



## Prison poison

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Extremist chaplains' domination and intimidation of Muslim believers incarcerated in New York prisons remains a major problem. Worse, the state Department of Correctional Services (DCS) is fighting to *preserve* this dangerous status quo.

Last week's illegal-weapon charges against Warith Deen Umar, the former chief Muslim chaplain of the state prison system, were one sign. The raid this past weekend on his upstate home by NYPD counterterror cops was another.

Born Wallace Gene Marks, Umar – now 61 – was once an adherent of Louis Farrakhan, with the alias Wallace 10X. He began his activities as a prison chaplain in 1975.

Gov. Pataki barred Umar from the prisons in 2003, after The Wall Street

Journal reported that Umar had expressed support for the 9/11 terrorists – admitting that Muslims "who say they are against terrorism secretly admire and applaud" bin Laden's mass murderers. (According to Umar, the Koran doesn't forbid terrorism even against the innocent. "This is the sort of teaching they don't want in prison," he said. "But this is what I'm doing.")

But that was it – the state didn't do anything at all about the clique of radical clerics that Umar had installed during the more than 25 years he worked in the prison system.

The concern isn't simply about ideas – as last week's weapons charges against Umar attest. Police seized a 12-gauge shotgun, a .22-caliber rifle and computers in an apartment of Umar's on Union Avenue. The

counterterror raid on his Glenmont home confiscated more computers.

But the ideas make the weapons scarier. The extremists who maintain an ideological monopoly over Muslims in New York jails are guided by the totalitarian Wahhabi sect based in Saudi Arabia, which has paid for Umar to travel there and study the methods of radical propaganda.

Since 2003, I have been personally involved in the fight to end the Wahhabi dominance of Muslim religious life in New York's state prisons. I and my organization, the Center for Islamic Pluralism, have filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the case of *Orafan v. Goord*, in which a small group of Shia Muslims have challenged the state's practices in keeping radical Sunni chaplains on the job.

While radical Sunni terrorists in Iraq kill Shias, Wahhabi clerics implanted in New York prisons still preach hatred of other Muslims, all non-Muslims and America. Prison libraries are still full of Saudi-produced volumes promoting intolerance and violence, of the kind exposed in last year's Freedom House report on the infiltration of Saudi-financed ideology into America through mosques and schools (see the report at [freedomhouse.org](http://freedomhouse.org)).

Wahhabi imams also threaten and provoke violence against dissenters behind bars. One Shia plaintiff in the case had to request to be put in solitary to stop harassment of him by the Wahhabi clerics. Another

plaintiff was stabbed by another convict the night before depositions were taken in the Shia suit. The message was obvious: Shut up or get hurt, badly.

How irresponsible is DCS? Imagine my surprise, when I showed up for a recent deposition in the lawsuit, to find Umar among those questioning me. That's right – Gov. Pataki fired Umar, who's suing to get his job back – yet he's sitting with the state's lawyers in DCS's legal fight to retain all the radical clerics Umar hired over the years.

Officially, DCS says that any outsider's questioning of the actions of extremist prison imams is an unwarranted and improper disruption of the agency's functions. Yet its ally Umar seems to be arguing that my group, the Journal and others are engaged in a conspiracy to smear them all.

During that deposition, Umar accused me of using "Wahhabi" as a hate term comparable to the n-word. He also exposed his prejudice by accusing Bosnian Muslims of having left Islam – presumably because they don't follow Saudi dictates.

Right now, *Orafan v. Goord* awaits disposition in an Albany court. The issue is simple: Will the state take appropriate action to assure that a pluralistic form of Islam is taught to and supported among convicts – people already in trouble – or will it continue to *sponsor* clerics who incite convicts to cause more trouble, including potential terrorism?

DCS has been grossly irresponsible in failing to clean those who share Umar's radical views and crass manners out of the Muslim prison chaplaincies.

The hiring of radical imams in state (and federal) prison systems, and their imposition of a radical dictatorship over Muslim believers in

their charge, began long before 9/11. The prison authorities might have had an excuse in their ignorance of the conflicts between radical and moderate trends in Islam. But *four years* after the attacks – and two years after the Journal exposed Umar – the state bureaucrats' refusal to admit the problem of radical prison Islam is an outrage.