

U.S. Intelligence Still Years From Reform Goals

By DAVID MORGAN, REUTERS

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U.S. intelligence will need several more years to achieve the level of security laid out in a 2004 reform law intended to protect the United States from another Sept. 11-scale attack, Bush administration officials say.

The forecast appears bleaker than the prediction to the Sept. 11 commission nearly three years ago by the CIA director at the time, George Tenet, and was due partly to a lack of seasoned spies and analysts that can be deployed around the world, they said.

Forty percent of the CIA's employees were hired after the 2001 attacks on Washington and New York killed 3,000 people and prompted the Bush administration's war on terrorism.

One in seven CIA employees has been on the classified payroll for one year or less, far short of the five year minimum that intelligence officials say is necessary to produce an effective spy or intelligence analyst.

"That presents challenges as well as opportunities," said one official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The effectiveness of intelligence reform surfaced this week at a hearing of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

A written statement to the committee by the office of U.S. intelligence chief John Negroponte said the 16 agencies that make up the espionage community have produced "good results" but suggested that security objectives would not be met until early in the next decade.

"We strive to ensure this progress continues, but several more years will be needed to fully achieve the goals of (reform legislation) and other proposals," it said.

In April 2004, Tenet suggested that an intelligence effort capable of tackling the terrorism threat could be in place by early 2009.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 ushered in sweeping reform that sought to follow recommendations from the Sept. 11 commission and congressional inquiries into faulty prewar Iraq intelligence.

The law established Negroponte's position to forge a new coordinated intelligence front running the gamut from local law enforcement to the CIA and National Security Agency.

But critics say the office of the director of national intelligence has simply become a new bureaucracy of about 1,600 people.

"There is a concern on the committee that these high level efforts have not yet had an effect at the agency level," said Sen. John Rockefeller, the West Virginia Democrat who chairs the intelligence panel.

Officials say the intelligence community is still struggling to recover from post-Cold War cutbacks in the 1990s intelligence that forced U.S. espionage to withdraw from countries including Afghanistan, which became an al-Qaida haven.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, resources were withdrawn from regions including Latin America to help cope with demands for intelligence on Islamist militants and Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Now Darfur and Somalia have joined the list of intelligence priorities, and despite a dramatic upswing in espionage funding, the government still does not have enough assets to monitor the globe as it did at the height of the Cold War.

"We need to get the intelligence community back to what I call 'global reach.' We don't have that today," Mary Margaret Graham, Negroponte's deputy for intelligence collection, told the committee.

"We have got to have processes in place that allow us to lift and shift our resources when we need to," she said.