



United States is open to attacks by terrorists, report warns

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WASHINGTON -- Bureaucracy, antiquated technology and a lack of coordination among government agencies combating nuclear, biological and chemical weapons have left the United States vulnerable to terrorist attacks, according to a report that will be issued next week.

The report, by a commission appointed by Congress, urges that Vice President Gore, head of the White House's "reinventing government" campaign, take the lead in efforts to streamline and improve security.

In an executive summary of the report, the panel, chaired by former CIA director John Deutch, says that despite "a grave threat," the U.S. government "is not effectively organized to combat proliferation."

The document also says "a new strategy focused not just on prevention, but also on combating all aspects of proliferation," is needed.

Henry Sokolski, executive director of the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center and a member of the commission, says current policies are not ambitious enough.

"We do not have truly effective strategies that pit our strengths against proliferators' weaknesses," he says.

"We must go further," he says.

Nearly 100 agencies are charged with tracking terrorists; monitoring weapons production by rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea; tracking the diversion of nuclear technology by disgruntled Russian scientists; and stopping the transfer of weapons technology to China.

Responsibilities among 96 government agencies involved overlap, such as between the Commerce and State departments.

"The federal government is a morass," says Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., vice chairman of the panel he helped create in 1996 when he chaired the Senate Intelligence Committee. "Nobody's in charge."

Drawing upon the panel's full report, the *Baltimore Sun* reported Thursday that the commission found that the Pentagon, despite spending billions of dollars on detection technology, still can't identify thousands of chemical and biological threats.

Intelligence agencies were taken to task for failing to predict India's nuclear test in May 1998. The FBI, the report says, lacks technical expertise to investigate crimes involving chemical and biological agents as well as the intelligence savvy to counter post-Cold War threats.

The commission recommends that the White House create a national director for combating proliferation to formulate policy and coordinate various efforts in the government.