

Ranking Member Brian Higgins Opening Statement

“Terror Inmates: Countering Violent Extremism in Prison and Beyond.”

Counterterrorism and Intelligence Subcommittee

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

I would like to thank you for holding today’s hearing to explore the detection and monitoring of radical ideology in prisons and ensure that information is shared between corrections personnel and law enforcement before the release of inmates, while understanding the limitations of sharing such information after an inmate’s release from prison.

As we begin today’s discussion, I believe it is important to distinguish the terms “radicalization” and “terrorism.” Under the First Amendment, an individual’s thought and speech are protected, including radical and extremist thought and speech. When radicalized individuals move from radicalized thought to illegal terrorist activity or other crimes, the criminal activity is not protected.

Based on that distinction, I am hopeful that today’s discussion will focus on how we can prevent former inmates from becoming a terrorist actor upon release. It is difficult to predict the behavior of an incarcerated individual upon release from prison. By its nature, prison may bring together disaffected people who might be receptive to anti-social messages offering intolerant solutions to complex problems of identity and belonging.

Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that some disaffected prisoners may join extreme groups and engage in extreme behavior in an attempt to find meaning, establish bonds, or combat a sense of fear and alienation within prison walls.

Since 9/11, more than 250 people have been convicted for their involvement in homegrown violent jihadist plots. However, an analysis of homegrown violent jihadist activity since 9/11, showed that these plots have nearly always featured people who radicalized outside of prison.

This statistic and similar numbers prove, despite a few high profile cases, terrorism plots among prison-radicalized, violent, Muslim extremists are rare.

But we must remain vigilant. Radicalization in prisons remains a concern abroad, both in non-Muslim and Muslim-majority countries. Middle Eastern governments have struggled to contain violent radicalization in their prisons, and have developed innovative approaches to addressing the issue, with varying degrees of success.

The United States does not have prisoner deradicalization programs, as many of our Constitutional rights do not permit aspects of several of the CVE programs conducted abroad.

Today, I hope we can have a robust discussion of the existence of these CVE programs as we seek to understand whether post-prison CVE re-entry programs may be helpful in reducing recidivism and decreasing the allure of committing a terrorist act upon release from prison.