

## **Inquiries Into Failures of Intelligence Community Are Put Off Until Next Year**

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 22— Congressional leaders have agreed to delay until next year any major investigation into the government's failure to prevent the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, citing the need to give the administration time to focus on the war in Afghanistan and the global effort to destroy the Qaeda terrorist network.

The Democratic chairman and the ranking Republican on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said they had agreed to forgo an immediate inquiry into the performance of the nation's intelligence and law enforcement agencies before the Sept. 11 attacks.

**Senator Bob Graham, the Florida Democrat who heads the intelligence panel, said in an interview that it would not be appropriate to conduct such an investigation at a time when the government's focus is on prosecuting the war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. [Emphasis added]**

**Senator Richard C. Shelby, an Alabama Republican and vice chairman of the panel, agreed, saying a Congressional investigation now would divert senior intelligence and law enforcement officials from the war on terrorism. [Emphasis added]**

**House leaders, including Representative Porter J. Goss, the Florida Republican who is the chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, have also agreed to wait until next year for such an inquiry, officials said. Mr. Goss could not be reached for comment. [Emphasis added]**

Both senators said they had been in touch with the White House about the issue and said there was now a broad agreement to put off any Sept. 11 inquiry. They added that there had been discussion of a possible inquiry by a blue-ribbon presidential board separate from those expected to be pursued by Congress. A White House spokesman said, however, that it was "premature to speculate" on any plans for a presidential investigation.

Senator Graham said that he believed a wide-ranging investigation was necessary but that it was premature to conduct one now.

"It is very important that there be a thorough and thoughtful investigation, looking at a wide range of issues -- intelligence, law enforcement, immigration and domestic preparation," he said. **"But just a few weeks after Sept. 11 is not the time to do it."** [Emphasis added]

**Senator Shelby added: "We are not going to do it until next year. It has to be well thought out and well prepared to be worthwhile."** [Emphasis added]

In fact, while the schedule has been delayed, there seems little doubt that a major inquest -- like those that followed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor -- into what went wrong on Sept. 11 is inevitable.

Warren B. Rudman, the former Republican senator who is now the chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, said senior officials in the Central Intelligence Agency and

other intelligence agencies had made it clear that they would like more time before any Sept. 11 post-mortems are begun.

"The agency's and the entire intelligence community's view is that considering what's going on right now, that it would be an enormous demand on the time of their leadership, and it would be a distraction, and I agree with that," Mr. Rudman said.

Mr. Rudman, who was appointed to the advisory board by President Bill Clinton, said the panel had no current plans to conduct an inquiry, even though its main function is oversight of the intelligence community. Mr. Rudman is the only current member on the advisory board, since the Bush administration has not yet filled the vacancies left by the expiration of the terms of other Clinton-era members.

Mr. Rudman is due to be replaced as chairman of the board by Brent Scowcroft, a retired general who served as national security adviser in the first Bush administration, but Mr. Scowcroft is so closely identified with the Bush family that Congressional leaders and other officials said it would be difficult for him to conduct an investigation that would be considered objective and credible.

"I would suggest that if the White House does something, it should be a new blue-ribbon commission, with people who are not tied to anybody," Senator Shelby said. "I respect General Scowcroft, but he was tied to the Bush administration."

Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which oversees the Justice Department, said his panel would also not conduct a Sept. 11 investigation until next year. But Mr. Shelby said that was only because the committee had too much other business to conduct first, including a hearing to question Attorney General John Ashcroft about administration actions to give law enforcement officials greater powers in the fight against terrorism.

"Nobody has talked to me about holding off," Mr. Leahy said, "but just mechanically, we can't get to it until next year. But we will look into it."

**A no-holds-barred investigation into intelligence lapses could be perilous for Republicans and Democrats alike. If the inquiry focused on why the United States did not take the threat from Osama bin Laden more seriously before Sept. 11, officials from the Bush administration and the Clinton administration could find themselves on the defensive.**

**The Clinton administration could face questions about its response to the August 1998 bombings of two United States embassies in East Africa by Al Qaeda. The Bush administration could face scrutiny for failing to take aggressive action earlier this year against the terror network after the October 2000 bombing of the destroyer Cole in Yemen.**

**As a result, leading lawmakers want to avoid hearings that could easily slide into partisan finger-pointing.** *[Emphasis added]*

"The blame game doesn't fix the problem," said Representative Jane Harman, a California Democrat and ranking member of the new Intelligence Subcommittee on Terrorism Homeland Security. "One could argue that not enough was done during the eight Clinton years, and in hindsight of course that's true. But not enough is still being done, and we're already two months after Sept. 11. I don't intend that as a comment blaming the new crowd. But shame on us all."