

More **TERRORISTS**, Less Resources:

Confronting One of the Most Critical Challenges In Corrections History

By Allan Turner

In the early 1990s, the U.S. Penitentiary in Marion, Ill., was the only administrative maximum-security penitentiary within the Federal Bureau of Prisons. At that time, USP Marion housed the highest risk inmates in the federal prison system, including several foreign and domestic terrorists. Thus, there was concern about outside support for these inmates and the potential for an external assault on the facility as part of an escape attempt.

Although there previously had been numerous threats and an external assault on USP Marion by several people aiding members of a security threat group during an escape, the focus was still primarily on “inside out” security with little attention given to “outside in” security. It was apparent that the ability to deal with the growing external threat was inadequate. In 1991, the facility was able to obtain some funding to improve longstanding security concerns. The meager resources at USP Marion were stretched as far as possible to install additional surveillance equipment and establish a security position on the main avenue of approach into the institution. Although there was never an actual assault on the institution, intelligence sources provided information on several threats by outside associates of Colombian drug cartel members and other high-risk inmates to use aircraft and weapons to attack the facility between 1991 and 1992. One threat was credible enough to cause the U.S. attorney general to dispatch part of the FBI’s Hostage Rescue Team to USP Marion for a short period of time to provide extra security.

While the potential for an outside assault on USP Marion was great at that time, it does not compare with the seri-

ousness of the threat that exists for many correctional facilities today.

Forgotten But Not Excluded

As widely reported by the news media, there is a major effort under way, beginning at the federal level, to develop and provide the tools necessary to deal with weapons of mass destruction and to fight the war on terrorism. During the past several months, a number of meetings and conferences related to this effort have been held. The emphasis is on providing first responders (firefighters, emergency medical personnel and law enforcement) with the equipment and training to cope with incidents involving weapons of mass destruction and developing the intelligence gathering, information sharing and tracking technology tools necessary to prevent such attacks. Unfortunately, corrections is rarely mentioned in any venue either as a key element in combating terrorism or as a priority for resources. This may be due in part to planners not considering correctional staff to be first responders (of course, this is true unless a correctional facility is the target), and law enforcement and security personnel not fully recognizing, nor fully appreciating, the important role corrections plays in an effective homeland security strategy. However, make no mistake, corrections is not excluded from the war on terrorism. According to the FBI, al Qaeda continues to recruit members in U.S. prisons despite a government crackdown. In fact, prisons are likely to be breeding grounds for any criminal activity, and terrorism is no exception, as reported by FOX News.

FOX News has also reported that Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, who is serving a life sentence in New York for plotting to blow up landmarks, is accused of sending messages from prison through visiting attorneys that directed terrorist acts to followers. And Jose Padilla, the dirty bomber, was exposed to radical Islam during his time in American prisons and from there was recruited by the al Qaeda network.

In fact, a key area of recruitment, according to the June 18, 2002, *Washington Times* article "Terrorists Recruited From the U.S. Seen as Rising Threat," is U.S. prisons and jails, where al Qaeda and other organizations have found men who have already been convicted of violent crimes and have little or no loyalty to the United States. It is really a captive audience, and many inmates are anxious to hear how they can attack American institutions.

As the U.S. government scrambles to fund homeland security, one of the areas taking a huge hit is the prison system. Approximately 19 states are looking at narrowing budget gaps by cutting funding to their correctional agencies. Governors in Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Utah and Virginia are closing entire prisons. New York, Texas and Nevada have downsized prison space by closing housing units. Oregon's budget crisis halted prison construction. Also, two prison openings have been postponed in Pennsylvania in an effort to save \$15 million. All this while the Council on Foreign Relations, a nonpartisan think tank, said the United States should spend \$98 billion more than scheduled to prepare personnel at home for attacks by terrorists coming into the country. But if prisons continue to be downsized and closed, the more deadly attacks may come from terrorists already in the country, according to the *AFSCME Public Employee* article "When Homeland Security Makes Us Less Secure," by William Lucy.

This information is by no means encouraging for correctional administrators. On the one hand, there is little doubt that corrections has a responsibility in preventing the recruitment of potential terrorists in prisons and jails and, most importantly, not allowing terrorists to plan or direct their activities from behind bars. On the other hand, federal, state and local correctional agencies, while facing one of the most difficult budget periods in recent memory, are low priorities when it comes to resource allocation for homeland security needs.

Corrections Cannot Become The Weak Link

Corrections must become a major consideration in the national effort against terrorism. Quite simply, correctional facilities are targets. Terrorist organizations specify in training manuals, such as the *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, that guerrilla operations will include riots, assaults on prisons and jails, and ambushes of the staff who work there. What better way to disrupt and terrorize a

community, and distract law enforcement, than to force the evacuation or neutralize the perimeter security of a major penitentiary or jail? It is for this reason that correctional staff must be provided with much of the same equipment, training and preparation as first responders so that they may properly respond to a terrorist incident.

Also, combating terrorism must be a start-to-finish undertaking. Once terrorists are arrested, prosecuted and convicted, they are incarcerated in a prison or jail somewhere in the United States. At this time, terrorists are being held in a number of federal, state and local facilities and there is little or no capability to accurately identify them as terrorists or track their location and activities. To close this hole, correctional administrators must have the best identification and tracking technology available to address this problem.

In addition, as has been the experience with domestic offenders, especially gangs and organized crime members, offenders do not cease criminal activity once they are arrested and incarcerated. Likewise, terrorists will not stop planning and coordinating acts of terrorism once they are behind bars. In fact, the al Qaeda training manual devotes a lesson describing the actions to be taken when an operative is incarcerated. It specifies the need for incarcerated "brothers" to continue to communicate with terrorists outside the prison or jail (see www.usdoj.gov/ag/trainingmanual.htm). Sheik Rahman is an example of that reality. Correctional administrators must have access to the same up-to-date technology tools for intelligence gathering, information sharing and preventing terrorist activities as law enforcement. In addition, correctional facilities can be tremendous sources of intelligence, but staff must be trained and equipped to collect, analyze and disseminate that intelligence.

Becoming an Effective Participant In Homeland Security

Regardless of the current fiscal situation and the intense competition for scarce resources, corrections officials, especially at the state and local levels, must find a way to equip and train staff and obtain the technology to meet their obligations in the war on terrorism.

The importance of corrections in the fight against terrorism must be recognized by the politicians and government officials controlling homeland security resources at the federal and state levels. The American Correctional Association, the Association of State Correctional Administrators, the American Jail Association, the National Sheriffs' Association, the American Probation and Parole Association and correctional administrators in high-risk states should join together and lead a consolidated effort to communicate that fact to politicians, other government officials and the public.

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Also, the fact that corrections has a great deal to contribute to the war on terror should be emphasized. The Department of Homeland Security is especially interested in best practices as related to protecting facilities and people, and corrections has much to offer in this effort.

Correctional facilities, unlike most public facilities or other parts of the nation's infrastructure, are always under attack. Those attacks can be from the inside out, such as an attempt to breach perimeter security as part of an escape, or can be from the outside in such as an attack using weapons of mass destruction to cause death and destruction or using other weapons to break an inmate out of the prison or jail. Because of this, corrections has a vast store of knowledge and expertise to bring to the table regarding protection against terrorist attacks. For a number of years, correctional agencies have been involved in a variety of homeland security related efforts such as the use of biometrics for identification and verification of inmates' identity, vulnerability assessment projects to determine institution security and implementation of sophisticated surveillance technologies. The lessons learned from corrections can prove invaluable to security planners assessing the vulnerability of schools, airports and other public facilities, but those lessons cannot be shared if corrections is not an active participant in the homeland security effort.

Corrections must look for ways to interact with other law enforcement, security and first responder agencies, especially when it comes to the development and evaluation of technologies. Corrections simply cannot afford to continue to fall behind in this area. In fact, correctional facilities make great test beds for a variety of technologies. Most new technologies are not originally developed for corrections, but they can be adapted effectively to correctional settings. Also, technologies that are effective in corrections can be readily used in other public safety areas. For example, many of the technology requirements to track and monitor correctional officers in prison can be applied to tracking and monitoring firefighters in burning buildings. The lessons learned using biometrics for identification and verification of inmates in a prison could be readily transferred to airport security.

Correctional agencies at all levels must work to leverage one another's resources and those of other public safety agencies. The Northeast Technology Product and Assessment Committee provides an example. Organized by the Massachusetts Department of Correction and supported in part by the National Institute of Justice, the committee includes members from each of the 13 correctional agencies throughout the Northeast region of the United States. The committee meets quarterly to share information on emerging technology and products that are beneficial to the corrections field. The meetings devote one day to vendors to demonstrate their products and one day to guest speakers to inform members of their services and the ways in which they test and evaluate technologies and products. One day also includes a private session whereby committee members discuss their own product testing and assessments. The committee provides a vehicle for correctional agencies to leverage the experience of other agencies at little cost beyond the travel and per diem expense required to attend meetings. Using the Northeast Technology Prod-

uct and Assessment Committee model, the National Institute of Justice has developed plans to establish a second committee in another region of the United States.

The ACA Technology Application Committee provides a forum at the national level for correctional practitioners to leverage one another's experience. The committee has worked closely with the Northeast Technology Product and Assessment Committee to provide informative programs at ACA's winter and summer conferences. The ACA committee explores a variety of sources to identify new technologies that have potential in the corrections field. It also examines technology use concepts being developed by various research laboratories and other federal, state and local law enforcement and other public safety organizations. For example, at a recent ACA Technology Application Committee meeting, the speaker was one of the top FBI experts on the application of biometrics.

A Critical Time

As the war on terror progresses, corrections is at a critical point in history unlike any other time since the birth of the modern prison system began with the Walnut Street Jail in Philadelphia. Correctional organizations strive daily against overwhelming problems with budgets that are severely constrained. Yet, the growing threat of terrorism requires more sophisticated capabilities for identification, tracking, intelligence gathering, information sharing and vulnerability assessment at prisons and jails throughout the United States. To develop these capabilities, corrections must receive an adequate share of the resources provided for homeland security, interact closely with security, law enforcement, and first responder organizations in the development and evaluation of technologies, and leverage the resources of other correctional and public safety agencies.

Without question, corrections must play a prominent role if the United States is going to protect its citizens from terrorists. Al Qaeda and its terrorist allies are unlike any other inmate group. Its members are organized, dedicated and disciplined zealots capable of sophisticated planning and violent actions. Under the criminal justice system, the time required to deal with al Qaeda and its terrorist allies in the investigative and judicial phase will be measured in days, weeks or perhaps a few years. But, corrections is the exception. Wardens will be given the day-to-day responsibility of managing these groups for periods ranging from a few months to life. This nation cannot afford to place terrorists in the custody of an ill-equipped, undertrained and unprepared correctional system. Correctional organizations at all levels must receive the training, equipment and technology to address this daunting task. There are no other options.

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