Prison guards give way to Islamists

**Behind the story**

Dominc Raab was met with repeated shouts of "Allahu akbar" by prisoners circling the small exercise area at HMP Woodhill in Milton Keynes, dubbed Britain’s toughest jail by the justice secretary himself (Matt Dathan writes).

The shouts were soon drowned out by the barking of two alsatians straining at their leashes as Raab waited to be let into the "jail within a jail" that is home to four of the most dangerous ideological terrorists in the country.

It was not a comfortable visit for the justice secretary, who used it to highlight a crackdown on the treatment of terrorist prisoners by expanding the use of the separation centres that are used to stop jails becoming breeding grounds for terrorism.

Even as deputy prime minister he was not exempt from the searches conducted on all visitors to Woodhill. He grimaced as a female prison officer frisked him, with no part of his body untouched.

The only outdoor area those in the separation centres have access to — for a maximum of an hour a day — is an area of breeze blocks half the size of a football pitch. Three immovable pieces of exercise equipment and two small benches are the only items.

The prisoners are allowed to socialise only among themselves, with the help of a pool table, table football, table tennis and a TV.

Walking through another series of high-security doors and corridors, Raab was led into one of the two close supervision centres that hold Britain’s most physically violent prisoners.

About 20 violent offenders, most of whom have committed murder in prison, are in the centre at Woodhill. These include Charles Bronson, known as Britain’s most violent prisoner, and Michael Adebowale, one of Lee Rigby’s killers, The Times understands.

Prisoners in the centre are largely kept apart. Those allowed to socialise can play board games such as Scrabble or Ludo. Otherwise they must make do with books.

**Ministers to tighten terror jail loopholes**

Domnic Raab, the justice secretary, on a visit to HMP Woodhill this week from attending Friday prayers because they were not Muslim, or imposing conditions on entry, such as removing their shoes.

Inmates had appointed their own "emirs" on wings who undermined the authority of prison imams, the inquiry found. Jonathan Hall QC, the government’s independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, said he had been told that prison officers sometimes appealed to the wing “emir” to help maintain order among inmates.

Extremists used sharia courts to administer punishments such as flogging and made “insinuere allegations of racism and Islamophobia” when challenged. This had weakened the ability of staff to stop the expanding control of terrorists over prison activities because they "worry about making false assumptions based on a lack of cultural familiarity with Islam or Muslims”.

In response to Hall’s report, which will be published today, Dominic Raab, the justice secretary, has pledged to stop prisoners using “cultural and religious sensitivities” to exert control over other prisoners and staff. This will include drawing up a new code for staff that will protect them when identifying "terrorist risk behaviour" and regular training on spotting signs of terrorist activity.

Raab has also announced a significant expansion in the use of separation centres to protect the rest of the prison population from the most dangerously ideological prisoners to stop jails becoming breeding grounds for terrorism. The process for referring prisoners to the centres will be streamlined by reducing the seven steps it now takes from a prisoner being referred to a centre and being approved.

The government’s overhaul of the Human Rights Act will prevent prisoners using Article 8 rights to a private life to claim their rights to socialise are being breached by putting them in separation centres.

Only nine terrorists are held in the separation centres in England and Wales at present, despite there being 28 cells available across three prisons. Among them are Hashem Abedi, the Manchester Arena bomb Plotter, at HMP Frankland in Co Durham.

Hall’s inquiry was launched after a spate of terrorist attacks carried out by ex-prisoners radicalised behind bars.

Sudesh Amman, 20, a convicted terrorist who boasted in prison of a desire to kill the Queen, become a suicide bomber and join Islamic State, stabbed two people in Streatham, south London, ten days after his release.

Three months earlier Usman Khan, 28, killed two people at a prisoner rehabilitation event inside Fishmonger’s Hall at London Bridge.

Speaking on a visit to HMP Woodhill, where Michael Adebowale, the Woolwich barracks killer, is held, Raab said: “The risk of terrorists and extremists poisoning the well inside prison, not just plotting what they might do on the outside, has grown and changed. We need to nip in the bud and be much more decisive earlier on in confronting coercive and controlling behaviour.”

**Isolation for worst offenders**

The prisoners are being accused of racism and Islamophobia that Muslim critics of anti-terror efforts, letters, page 30