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TECHNICAL FLAWS HINDER TERRORIST WATCH LIST; CONGRESS CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION

(Washington, DC) - Today, the Chairman of the **House Science and Technology Committee's Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee** sent [a letter](#) to the Inspector General of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) requesting an investigation of the technical failure and mismanagement of one of the government's most important counterterrorism programs.

The "Railhead" program was intended to improve the terrorist watch list and enhance the integration of U.S. terrorist intelligence from the nation's 16 separate intelligence agencies as recommended by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States or 9.11 Commission. In addition, it was supposed to provide an integrated information infrastructure that government counterterrorism analysts could rely on to identify current and future terrorist threats and possibly predict and prevent the next terrorist attack. Situated at the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) the "Railhead" program was the celebrated superstar of the NCTC's most promising and important counterterrorism programs.

Yet the program appears to be on the brink of collapse after an estimated half-billion dollars in taxpayer funding has been spent on it. In recent weeks, the majority of more than 800 private contractors from



of Railhead to help repair the technical design flaws and improve government oversight. A [Subcommittee staff memo](#) to Chairman Miller detailed many of these problems.

"This is a critical national security program that has been plagued by technical design and development errors, basic management blunders and poor government oversight," said **Chairman Brad Miller (D-NC)**. "The program not only can't connect the dots, it can't find the dots."

Railhead was intended to update and enhance the National Counterterrorism Center's terrorist intelligence database called TIDE or Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment that provided the backbone of the FBI's consolidated terrorist watch list. It was also supposed to improve two related information technology programs at the NCTC, TIDE Online (TOL), an unclassified version of the TIDE database and NCTC Online (NOL), a classified repository of terrorist information and finished intelligence reports from across the government's intelligence community that is accessible to counterterrorism analysts.

The Railhead program had been undergoing an internal technical implosion for more than one year. But public statements and sworn public testimony to Congress from senior officials within the NCTC and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) never revealed the mounting technical troubles, poor contractor management or lax government oversight that appears to have been endemic throughout the program and has led to Railhead's colossal failure. Astoundingly, the Director of NCTC and the Director of National Intelligence have both specifically pointed to TIDE and NCTC Online as hallmarks of the government's information sharing accomplishments.

Last February, the Director of National Intelligence, J. M. McConnell and his Chief Information Officer, Dale Meyerrose, issued a report outlining the U.S. Intelligence Community's "Information Sharing Strategy." The report emphasized that "time is of the essence" in improving information sharing among intelligence agencies and said: "The tragic events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated that the United States needed greater integration across the Intelligence Community and improved information sharing to respond to evolving threats and to support new homeland security customers."

Furthermore, it boasted, "NCTC has developed innovative solutions, including NCTC Online and Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, to increase information sharing and collaboration in support of the counterterrorism mission."

Yet internal Railhead documents paint a very different and troubling picture of these programs. Not only do existing technical impediments drastically hinder the ability of the current TIDE database to operate effectively and efficiently, but the planned design and development upgrade to TIDE, Tide Online and NCTC Online have come under intense criticism within the Railhead program. This analysis has shown that the planned upgrades to these programs would actually *diminish* not improve their capabilities, limiting the ability to share terrorist intelligence data among federal agencies and crippling the ability of counterterrorism analysts to conduct searches of these databases.

Most disturbingly, the Subcommittee understands that tens of thousands of potentially vital CIA messages flowing into NCTC have not been properly processed, reviewed or included in the existing TIDE database.

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made to other NCTC information systems.

"The collapse of the Railhead program appears to be the result of poor technical planning and design, potential contractor mismanagement and inadequate government oversight," said **Miller**. "These same problems have emerged again and again on government programs as millions of dollars in taxpayer funding is squandered. At some point the government needs to learn how to manage its technology programs so that they actually perform as advertised. This episode is particularly disturbing since we are talking about the safety and security of 300 million American citizens," Miller added. "I have asked the Inspector General to investigate this program thoroughly and recommend potential lessons learned for future government programs. We can't just keep making the same mistakes again and again."

For more information or to view the [letter](#) please visit the [Committee's website](#).

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