

**Case 9: JIS**

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The JIS plot of 2005, located in the Los Angeles area, was developed and inspired by Kevin James, who was doing time for armed robbery in a jail several hundred miles away during the whole period. It was to be carried out by a man he converted in prison, Levar Washington. After Washington was released on parole, he was to recruit five men and for the cell to acquire explosives. The goal was to commit various acts of terrorism to protest American foreign policy against Muslims and to begin a process that would somehow eventually culminate in the establishment of a Muslim Caliphate in the United States.

Upon release, Washington was able to recruit two (not five) men to the mission, one of them a schizophrenic. Although they really wanted to use explosives as James had ordained, they had no competence whatever in the creation, maintenance, or detonation of such weapons, and consequently they fell back, by default, to a simple plan they could handle: driving up to a target, jumping out, shooting a bunch of people with the two weapons they had—a semi-automatic rifle and a pump-action shotgun—hopping back in the car, and then speeding off to the next target. They spent one day practicing with the shotgun and none with the rifle, though they did engage in martial arts exercises from time to time.

The three-man group seems to have come fairly close to actually committing violence: they appear to have decided on a date for the attack and had distinct targets in mind.

Their rather extravagant target list, largely compiled by the schizophrenic, began with a dozen or so military recruitment stations in the Los Angeles area. According to an FBI affidavit, “a check of these addresses revealed that all were, or had been, United States military recruiting stations in Los Angeles County.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, some of the targets on the list were no longer recruiting centers. The list also included various Jewish targets and a “military base” in Manhattan Beach.<sup>2</sup> According to the city clerk, this suburb of less than four square miles does not actually have anything that could be called a military base although, as she helpfully points out, it does have a State Army National Guard armory that is home to an engineering battalion, a support battalion, and a maintenance shop.

But the tiny group did have the will, the car, and the weapons. They planned to begin with a series of attacks on the military recruitment centers—targets, as Demetrius Daniels-Hill notes, of rather questionable value to them compared, for example, to places of public congregation. It is hugely unlikely they could successfully have attacked very many of these before being foiled—and they never seem to have considered this likelihood. Relevant here may be the experience of Little Rock (Case 19) where a terrorist shot two recruiters and was

<sup>1</sup> NEFA Foundation, “Target: America: The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets,” January 2008, 5.

<sup>2</sup> NEFA, “Target America,” 5; Jeffrey Cozzens and William Rosenau, “Training for Terror: The ‘Homegrown’ Case of Jami’at al-Islam al-Sahih,” *CTC Sentinel*, August 2009,

caught by police within 12 minutes. Even if they got away, it is likely all the recruitment centers remaining on their list would immediately be put on alert. But clearly they could have killed some people. The process by which such murders would inch them along toward establishing their Caliphate was not, it appears, deeply considered.

The plot was disrupted not by a terrorism investigation, but by ordinary police work. Short of the cash needed to purchase the rifle, the three man group carried out a set of gas station robberies. They had apparently convinced themselves that these had the added benefit of being expressive acts of terrorism against oil companies which are, of course, a symbol of U.S. oppression of Muslims. One of them managed to drop his cell phone at the last of these robberies, however, and the police were able to use it to find them and then uncovered evidence in their apartment of the plot and of their incarcerated inspiration, James, who has since had his sentence extended by sixteen years.

The case is often used by those voicing concern about the potential for terrorist radicalization in prisons, and Daniels-Hill joins in this concern. However, although James seems to have been fairly charismatic and did convert a number of fellow inmates to Islam, only one seems to have been inspired to seek to commit violence in the religion's name.

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### 1. Overview

Few cases of homegrown terrorism have come closer to implementation than that of Jama'at Ul-Islami As Sahih or JIS.<sup>1</sup> Four members of a terrorist cell in California were indicted on August 31, 2005 on charges of conspiracy to levy war against the United States government.<sup>2</sup> Kevin James, an African-American, was the founder and spiritual leader behind JIS. He was serving time in a California prison for armed robbery and had converted to Islam there, becoming radicalized in the process.<sup>3</sup> He then founded JIS and recruited several other inmates to join his terrorist organization.<sup>4</sup> The recruits participated in martial arts training before and after Islamic prayer services in the prison.<sup>5</sup> This was the only real training that occurred among the JIS members in prison. In an effort to increase his leadership credentials, James lied and claimed that he had trained in Sudanese terrorists camps with foreign radicals.<sup>6</sup> Since James was serving a long sentence in prison, he needed someone who could orchestrate and lead the terrorists outside the prison walls. James convinced one of the recruits, Levar Washington, to be the man who would coordinate JIS attacks once he was released on parole.<sup>7</sup> Washington swore a personal oath of allegiance or bay'at to James and agreed to never fall out of contact for longer than ninety days at a time.<sup>8</sup>

Once out of prison, Washington began to recruit other like-minded individuals to join their terrorist cell.<sup>9</sup> He met Hammad Samana, a Pakistani, and Gregory Patterson, an African-American, at the Jamaat-E-Masijudal mosque in Inglewood, California.<sup>10</sup> The same month the three men met, they acquired an apartment in south central Los Angeles.<sup>11</sup> Here they discussed US foreign policy and its harmful consequences for Muslims around the world, specifically the war in Iraq and the prison at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>12</sup> All concluded that the United States was hostile to Islam and that direct action needed to be taken. Samana took a

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<sup>1</sup> NEFA Foundation, "Target: America: The L.A. Plot to Attack U.S. Military, Israeli Government, & Jewish Targets," January 2008, 3.

<sup>2</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 1.

<sup>3</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Cozzens and William Rosenau, "Training for Terror: The 'Homegrown' Case of Jami'at al-Islam al-Sahih," *CTC Sentinel*, August 2009, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>6</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>7</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>8</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>9</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>10</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 2.

<sup>11</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>12</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

personal oath of allegiance to Washington and both Samana and Patterson promised to fight as mujahedeen or holy warriors.<sup>13</sup>

Once the three men were committed to carrying out terrorist attacks in the name of Islam, they began to follow the directions of the “JIS Protocol” and “Blue Print 2005”, pamphlets that James had authored in prison.<sup>14</sup> James directed his agents to strike at religious, political, and military targets in the United States.<sup>15</sup> In his opinion, these targets had received less attention than other parts of America’s national infrastructure such as electrical and transportation networks.<sup>16</sup> James directed Washington and his subordinates to acquire guns and explosives with detonators to attack targets of their choosing in California.<sup>17</sup> From the beginning there was no indication that the planned attacks were suicidal in nature. This is why James and Washington wanted explosives that could be detonated remotely once the bomb had been planted.

Washington realized that they would need money in order to purchase the weapons and explosives necessary to carry out their terrorist plots. He therefore directed Patterson and Samana to rob gas stations in southern California to finance their terrorist activities.<sup>18</sup> This served as hands-on training for Patterson and Samana, who had never before been involved in a criminal enterprise, and also allowed them to demonstrate their loyalty to Washington and to the JIS vision.<sup>19</sup> The pair robbed a dozen gas stations from May through June of 2005.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear exactly how much money the conspirators gained from the robberies but it was enough for Patterson to purchase a .223 caliber semi-automatic rifle on July 10, 2005.<sup>21</sup> Washington already owned a pump-action shotgun.

Following the directive of James to attack targets of opportunity, Washington selected several military and religious targets in southern California. Samana also authored a document called “Modes of Attack” which listed such targets as the El-Al ticket counter at Los Angeles International airport, sixteen different army recruitment centers with individual addresses listed for each one, the Israeli consulate, and a U.S. military base in Manhattan Beach. All of these targets were within a twenty-mile radius of the L.A. apartment that was their base of operations.<sup>22</sup> This list was approved by James, who communicated with the group through face-to-face visitations in prison and through letters that were smuggled in and out of the facility.<sup>23</sup> The attacks were to begin on September 11, 2005.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> NEFA, “Target: America,” 2.

<sup>14</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>15</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>16</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>17</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 21.

<sup>18</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>19</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>20</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>21</sup> NEFA, “Target: America,” 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 22.

<sup>23</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, “Training for Terror,” 23.

<sup>24</sup> Julia Davis, “Convicted Terrorists Living Next Door, Deadly Terror Plot Devised Inside California Prison,” examiner.com, January 28, 2010.

Firearms became the default weapon of choice because the group already possessed a semiautomatic rifle and shotgun and the weapons were easy to use and required little training.<sup>25</sup> In terms of assuring that the attacks were successful and minimized the amount of risk to the assailants, a quick raid with firearms was the best choice available to the terrorists.<sup>26</sup> They neither had the training or the materials for more elaborate plots involving explosives or other weapons.

The terrorist plot was foiled by the group's own carelessness: during their last gas station robbery Patterson accidentally dropped his cell phone, leaving it behind at the scene of the crime.<sup>27</sup> Authorities traced the phone to the apartment that JIS had been using as their base of operations where they found documents detailing the group's plans for violent jihad, posters of Osama Bin Laden, a bulletproof vest, and other contraband.<sup>28</sup> Washington and Patterson were arrested for the gas station robberies and also charged with conspiracy to wage war against the United States government.<sup>29</sup> The documents that authorities found on the computer in the apartment included "Modes of Attack," the target list written by Samana.<sup>30</sup> He was also arrested and confessed to robbing two gas stations.<sup>31</sup> Police also recovered a letter written by James to Washington, linking him to the plot.<sup>32</sup> Subsequent investigations would reveal how close the conspirators were to carrying out their plans and just how essential James' leadership was to the whole operation.

On March 6, 2009, Kevin James was convicted on charges of terrorism and sentenced by Judge Carney to sixteen years in prison.<sup>33</sup> In 2008 the same judge sentenced Levar Washington to twenty-two years in prison for his role in the conspiracy.<sup>34</sup> Gregory Patterson pled guilty to charges of conspiracy to wage war against the United States and conspiring to possess and discharge firearms.<sup>35</sup> He was sentenced to a prison term of 151 months or nearly thirteen years in prison.<sup>36</sup> Hammad Samana upon his arrest was evaluated for mental illness and was found to be schizophrenic.<sup>37</sup> He pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit terrorism and was sentenced to seventy months in prison.<sup>38</sup> His lighter sentence is due partially to his mental illness and partially because he played a lesser role in the conspiracy, contributing mostly by conducting internet research of prospective targets and acting as the getaway driver during the gas station

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<sup>25</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>26</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>27</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>28</sup> Rob Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy," Frontline, PBS.

<sup>29</sup> Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy."

<sup>30</sup> Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy."

<sup>31</sup> Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy."

<sup>32</sup> Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy."

<sup>33</sup> FBI press release, March 6, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> FBI press release, March 6, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Pipes, "Guilty Pleas By Would Be Los Angeles Terrorists," [Danielpipes.org](http://Danielpipes.org). August 26, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> FBI press release, March 6, 2009

<sup>37</sup> Pipes, "Guilty Pleas."

<sup>38</sup> Pipes, "Guilty Pleas."

robberies.<sup>39</sup> Although there were allegedly other people that James recruited to be apart of JIS, the main plot consisted of the efforts of Washington and his accomplices to successfully plan and execute terrorist attacks on targets in California. Once these men were arrested, the case was considered closed by the Department of Justice.

## 2. Nature of the adversary

The plot to attack targets in California took shape because of the leadership of Kevin James and Levar Washington. These men were able to forge a close bond ultimately because they could relate to each other's past life experiences. James was an African-American who had grown up in the inner city and was a member of the infamous Crips gang. He rejected the Nation of Islam teachings espoused by his father. James led a life of crime and was convicted in 1997 of armed robbery and sent to New Folsom County Prison. Once in prison he converted to Islam and became radicalized by reading the sermons of cleric Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo, and became convinced that Muslims were being oppressed worldwide by America and that the infidels needed to be punished.<sup>40</sup>

He formed a community of disaffected African-American former gang members who were now fellow inmates in the prison and converted them to radical Islam. This was the beginning of JIS as an actual organization. James radicalized these recruits and instructed them to learn Arabic, and to familiarize themselves with the Hadith of Jihreel, or the writings of Zarabozo. James also contributed his own writings on radical Islam and the necessity of jihadist action in the mostly theological "JIS Protocol" that he wrote in 1997. By all accounts, James became a deeply religious man whose piety and devotion were well known in the prison.<sup>41</sup>

Washington was likewise African-American and was affiliated with the Rolling 60's gang before he was sent to prison. He and James came from similar backgrounds and they likely connected because of this common history. Washington was impressed with James when the two men first met. He eagerly listened to all that James said about religion and converted to Islam shortly after entering the prison. James immediately recognized a kindred spirit who would be useful once he obtained his parole in November 2004. The personal oath of allegiance that both men took very seriously sealed the deal and the framework for a homegrown terrorist cell was established.<sup>42</sup>

The involvement of Samana and Patterson, recruited by Washington at the Inglewood mosque after he was paroled, is more of a mystery. Samana was a Pakistani national who was a legal resident in the United States.<sup>43</sup> He attended Santa Monica College and came from a family that was well adjusted to life in the United States.<sup>44</sup> Patterson was an African-American who also attended the

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<sup>39</sup> Pipes, "Guilty Pleas."

<sup>40</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>41</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>42</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>43</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 2.

<sup>44</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 2.

mosque occasionally. Neither of the men had a criminal record.<sup>45</sup> It would later be discovered that Samana suffered from schizophrenia.<sup>46</sup> Literature on terrorist networks suggests that youths who feel alienated from their larger community or marginalized by society will join terrorist networks for the sense of belonging and acceptance. It is quite possible that Samana and Patterson, although they had good lives, felt marginalized by society because of their status as minorities and were thus receptive to Washington's idea of jihad. Jessica Stern points out that acts of terrorism are often committed because of a perceived humiliation or injustice.<sup>47</sup>

Washington, then, was the only one of the three men operating in the cell who had any operational experience in breaking the law.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. Motivation

There is a wealth of information about the motivation of JIS to commit terrorist attacks because authorities recovered Kevin James' writings from inside the prison. Once James was radicalized by the preaching of clerics like Zarabozo, he took their intense rhetoric and propaganda and made it his own. James wrote over and over that Islam is locked in a holy war against the infidels of the west and supporters of Zionism.<sup>49</sup> As part of this, James reserved a special hatred for Israel and for the government of the United States and the United States military.<sup>50</sup> By all accounts, James truly believed in the need for violent jihad to fight against the perceived oppression of Muslims. He wrote in the JIS Protocol that Allah commanded Muslims to fight against non-believers.<sup>51</sup> James saw the struggle of JIS as only one part of a global jihad. He urged his followers to learn Arabic and to consider themselves to be members of the international Islamic community.<sup>52</sup> James stated in his writings that membership in this community of international jihad superseded the needs and the importance of the individual being.<sup>53</sup>

James was charismatic enough to establish JIS and to convince other inmates, including Washington, of the need for action. James, with his deeply radical convictions and personal charisma, was the driving force behind the entire operation. He wanted his recruits to learn Arabic and to recruit other potential members to the cause and to radicalize them to support jihad.<sup>54</sup> Washington turned recruited two disaffected and naïve younger men to the cause. At James' sentencing, the judge remarked that he was the mastermind behind the whole operation.<sup>55</sup> Kevin James was the main source of motivation for the JIS plot.

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<sup>45</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 2.

<sup>46</sup> Pipes, "Guilty Pleas."

<sup>47</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>49</sup> United States, Department of Justice, U.S. v James Exhibit Summary, 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>51</sup> United States, Department of Justice, U.S. v James Exhibit Summary, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>53</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>54</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>55</sup> United States, Federal Bureau of Investigation, press release for March 6, 2009

Although Washington was the only follower who ever truly acted to carry out James' message, he did so with a zeal inspired by his personal loyalty to James as his mentor. He was able to recruit Samana and Patterson after lengthy discussions about the war in Iraq and the prison at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>56</sup> On some level, all four shared the conviction that the infidels, chief among them being the United States, should pay for their crimes against Muslims. They saw themselves as soldiers in a global jihad, a massive clash of civilizations. The perception was that America was engaged in a war against Islam and needed to be punished was a conviction that all four men shared. They were ultimately ready to die in service to Allah if necessary in order to see that their plans carried out.<sup>57</sup>

#### **4. Goals**

James' two main goals were to establish an Islamic caliphate in the United States and to punish the U.S. for their crimes against Muslims. By establishing an Islamic caliphate, James could realize his goal of allowing Muslims to live under sharia law and not a secular state government. James considered the inability of Muslims to have self-determination in government to be a form of oppression.<sup>58</sup>

James saw his organization as part of a global jihad against the infidel. Like most terrorists, JIS planned to claim responsibility for any successful attacks they committed to bring attention to their cause and to strike fear in the hearts of the enemy. James wrote a pamphlet called "Notoriety Moves" in which he composed a sample letter that was to be sent to news stations after a successful attack had taken place. In the letter he urged his fellow Muslims to follow Sharia law or the community would enforce the law. He also warned Muslims not to associate themselves in any way with the intended targets of JIS, like the American military. He considered any Muslim who was a member of the military or any non-Islamic form of government bureaucracy to be his enemy.<sup>59</sup>

These threats against fellow Muslims indicate that James wanted a pure Islamic society based on the strictest of radical interpretations of the Koran. The fact that James harbored the same level of hatred for Muslims who he considered to be traitors as he did infidels speaks to his uncompromising level of devotion to jihad. Whether or not Washington and Samana and Patterson shared this level of devotion is irrelevant to the damage they could have caused had authorities not stopped the plot from unfolding. Washington's plea agreement acknowledged that the goal of his cell was "to kill as many people as possible who were present at the locations that they were targeting."<sup>60</sup>

#### **5. Plans for violence**

Kevin James had very specific plans for violence once he founded JIS. In "Blue Print 2005" he wrote extensively about the need for JIS members to maintain secrecy at all times because of the dangers of being caught by law

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<sup>56</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 21.

<sup>57</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 7.

<sup>58</sup> United States, Department of Justice, U.S. v James Exhibit Summary, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 8.

<sup>60</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 4.

enforcement. His members were to take the necessary steps to acquire firearms and explosives for use in the struggle against the infidels. They were to do this while appearing to the rest of the world to be ordinary American citizens. In order to better blend in with their community, James suggested his recruits should hold a steady job, obtain a driver's license, and to even marry if they so chose, all as a part of the cover the JIS members would need to plot without arousing suspicion. He also directed JIS members to avoid dressing or acting in a manner that would arouse suspicion or attract attention to themselves. He demanded that JIS members live by the religious guidelines of Dar al-Harb or living in the abode of war.<sup>61</sup> Even though he urged caution and secrecy so as not to arouse the public's suspicions, he still expected his soldiers to behave like true Muslims and to remain ideologically and spiritually pure. Strict adherence to the Koran and ideological purity were always important to James.

James had specific instructions for Levar Washington. Washington was to acquire two pistols with silencers for use in covert terrorist attacks. He was also to recruit five men without criminal records who would form the main body of the terrorist cell. He was to appoint one of these five men to establish contacts to acquire explosives with detonators that could be used in their future planned attacks.<sup>62</sup> Washington never acquired pistols with silencers nor did he ever acquire explosives or material for making a bomb. None of the conspirators had the technical expertise to know how to build or use a bomb and none of them made a serious attempt to gain this knowledge. Washington also failed to recruit five willing men, but the two that he found, Patterson and Samana, did fit James' requirement that they be free of a criminal record.

Once Patterson and Samana were committed to the cause, the group began plotting actual terrorist attacks. First they needed money to finance their plots. Washington, a former gang member, decided to raise money by robbing gas stations. The decision to rob gas stations served two purposes. On a practical level, it would allow the group to buy weapons and other materials from the proceeds. However, there are many different kinds of places that the terrorists could have robbed in order to obtain money. Washington told the court during his sentencing hearing that gas stations were chosen as the target because oil was a political symbol of U.S. oppression in the Muslim world.<sup>63</sup> In Washington's mind, a simple criminal act of robbing a gas station turned into a sort of mini-jihad when one framed it as an attack on a symbol of U.S. imperialism. Thus the conspirators considered themselves as, in a small way at least, avenging the oppression of Muslims worldwide by robbing gas stations in southern California.

They three men had a training exercise on July 4, 2005 at Kenneth Hahn Park outside of Los Angeles. This training exercise consisted of the three men taking turns shooting at fabricated targets with Washington's shotgun. This was the only time the group spent on firearms training. However, they did continue the

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<sup>61</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>62</sup> United States, Department of Justice, U.S. v James Exhibit Summary, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

daily ritual of physical training in martial arts that Washington learned from James while he was in prison.<sup>64</sup>

James had made it clear in his writings that the enemy was America, Zionism, and infidels more generally, and any Muslim who was sympathetic to their cause. Accordingly, the targets that Washington and the others chose fell in line with the rhetoric of the founder of JIS. The main targets included several military recruiting stations, a military base on Manhattan Beach, the Israeli consulate, and Jewish synagogues.<sup>65</sup>

Washington planned to attack the recruiting stations on September 11, 2005, and the synagogues on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.<sup>66</sup> The September 11 date was probably chosen for symbolic reasons to try and recreate the success that Al-Qaeda enjoyed in the attacks on the World Trade Center. Attacking synagogues during a Jewish holiday would also carry symbolic meaning and would ensure that there were many people in attendance, increasing the projected casualties. Choosing to attack a place of worship when it is known that many people would be attendance corroborates Washington's claim that the goal of JIS was to kill as many people at the selected targets as possible.<sup>67</sup>

Once the target list was approved, Washington and the others began preparations for the actual attacks. Washington's initial plan was to use bombs with detonators and firearms to attack the target and then escape before authorities arrived.<sup>68</sup> However, they never were able to acquire any explosives for use in their planned attacks.<sup>69</sup> More importantly, since they had no training with explosives, even if they would have been able to acquire the necessary materials it is unlikely that they could have utilized them effectively.<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, firearms—Washington's pump-action shotgun and the .223 caliber semi-automatic rifle they had purchased with the proceeds from their gas station robberies, became, by default, their weapons.

The actual plans for attacking the sites were not complicated at all. In an interview with a FBI agent, Samana describes that the plan for attacking the military stations was for Washington and Patterson to simply enter the building with Samana bringing up the rear. They would all begin shooting at whoever was in the building and then flee in the car that they had arrived in. The group planned to withhold taking responsibility for any attack until they had hit all ten recruitment centers on their list.<sup>71</sup>

There are several things worth noting. First, following the basic psychology behind all of the JIS' operations planning and propaganda, these were not suicide attacks. Second, it showed that the terrorists were willing to plan within their means. They had been unable to acquire explosives and therefore settled on what was familiar and on what they had available to them. Firearms

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<sup>64</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 7.

<sup>65</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>66</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 8.

<sup>67</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 4.

<sup>68</sup> Davis, "Convicted Terrorists."

<sup>69</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>70</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>71</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 4-5.

may be inelegant, but they are effective and do not require much training or skill to handle.<sup>72</sup> The less complicated the plan, the more likely that the attack will successfully inflict damage upon the intended target. It is not clear how all three men intended to participate in the attack when the group only had two guns. It is also important to note that besides the one day spent training in Kenneth Hahn Park there is no evidence that either Patterson or Samana knew how to handle a firearm. Also they had absolutely no combat experience; shooting at real people requires a different mental state than shooting at inanimate targets. However effective they would have been in an actual attack, it appeared that the group was dedicated to trying their best to carry out James' directive of violent jihad and they had an extravagant list of all the targets compiled by Samana.<sup>73</sup>

Although Samana and Patterson participated in the gas station robberies, none of these had ever turned violent. They had thus never been in a real combat situation. This brings into question their level of effectiveness had they actually carried out their plans to attack various targets in southern California given their near total lack of adequate training and experience.

Although the planned attacks were not suicidal in nature, Washington acknowledged in an interview after his arrest that they were ready to die for Allah if that became necessary.<sup>74</sup>

## **6. Role of informants**

There was no informant in this case.

## **7. Connections**

JIS made no efforts to contact other international terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda. They were a homegrown terrorist cell that was essentially self-radicalized and self-motivating because James was such a charismatic leader who had earned the personal loyalty of at least one of his prison recruits, Washington.

There is thus something of a discrepancy between James' emphasis on the importance of participating in a global jihad and the apparent lack of effort in seeking contact with international terrorist organizations. This contradiction is never explained by James or by subsequent investigations by law enforcement.

## **8. Relation to the Muslim community**

The group had no real meaningful connection with the Muslim community. They stayed isolated to fulfill James' requirement that they not attract attention to themselves for fear of being discovered by the police.<sup>75</sup> Critics would point out that Washington first met Samana and Patterson at the Jamaat-E-Masijudal mosque in Inglewood, California, possibly showing that that served as a symbol for terrorist recruitment within the Muslim community.<sup>76</sup> However, Samana and Patterson were not radical at all before they met Washington and the

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<sup>72</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 23.

<sup>73</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>74</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 7.

<sup>75</sup> Cozzens and Rosenau, "Training for Terror," 22.

<sup>76</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 2.

conversion did not occur till some time later. The fact that they met at a mosque seems to be mere coincidence and not evidence of strong ties between JIS and the Muslim community.

### **9. Depiction by the authorities**

At the time of the discovery of the apartment the authorities had no idea what they had stumbled upon. They quickly realized however once they discovered “Modes of Attack,” Samana’s list of potential terrorist targets. Once the investigation was wrapped up, John Miller, the FBI’s assistant director of Public Affairs, remarked, “I think if you look at the JIS case, of all of the terrorist plots since 9/11, it is probably the one that operationally was closest to actually occurring.” He noted that the group had already acquired weapons, had chosen targets, and had even set dates for when the attacks would occur. Los Angeles Police Department Chief Michael Downing said that the JIS cell was the closest thing to operational that America had seen since 9/11.<sup>77</sup>

Given that these events transpired before Major Nadal Hassan’s Fort Hood shooting (Case 25) and Faisal Hassan’s attempted Times Square Bombing (Case 27), the JIS plot was certainly the biggest terrorist scare at the time that our country had suffered since 9/11. Authorities took the matter extremely seriously judging by the scope of the subsequent investigation that involved over five hundred officers from over twenty-five different federal, state, and local police agencies.<sup>78</sup> If the justice department’s actions in sentencing the defendants is any indication of how the authorities felt about the seriousness of the plot, the defendants all received long prison sentences for their involvement in JIS.

### **10. Coverage by the media**

Given the seriousness of the potential damage that JIS could have caused and the grave assessment that authorities gave concerning how close the cell came to successfully completing their mission, I expected there to be much more robust news coverage of the initial arrest and indictments of the suspects. That I didn’t find much news coverage could point to the fact that the media either didn’t think it was much of a story or perhaps the authorities took measures to keep the story under wraps so as not to induce a panic.

One story by ABC News from August 16, 2005 is very informative and accurate in terms of the information provided. Interestingly, there are some discrepancies between what is reported in the article and what authorities would release months later after they had concluded their investigation. The article reports that Kevin James and his cellmate Peter Martinez were responsible for masterminding a terrorist attack from prison that was supposed to occur later that year. Subsequent investigations would focus solely on James’ role as founder and head of the JIS and the special relationship that he developed with Levar Washington that made the rest of the plot possible. The article correctly identifies military recruitment centers and Jewish synagogues as the anticipated targets in the planned attack. The article identifies Levar Washington as the other main

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<sup>77</sup> NEFA, “Target: America,” 3-4.

<sup>78</sup> NEFA, “Target: America,” 16.

conspirator and reports on his history with James and the fact that he became a converted Islamist radical after the two men met in prison. The article mentions the high-powered rifle that the men purchased and explains that Washington and Patterson were arrested after the string of gas station robberies. Patterson is not actually named in the article; he is simply referred to as Washington's "accomplice."<sup>79</sup> No mention is made of Samana or of the role that he played in the conspiracy.

Another story published on September 26, 2005, was also very fair in its approach to the facts. This story involved the indictment of James, Washington, Samana, and Patterson on formal charges of conspiracy to wage war against the United States government.<sup>80</sup> All of the information that the article contains is factually correct. The article basically contains an overview of the history of JIS and a brief synopsis of how Washington and Patterson were busted for the gas station robberies that led to the subsequent terrorism investigation.

The overall tone of these articles is not very alarmist in nature. The press was very responsible in their handling of the facts, they reported the facts as best as they could and did not sensationalize details or blow the threat out of proportion. In an article from March 7, 2009 detailing the sentencing of Kevin James, the reporter again handled the facts well without sensationalizing details. The article correctly reports that James was sentenced to sixteen years in prison for his role in the JIS plot. The rest of the article goes on to talk about the judge's reaction at the sentencing and James' apology for his actions.<sup>81</sup>

The media was very responsible in its handling of the JIS case. No one made an effort to blow things out of proportion in an effort to sensationalize the story. The information that was reported was accurate and up to date based on the information that the authorities had released at the time the articles were written. I am surprised at the lack of national coverage of the plot. Most of the reporting was done by local L.A. news stations and newspapers. There was little or no national coverage of the event that I could find.

## 11. Policing costs

For the most part the costs of the investigation that brought down the terrorists was not expensive. The investigation did, however, ultimately involve over 500 officers from 25 different law enforcement agencies.<sup>82</sup> Tipped off when Patterson left his cell phone at the site of one of the gas station robberies, authorities were led to the apartment that Patterson and Washington shared.<sup>83</sup> Local police in Torrance shadowed Washington and Patterson for two days following the tip and then arrested them while they attempted to rob a Chevron station in Fullerton, California.<sup>84</sup> There was no paid informant in the case or

<sup>79</sup> "Terror Plot Hatched in California Prison," ABC News, August 16, 2005.

<sup>80</sup> "Accused Terror Plot Mastermind Arraigned," ABC 7 KABC-TV, Los Angeles, September 26, 2005.

<sup>81</sup> Christopher Goffard, "Founder of prison-based terrorist group sentenced to 16 years," *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 2009.

<sup>82</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 16.

<sup>83</sup> Harris, "Kevin James and the JIS Conspiracy."

<sup>84</sup> "Accused Terror Plot Mastermind Arraigned."

lengthy FBI investigation prior to the arrests. The four men did not have lengthy trials with multiple appeals because they agreed to plea deals with the county prosecutor.<sup>85</sup> The policing costs associated with closing the case were minimal.

## **12. Relevance of the internet**

JIS searched the internet extensively when they were planning attacks on the various targets they had selected, and Samana used it to compose the list of targets including the military recruiting centers and the Israeli consulate. Samana and Patterson also used the internet to research information on the Israeli Consulate, including finding the names of individual officials who worked there. Samana also conducted research on Jewish holidays and on the location of Jewish synagogues in the area.<sup>86</sup> This is how they chose Yom Kippur as the day in October that they would attack to maximize potential casualties. Again it is curious to note that the internet was not employed to contact like-minded terrorist networks globally or to obtain any kind of training in explosives or other terrorist activities.

## **13. Are we safer?**

We are safer because the JIS plot was broken up. As authorities noted once the investigation was wrapped up, this was the closest that America had come to experiencing another attack since September 11, 2001. The terrorists had the weapons, information, targets, dates, and apparently the determination to see their plot through to the end.<sup>87</sup> By all accounts, the JIS plot was a substantial one that posed a real danger to public safety.

## **14. Conclusions**

Since the JIS case, the FBI and other government agencies have become increasingly interested in the radicalization of prison inmates and there is a substantial literature on this subject. In February 2005, even before the JIS arrests, FBI director Robert Mueller testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee that his agency was cooperating with state and local law enforcement to address the issue. Similarly, in September 2006, Donald Van Duyn, the Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI's Counter Terrorism Division, testified before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee that inmates can be influenced by imams and other radical inmates who preach a radical Salafi form of Sunni Islam. He noted trends in prison radicalization, contending that most cases appeared to be made up of homegrown extremists with few or no foreign connections, that there is a tendency of former gang members to be susceptible to the rhetoric of Islamist extremism, and that prison radicalization appears to be most prevalent among high population areas on the west coast and in the northeastern part of the United States. All of these trends came from a study that surveyed three thousand state and local prisons from around the country.<sup>88</sup> These

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<sup>85</sup> Pipes, "Guilty Pleas."

<sup>86</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 6.

<sup>87</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 4.

<sup>88</sup> NEFA, "Target: America," 12-13.

trends are seen in the JIS plot which features homegrown terrorists who were first radicalized in prison on the west coast after being former gang members.

Harvey Kushner discusses an excellent example of the vulnerability of prison inmates to the preaching of radical imams in his book, *Holy War On The Home Front*. He tells the story of a radical imam named Warith-Deen Umar who was a former head Muslim chaplain of all of New York State's prisons. This imam preached anti-western sermons to his converts and actively recruited other imams to do the same. Kushner asserts in his book that al-Qaeda recruiters actively look for converts in America's prison system because these men are likely to be disenchanted with their country's government. Kushner goes on to detail a secret Islamic recruiting network that is designed by terrorists groups like al-Qaeda to provide them with a supply of recruits who are eager for revenge and who are U.S. citizens and can therefore travel and interact with others in this country without arousing much suspicion. The JIS case consisted of a network of homegrown and self-radicalized terrorists and did not involve al-Qaeda or any other foreign terror networks. Kushner does bring up an interesting point when he discusses why prison inmates convert to Islam. He writes that Islam provided the inmates with an escape from prison violence, an alternative that was a community where members looked out for one another's spiritual and physical well being.<sup>89</sup>

It is quite plausible that the inmates who first listened to James' preaching in New Folsom Prison were interested for reasons very similar to the ones Kushner describes. In a sense, these men could have been replacing the street gangs they had belonged to with the religion of Islam and the sense of community and safety that being among other believers would have provided. Once race relations, economic systems that create an impoverished underclass, and a sense of hatred toward the government are created, it is plausible that James could have turned to Islam as an answer to why he felt oppressed by society and by the government in particular. In the wake of September 11, it is not implausible to consider that someone like James, with hatred in his heart and a hunger for revenge, could use radical Islam as his vehicle to hit back at his perceived oppressors.

Because of the near success that the JIS plot had and the startling realization that the plot was not only entirely homegrown but was also organized by a man who was in prison the entire time, prison radicalization will be a topic that the FBI and other agencies continue to monitor and investigate as the war on terror continues. That such a plot could begin and nearly succeed while being orchestrated from a prison cell is truly terrifying.

Some of Kevin James' goals such as establishing an Islamic caliphate are nothing but nonsense: it is obviously beyond the means of four conspirators to establish true Sharia law throughout the entire United States. But, had Patterson not been careless and dropped his cell phone at the gas station, there is no telling what could have happened. The JIS could have successfully attacked some of their targets, making them the first successful terrorist attack since September 11, 2001, and resulting in the potential deaths of innocent civilians.

More attention needs to be given to how James was able to orchestrate these

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<sup>89</sup> Harvey Kushner, *Holy War On The Home Front*. New York: Penguin, 2004, 36-43.

efforts while he was still in prison. Efforts to stop inmates from smuggling messages in and out to organize criminal activity need to be made by the authorities. In the meantime it is comforting knowing that the conspirators behind the JIS plot are all behind bars and that law enforcement agencies continue to vigilantly work to uncover all threats to national security both foreign and domestic.