

Prison systems breeding radical Islam

by UPI

RABAT, Morocco -- Preferential treatment for detained militants in Moroccan prisons highlights the influence the various jihadi movements have over authorities. Monday's New York Times cited the case of Ahmed Rafiki, known as the father of Moroccan jihadists, whose lush private gardens, radios and visits by his two wives in prison showcase the balancing act between counter-terrorism efforts and the influence of Islamic militants. Prisoners gain leverage over authorities through hunger strikes and protests and officials worry the increased freedom could make prisons breeding grounds for radicalization and recruiting for their cause. "More than any time in the modern history of terrorism, the prisons have become a key front in the war on terror," said Dennis Pluchinsky, a former intelligence analyst at the U.S. State Department. Arab governments are also feeling the pressure to hand out lenient prison sentences and mass pardons in an effort to subdue Islamic fundamentalist movement, the Times said. British diplomats and other representatives at a Moroccan conference on the radicalization of Islamic prisoners expressed concerns over dealing with the unique circumstances in an "overcrowded and underfinanced" prison system. Some said they see the increased access as a chance to inject moderate Islam to the increased militant population. "You have to fight their ideology with Islam and against their wrong interpretation of Islam," one Syrian security official said in the Times' article.

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