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Sept. 11 Follow-Up Panel Says FBI Needs to Improve Terror Tracking

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A panel led by a former member of the 9/11 Commission said the Federal Bureau of Investigation has failed to carry out promised improvements for tracking terrorist threats, and former commission members may reconsider their recommendation that responsibility for domestic intelligence remain with the FBI.

The panel, the first of at least eight to be held through the summer, is part of a drive by the former commissioners to see that their recommendations for intelligence reform don't fall by the wayside. It reported that both domestic and international intelligence efforts still fell far short of what the commission called for, with the FBI particularly hamstrung by a failed attempt to implement a computer system, a hidebound culture in field offices that continue to resist emphasis on domestic intelligence, and rapid turnover of supervisory personnel.

The former commissioners also confirmed that they are seeking extraordinary powers for a group with no official government status. Group spokesman Al Felzenberg said the group plans to send a letter to the White House in the next few days seeking permission to obtain detailed information from the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Department and other federal agencies on steps taken to address terrorist threats.

Though the 9/11 Commission officially ceased to exist after issuing its final recommendations in July, all 10 commissioners have continued to work jointly for their implementation through the 9/11 Public Discourse Project, a private entity funded by such foundations as the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Yesterday's review focused on how far the FBI and CIA have gone to overhaul their operations. The panel was headed by former 9/11 commissioner Jamie Gorelick, a top Justice Department official in the Clinton administration. It included former Attorney General Richard Thornburgh, who recently was chairman of another group that examined the FBI's efforts to improve counterterrorism efforts; John Gannon, a former veteran CIA official who recently served as staff director for the House Select Committee on Homeland Security; and Chitra Ragavan, a reporter who writes about the Justice Department and FBI for U.S. News & World Report magazine. The CIA and FBI came in for criticism during commission hearings last year, for shortcomings that the final report said contributed to the failure to detect and prevent the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

The commission had considered several drastic recommendations related to the FBI, including taking away its responsibility for monitoring terrorism and giving it to a new domestic intelligence agency. Based on assurances from FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III that big strides were being made, the commission in its final report backed away from such options and recommended allowing Mr. Mueller to proceed.

Ms. Gorelick said many promised changes never occurred. Of special concern is the FBI's failure to replace its paper-based record keeping with a computer system. Last year the bureau said its computer project was well on the way to being implemented, but in March Mr. Mueller said it wouldn't work, and the system was scrapped at a cost of more than \$100 million. The effort was restarted from scratch, and is years from being able to give agents easy access to case records, and to be able to swiftly share data with other agencies.

FBI Assistant Director Cassandra Chandler rejected the panel's criticism. In a statement last night she said that "by building our intelligence capabilities, improving our technology and working together, we have and will continue to develop the capabilities we need to succeed against all threats."

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