

THE MANIFESTATION OF TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM IN PRISONS

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with prison facilities from the perspective of the security threats of radicalization and terrorism. Prisons are continuously assessed as an ideal recruitment pool for extremist and terrorist organizations. Prison environment concentrates various persons with criminal past and with the tendencies to accept different ideological doctrines or radical interpretations of religions. Many of prisoners suffer from stress, lack of social and family support, uncertain future, depressions and frustration. Such factors could initiate or accelerate radicalization process in correctional facilities. This security problem is in contemporary days discussed in many European countries. All security experts and academic institutions came to the fact, that the crucial attribute of this issue is prevention and appropriate iden-

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tification of the indicators of radicalization. The paper gives an overview of the most significant findings in this field, summarizes the experiences of Czech Republic and gives examples of good practices.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 10.09.2019 Accepted: 24.09.2019

Keywords

prison service, radicalization, terrorism, security, prevention

INTRODUCTION

The prisons is a specific environment that generates various challenges and issues, primary in the field of security and social work. Prison facilities do not only serve as institutions within criminal justice system isolating dangerous persons from the society in order that they not to commit any more violent crimes, owing to which the state becomes safer. Prison facilities also play an important role in the rehabilitation process and in the preparation of the inmates for further life after they are released. To achieve this specific goal, correctional facilities have been developing the system of multiple approaches in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. The Prison Services in many countries offer the inmates a set of educational programmes based on the idea of helping the offenders to get back to normal life standards, find a job, improve their social skills and responsible financial behavior. For this purpose, correctional facilities employ special pedagogues and social workers; they also cooperate with nongovernmental organization, probation and mediation services, and other competent partners. The efficiency of the above mentioned activities is very frequently discussed in the academic environment and by general public as well. A part of experts and criminologists are rather skeptical to this approach: they argument that these efforts are not capable of reducing crime or dealing with high recidivism rate. On the other hand, repressive tactics of punishment are usually not only ineffective, but also counterproductive, as in some cases they become the trigger of further radicalisation. The best solution to reconcile these opposite opinions is to combine various approaches related to concrete crimes and their perpetrators. The inmate community in prisons is not a homogenous subculture and it includes

different personalities with specific social and criminal background. Individual programmes, initiatives and social work could become effective tools to get over difficult security problems.

PRISONS AND CONTEMPORARY SECURITY ISSUES

Prison facilities and their staff have been facing for several decades many security threats and new phenomena, e.g. criminal activities of ethnic gangs, verbal and nonverbal violence, mental problems and frustration of inmates. Traditional security threats that frequently spread in prison facilities all over the world are e.g. infiltration and different contrabands. Cigarettes, drugs, alcohol, mobile phones and improvised weapons are usually a part of so called *inmate economy*. It is not uncommon in many correctional facilities that the visitors are used to get forbidden things into the prisons. There are different methods of smuggling these objects into the institution. Relatives and friends are usually supporters who help incarcerated persons to penetrate prison security system and smuggle different dangerous objects into the prisons. They can just simply bring these things into the visiting room or, alternatively, send them hidden in cans, tubes or books put in parcels. Another way is to throw the contraband over the wall or a fence hidden in a tennis ball or a bundle of socks, especially when the prisons are located in the centers of towns. Contraband exchange is a very popular means of achieving a higher status in prison structural hierarchy, or of getting some advantages or privileges by the prisoners. Almost in all prison facilities convicts develop a unique internal social system, which is usually named a *convict code*. It is very closely connected with the process of prisonisation, which is an integral part of the adaptation process that every inmate is going through. In order to adapt and adjust to the prison conditions and rules, some inmates could come to a decision to join a gang or another similar group. Their motivations are different: they want to be protected, to be a part of strong and powerful organization within the penal institution, or to get a higher status in prison community. It is beyond doubts that prison gangs represent another security threat in correctional facilities.

Prison gangs are typically established on the racial, national, ethnic, political or ideological basis. Especially prison gangs in the United States of America have a long history but it is no exception that prison gangs are based in European countries as well. Correctional facilities in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and other European countries have faced in recent decades new phenomena connected with Muslim gangs.

Membership in a gang is usually a value in itself. Some gangs operate in prisons and in the street as well and constitute a very sophisticated network of criminal cliques and cells. They are very violent, strict, well-structured and organized. Gangs are usually responsible for organizing criminal business not only on the streets but also in prisons. They are very frequently involved in smuggling contrabands into prisons. Apart from the above mentioned methods, gang members can threaten the wardens' families; they may also try to corrupt correctional officers or offer them extra services or participation in the profit.

The smuggling of dangerous objects into prisons is a very serious problem. A convict abusing drugs or alcohol can be more violent: they can initiate conflicts or riots, or they can attack correctional officers or other staff members. Illegally use of mobile phones is a very risky phenomenon as well. Inmates can plan and organize illegal activities outside the prisons, influence or threaten witnesses, or prepare the escape. It is not uncommon that different political or religious terrorist organizations try to smuggle propaganda materials into the prisons in order to recruit new members or to support the incarcerated extremists mentally or ideologically. Continuous monitoring of these activities is very important because terrorist organizations use every opportunity to recruit or radicalize new members. From the perspective of a terrorist, sentenced members of terrorist organizations are not considered as criminals but as a heroes and martyrs. They are admired and glorified in order to inspire other followers and supporters. It is a very serious threat because such presentation could lead to so called *copycat effect*, which means that this depiction could push other individuals or lone actors to commit violent attacks or join terrorist organizations. All these factors have one important issue in common. They represent very actual threats connected with radicalization in prisons, which could lead to serious manifestations of violence or, even worse, to terrorist attacks.

RADICALIZATION AND RECRUITMENT IN PRISONS

“Prisons are often said to have become breeding grounds for radicalization. This should come as no surprise. Prisons are ‘places of vulnerability’, which produce ‘identity seekers’, ‘protection seekers’ and ‘rebels’ in greater numbers than other environments. They provide near-perfect conditions in which

radical, religiously framed ideologies can flourish”.¹ All these terms indicate that the prisons are very specific space, where the radicalization roots could be created and spread among other, for the time being, non-radical prisoners. Recent cases of terrorism (London Bridge attack 2019, Christmas Market attack in Berlin, 2016) show us the need to deal with the influence and role of prison facilities in radicalization process.

Security experts and criminologists have been dealing with specific research challenges related to the environment of prison facilities in the context of radicalization process. The penal institution is nowadays understood as a place which is very vulnerable to radicalization. Radicalization as such is usual defined as a unique an multi-staged process in which the individual adopts the belief that violence justified by ideological, political or religious reasons is legitimate, and that terrorism is an adequate way of solving problems. Radicalization is a very complex phenomenon and there are different triggers of this process. Recent studies and research mention multiple factors that launch, facilitate or accelerate radicalization. Prisons are, from this perspective, an ideal recruitment pool for terrorist organizations. These institutions concentrate different convicts with criminal past and uncertain future, suffering from depression, isolated from their families, with low chances for reintegration. This recruit profile is ideal for initiating radicalization. Terrorist organization do not force the convicts to change their personalities: they offer them an opportunity to start a new life in a new movement, and they provide them with new ideas.

The cases from the last decade show that acts of prison-based terrorism are a reality in the United States, just as they are a reality abroad. These cases, among others, represent some of the most spectacular instances of terrorist-oriented criminality in recent times. “They matter because prison has been largely overlooked as an operational base for terrorist recruitment and organizing. Only by understanding this potential threat can counter-terrorism officials take steps to train intelligence officers and prison staff about the warning signs of an imminent attack”.²

¹ P.A. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation. A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, The Hague 2013, p. 32.

² M.S. Hamm, *The spectacular few: prisoner radicalization and the evolving terrorist threat*. New York 2013, p. 10.

PHOTOGRAPH 1. SPECIFIC CRIMINAL TATTOO SYMBOLS GIVE A CLUE THAT AN INMATE IS INVOLVED IN A GANG OR AFFILIATED IN AN EXTREMIST ORGANIZATION



Source: archive of Barbora Vegrichová.

Following the increasing cases of prison radicalization, the penal justice system have been revitalizing its crucial strategy in order to fight terrorism and related issues rooted in prison environment. The key point in this process is to raise awareness among competent authorities about *criminal terror nexus*. Many criminals who were, in their previous lives, involved in organized crime or gangs have been recruited by criminal organizations. These people are very attractive for terrorist groups. They are well-oriented in the underworld and capable of operating under pressure; they have military experience, including experience with weapons and explosives; and they do not hesitate to use any means to achieve their goals.

From the perspective of prison facilities, it is utmost important to identify warning signs of radicalization. These signs are usually called *indicators of radicalization* and they include different behavioral and visual attributes indicating that a person is radicalized or is going through the radicalization process. The prompt detection of the radicalization phase allows one to apply counter-radicalization measures or to initiate preventive programmes. It should be mainly done by social workers and special pedagogues, who are responsible for applying these measures. Each step should be debated with competent partners from security and academic areas (security experts, researchers, psychologists). The warning signs may include a change in one's

image, the use of a new nickname, verbal and nonverbal aggression, the use of specific symbols, the application of tattoos, change in one's clothing style, open admiration for terrorist attacks and offenders, radical opinions and ideas, recruitment of other convicts, as well as initiation of conflicts with other inmates and prison staff. Abovementioned indicators are only illustrations: the issue needs deep and continuous education, analysis, evaluation, and the cooperation of prison service and other law enforcement authorities in order to prevent terrorist incidents.

CONCLUSION

Counterterrorist activities in the field of domestic security prefer multi-agency approach covering different attributes of national security. In the application of preventive measures, it is utmost important to understand the roots and triggers of terrorist activities and violent extremist behaviours. Selected criminal subcultures, recidivists, people with criminal background or delinquent youth are potentially susceptible to radical thoughts and ideas, and the prison environment enables these tendencies to evolve. Improved education and social skills of prison service employees are key factors that make it possible to fight terrorism and radicalization in prison facilities. These efforts must be based on the conceptual approach and on the interdisciplinary cooperation with the academic community and with the representatives of security system on the national or even international level.

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CITE THIS ARTICLE AS:

M. Brunová, B. Vegríchtová, *The Manifestation of Terrorism and Extremism in Prisons*, "Security Dimensions", 2019, no. 31, pp. 110-116, DOI 10.5604/01.3001.0014.0278.

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