal record
- Gregory Vernon Patterson: cell member, 21, aka “Bilal”, U.S. national, no prior criminal record
- Hammad Riaz Samana: cell member, 21, a lawful permanent U.S. resident originally from Pakistan, no prior criminal record



Downtown Torrance, California



California State Prison, Sacramento

Indoctrination, Recruitment and Planning:

- Shortly after being incarcerated in 1997 on a 10-year stint for robbery, James, founded an Islamic militant gang called Jam’iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS or Assembly of Authentic Islam)
- James secretly distributed a written “protocol” setting forth his religious teachings, and preached that JIS members had a duty to attack Islam’s enemies, including the U.S. government and supporters of Israel
- James also required prospective JIS members to take an oath of loyalty, including an obligation to communicate with him at least once every 90 days

- Washington converted to Islam while serving 3 years for a robbery conviction, where James recruited him to join JIS in 2004; he pledged loyalty to James “until death by martyrdom”
- Washington paroled in Nov. 2004, and James encouraged him to start a JIS cell outside prison
- James instructed Washington to recruit 5 other members to train in covert operations, acquire weapons (including firearms with silencers) and gain expertise with explosives and bombs that could be detonated from a distance
- Washington recruited Patterson and Samara from a mosque the 3 attended in Inglewood
- Washington, Patterson, and Samara began surveillance of military bases and recruiting centers, synagogues, the Israeli Consulate, and the El Al airline ticket counter at LAX (Patterson had worked at a duty-free shop in the airport’s international terminal)
- They also researched the internet for information on Jewish holidays, planning to attack crowds of worshipers during Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur
- Patterson purchased a .223 caliber rifle and ordered an AR-15 from a local sporting goods store
- Between 30 May-5 July 2005, Washington, Patterson, and Samara—armed with shotguns—robbed 11 different gas stations in several cities and towns in Southern California

Law Enforcement Response:

- Cell activities discovered as a result of a joint law enforcement operation to investigate and prevent gas station robberies
- On 5 July, robbery investigators from the Torrance Police Department observed Washington and Patterson casing a gas station
- At 11 PM that evening, the two men, wearing ski masks and armed with shotguns, robbed a Chevron station in Fullerton; Torrance Police immediately pulled them over and arrested them without incident
- Police search of Washington and Patterson’s home uncovered jihadist literature (written in English), bulletproof vests, and a list of potential targets
- Police contacted the FBI, which led to an investigation involving more than 200 agents, LAPD detectives, counter terrorism officials, and other law enforcement officials
- All men charged with conspiring to wage war against the U.S. government through terrorism, kill armed service members, and murder foreign officials, as well as other charges
- FBI recently ordered its agents nationwide to conduct “threat assessments” of inmates who may have become radicalized in prison and could commit extremist violence upon release
- California’s Prison System assessing possible terrorist threats posed by prison groups, including hundreds of gangs and splinter groups that exist inside the Nation’s largest prison system

Radicalism in US Prisons:

- Over the past 30 years, Islam has become a powerful force in the U.S. prison system, with some estimates that up to 20% of the inmate population is now Muslim
- Terrorism experts are increasingly concerned that disaffected inmates drawn to radical Islam could become a source of homegrown terrorist activity
- Cases in which terror suspects were introduced to militant Islam while in prison include: Richard Reid (convicted British “Shoe Bomber”), Jose Padilla (alleged “Dirty Bomber”) and Aquil Collins (attended an Afghan training camp with the men accused of killing reporter Daniel Pearl)

- Overlap of criminal conduct and terrorism demands that criminal investigators are trained to identify signs of terrorism (see Center for Policing Terrorism tactics, techniques and procedures report, “Recognizing Symbolic Cues That Could Indicate Terrorist Related Activities”)
- High level of cooperation between federal and local law enforcement characterized investigation
- Cell activity began with ideological indoctrination and radicalization, which led to a predictable outcome; disruption must begin with identifying and neutralizing violent discourse conducted under the guise of religious worship

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