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Bush's toothless war against terrorism

The Vice President called for many improvements in counterterror operations. Why were so few adopted?

"I wrote the antiterrorism report for this government. It is the best antiterrorism report written."

—George Bush

September 25 presidential debate.

Vice President Bush may be proud of the document he authored in February, 1986, but the administration has ignored it almost as much as it has heeded its recommendations since it was handed to President Reagan. The most flagrant dismissal of Bush's recommendations, which were crafted in the aftermath of the June, 1985, hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in Lebanon, came when the administration traded weapons for hostages in the Iran-Contra affair. But interviews with key counterterrorism officials in the Pentagon, CIA, State Department and FBI have revealed that at least 22 of the 42 recommendations of the Bush report have never been fully implemented. Intelligence sources complain that the administration has failed to carry out major policy changes that could have helped in the fight against international terrorists. The fact that so much of his work was never treated seriously by his own administration raises new questions about Bush's leadership capacities.

U.S. News has reviewed a classified copy of the panel's full list of recommendations, and here are some of the key proposals that were never enacted:

■ **Get more spies and informants.** The Bush report called for expanding human intelligence gathering against terrorist



A question of follow-through: Presenting the report to the President

groups, specifically citing the need to make greater use of an elite counterterrorist unit within the Pentagon. It was not done. Instead, the role of the Pentagon commando group touted in the Bush panel has been severely curtailed in the past two years, and no other unit or program has filled the void.

■ **Send commandos overseas.** Bush also urged that counterterrorist forces be placed abroad near likely sites of terrorist attacks. No such posts have been created.

■ **Create a centralized analysis center.** Bush asked for an "intelligence-fusion center," to collect, analyze and distribute intelligence data throughout the government. The comprehensive facility envisioned in the report has not yet been established. Intelligence sources say that, while the CIA has established a counterterrorism center, officials from the other agencies have been stymied in

trying to get information and, in some cases, they have been unable to get the CIA to accept their intelligence.

The Vice President, in a letter to Ronald Reagan last year, gave this account of the task force: "Progress has been excellent . . . [but] in a few cases—usually requiring the cooperation of foreign governments—our final objectives have not yet been attained." On other fronts, Bush's defenders say he should be given credit for policy changes that were made, such as tougher antiterrorism laws. In the intelligence community, however, reaction to the administration's lack of attention to its own report is scathing. "They made their big splash and then left the water," says one senior counterintelligence expert. "There was no follow-up. The report was a farce." ■

by Steven Emerson