

REMARKS BY CHITRA RAVAVAN, US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT

9/11 PUBLIC DISCOURSE PROJECT: CIA & FBI REFORM

JUNE 6th, 2005

Thank you very much for having me and thank you to the Public Discourse Project as well.

Clearly the 9/11 attacks and President Bush's mandate to the FBI to prevent terrorist attacks, rather than just be a crime-solving agency, has created somewhat of a battle for the soul of the FBI and it's very unclear at this point who's going to win.

Trying to get FBI agents to think like spies is turning into a much more difficult task than Director Mueller even anticipated. There's still considerable resistance, we found through our reporting, among FBI agents to this new mandate: putting counterterrorism at the top of the priority list.

There are many who believe that, just like communism and the Mafia, that some day Al Qaida might be a thing that they may have conquered and moved on to other challenges. And I think it's Director Mueller's big task to try push home the point that Islamic fundamentalism is something that the agency and bureau has to fight for the next few decades, if not longer.

Deputy Attorney General James Comey recently likened the culture of the FBI to the Marine Corps: that agents spend 20, 30 years in the bureau, and he said that the culture sets like concrete, and to change that is very, very hard.

And I think you can, sort of, see some of the challenges that Director Mueller is facing in trying to transform the FBI into a terrorism-preventing organization if you look at some of these facts.

I did some reporting over the weekend in preparing for this, and it's my understanding that the bureau has 200 unfilled counterterrorism positions right now -- agents and analysts -- and they're having great difficulty filling them partly because there is great resistance among agents to having to move to Washington -- since so much of the terrorism work now is at headquarters -- and that they really resent the director's efforts to try and move them where the needs of the bureau are. So there are 200 counterterrorism positions that still are waiting to be filled.

The Virtual Case File, to my understanding, is going to prove to be an even bigger disaster than has been acknowledged so far. And I think that as that unravels, you're going to really get some sense of how big a challenge the FBI faces in resolving one of the central criticisms that it confronted after the 9/11 attacks, which is how to modernize its information technology.

Director Mueller told us in the course of our reporting for a recent cover we did -- we asked him, "You know, you're four years into your tenure and the Virtual Case File is a complete catastrophe. And you're saying now that you'll be dealing with this in '04, another two or three years -- and it will be another two or three years before a replacement system is in place. Did you ever think you would deal this seven years into your tenure?" And he said, "I will be dealing with this all 10 years of my tenure."

But that doesn't answer the question of whether the information technology problems will be resolved when he leaves, if he's still dealing with it at the end of his tenure.

So I think that's a very candid and revealing comment that he made.

The Directorate of Intelligence, which was created despite Mueller's resistance -- it was Congressman Wolf's idea, and he pushed it through when the 9/11 Commission was putting enormous pressure on the bureau as a way of salvaging the bureau's domestic intelligence mission -- the directorate is also facing enormous struggles in creating a cadre of intelligence analysts, training them, training the agents and analysts who are involved in these field intelligence groups and, also, to set up a very efficient form of intelligence reporting to other agencies and sharing information.

And I think that the directorate's relationship with the DNI, John Negroponte's shop, is going to be the source of a considerable amount of friction and power struggle in the coming months, and will also determine, to some extent, how successful the bureau is in changing its priorities.

Just a few other quick things.

There is some question as to whether the director's own management style has prevented him from getting bad news, such as the Virtual Case File collapse, and how much of that is contributing to some of the problems that he has in turning the bureau around.

And also, information sharing with other agencies such as DHS -- while information sharing has gotten to be considerably better, a lot of police officers, for instance, tell us that the biggest challenge they face is getting the FBI to share information with DHS and getting DHS to share it with them, because they don't trust this relationship because of this incredible rivalry and turf wars between the two agencies.

They're unclear as to how much information is being shared. And they also believe that, to a large extent, the FBI still is a very stovepiped system where information is highly compartmentalized. And I think that's something we should probably talk about, as well.

Again, thank you very much.