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Lawmakers urge Bush to release Sept. 11 information

By [LARRY LIPMAN](#)
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

WASHINGTON -- Lawmakers from both parties called on the Bush administration Thursday to release more information about the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

During testimony before the independent National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, witnesses and panel members also questioned the reliability of intelligence about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

"All of us are extremely frustrated that the declassification process is taking so long," said Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla., who chaired the Senate Intelligence Committee last year. The congressional panels completed their work last December and have been waiting for the Bush administration to allow the report to be released.

Among the recommendations the committees made, Graham said, is that the role of foreign governments in supporting terrorist activities should be further explored. Graham said he was particularly concerned with the role of Saudi Arabia, where 15 of the 19 hijackers were from.

"This commission, in my judgment, should vigorously pursue the links between foreign governments and the Sept. 11 hijackers," Graham said. "Ignoring facts simply because they make some people uncomfortable, or because they might stand in the way of short-term policy, will prevent Americans from learning the full truth about Sept. 11."

The commission's second public hearing into the events surrounding the attacks on New York and Washington came amid reports that the Bush administration is reviewing U.S. intelligence assessments of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction under Saddam Hussein's regime.

"If, in fact, we find out that this was an intelligence failure, that ... statements that (Secretary of State) Colin Powell made before the United Nations were, in fact, not true, and that (lapses) in intelligence had resulted in what would be a major embarrassment and a further straining of our international relations ... I think the intelligence agency will be subject to great questioning and criticism," Graham said.

Asked whether he believes the Bush administration intentionally misled the public into believing that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in order to justify the war, Graham said, "I think we have to know what was the intelligence that was submitted to the president?"

"Where did it come from -- the Defense Department or the CIA -- and would a reasonable person have relied on that intelligence and reached the same judgement that the president did that there were massive weapons of mass destruction stores inside Iraq?"

Prior to the war, there was reportedly a split among intelligence sources, with the CIA questioning the link between al-Qaida and Iraq while the Defense Department suggested a closer relationship.

Former Sen. Max Cleland, D-Ga., a member of the commission, said he was troubled by the reports about the intelligence reassessment.

"We went to war, now we have (the question of) inadequate intelligence," Cleland said. "Were we right? Where are the weapons of mass destruction?"

"It does seem to me ... that this commission better get on with its business ... and the sooner the better we come to terms with connecting the dots, improving the intelligence capabilities of this country so that when we go to war somewhere, we don't have to look back and say 'did we have the right intelligence?'"

Cleland said he never understood why the various intelligence agencies were referred to as the "intelligence community."

"I never really understood who was in charge. Apparently, now no one is in charge. It's a horse built by committee that winds up being a camel," he said. "We still have a camel out there."

Lawmakers who led the effort to establish the 10-member independent commission headed by former Gov. Thomas H. Kean, R-N.J., chided the administration for not releasing the final report of the joint House and Senate Intelligence committees and urged it to provide certain National Security Council records -- which had been denied to the congressional panels -- to the commission.

Access to National Security Council records "will be central to (the commission's) ability to move beyond what we already know," Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. told the commission. "I hope the administration will not abuse the principle of 'executive privilege to deny the commission this critical repository of day-to-day activity on issues related to the terrorist attacks."

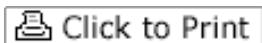
Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., said the administration's refusal until recently to allow commission members to see the congressional committees' report has hindered the panel's work, which is scheduled to be completed a year from now.

"The Bush administration has not acted cooperatively," Lieberman said. "You don't have much time. If you're constantly forced to fight for information, you'll never get to the heart of the problems that plagued, and in many cases, still plague our government's fight against terrorism."

Graham and Lieberman are both declared candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination.

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