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THIS MAN IS PUSHING SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES IN THE BUREAU'S HISTORY. THINK HE'S A POPULAR GUY?

XING THE FBI

BY CHITRA RAGAVAN

On a cold January day two years ago, FBI Director Robert Mueller strode into the executive briefing room of the bureau's state-of-the-art command center in the J. Edgar Hoover Building in Washington. Mueller had invited reporters for a special demonstration of a supposedly revolutionary records-management software package called Virtual Case File. VCF, as it is known inside the bureau, was intended to allow agents in the 56 field offices, more than 400 smaller regional offices, and dozens of liaison offices at U.S. embassies abroad to share investigative leads and reports and connect to government terrorism databases quickly and efficiently. Dressed in his usual button-down white oxford dress shirt, Mueller delivered a bravura performance. There was only one small glitch, when the system crashed for a few minutes. The glitch, however, would prove to

be an unfortunate omen.

Today, after nearly four years and \$170 million, the Virtual Case File system has all but been junked. And despite a series of post-9/11 reviews of the FBI's anarchic computer systems—unworkable, antiquated machines that contributed to the bureau's failure to “connect the dots” before the terrorist attacks—there is no hope of fielding a replacement system for VCF for at least another 3½ years. In a wide-ranging interview in his elegant conference room on the seventh floor of the Hoover Building,

“I'm impatient to make this even a better institution.”

ROBERT MUELLER,
FBI director

Mueller, a highly regarded former federal prosecutor, conceded that the VCF system was plagued by a series of management failures at FBI headquarters. “If you give me a criminal case, my area of expertise,” he said, “I can sit down and tell where it's going to go and what the likelihood of winning a trial is. . . . [But] you put me down with a software package, given my background, I'm not going to be able to tell



you how it's going to shake out.”

The failure of the VCF system, not surprisingly, has raised questions among some of the FBI's congressional overseers and bureau watchers about whether anyone—even someone with Mueller's acknowledged credibility and commitment—can guide the FBI through the

most wrenching changes in its nearly 97-year history. “That's an organization where the culture is very, very fixed, more so than a place like the Marine Corps,” says Deputy Attorney General James Comey. “Unlike the Marine Corps, most people spend 30 years at the bureau. The culture sets like concrete over 30 years,

and to change that is very, very hard.”

Hard, even for a decorated ex-marine like Mueller. “I've come to find that one of the most difficult things one has to do,” he said, assessing the challenges he has encountered since assuming the directorship just a week before the 9/11 attacks, “is to bring an entity through

THE CASE OF THE ORPHANED PDAs

Some FBI insiders say Director Mueller's ambitious initiatives are often undercut by the people running the engines of the bureau—the powerful finance division, human re-

sources, information technology. Even today, FBI field agents and officials at headquarters, including in the press office, are unable to send and receive E-mails consistently,

despite repeated complaints. The bureau's conversion to a supposedly more efficient hiring system called QuickHire has been disastrous, leaving hundreds of support positions unfilled. And the hiring of agents, ana-

lysts, and translators is excruciatingly slow. A senior Justice Department official says Mueller is aware of the problems. “I know that Bob is very frustrated by the bureaucracy there and the pace of hiring and stuff like that,” this official says. “He thinks it's byzantine.”





BUSTED. Practicing arrest techniques at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va.

the development of a change of business practices.”

Changing any large bureaucracy is difficult, but at the FBI it is especially so. Mueller’s challenge is at once simple—and enormous. It is nothing less than the transformation of a big, tradition-conscious police agency (which was really an

interlocking series of 56 powerful, quasi-independent fiefdoms) into a forward-leaning, fast-moving intelligence agency. Today, the premium is not so much on busting bad guys after they commit a crime but on spotting terrorists and stopping them before they attack. That’s not just a whole new mind-set. It means creating a new infrastructure to assess threats, communicating that information rapidly through a far-flung network of agents, offices, and executives, and sharing it with analysts and operatives outside the FBI—all things the bureau has never done especially well.

Mueller, often referred to as “Himself” by subordinates, because of his widely acknowledged lack of self-doubt, is an avid student of management theory. One of his earliest initiatives was to require all FBI executives to take management courses at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Ill. The program, participants say, has been a nearly universal success. But Mueller isn’t kidding himself. As a former federal prosecutor and former acting deputy attorney general, Mueller has watched and worked with the FBI for many years. The 9/11 attacks, Mueller says, administered a unique shock to the bureau’s insular, change-resistant culture, making it easier for him to sell veteran agents and managers on the need to reorient their focus from that of a reactive law-enforcement agency to one of a proactive intelligence bureaucracy. Still, Mueller says, fidgeting with a pen at the head of his polished oak conference table that seats probably 40, “if you read any of the management books, they’ll tell you that when you’re trying to bring an institution through a transformation, 30 percent will be with you, 30

percent will be in the middle, and 30 percent you won’t bring along.” Given the bureau’s unique responsibilities, those percentages, if they apply, give even some bureau boosters reason for pause. “All you can do every day is come in and put one foot in front of another,” says Maureen Baginski, who heads the FBI’s new Directorate of Intelligence, “’cause if you start to think about it, you might just run, you know. It’s a lot of work, but I have nothing but confidence.”

Good news, bad news. The failure of the VCF system offers a glimpse into the difficulties facing anyone intent on casting the FBI into a radically different model.

“As you know, senator,” Mueller told Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who is the ranking minority member on the Senate Judiciary Committee, which oversees the work of the FBI, “in a bureaucracy this size, one of the problems is that people want to bring you the good news. They don’t want to bring you the bad news.”

“The culture sets like concrete.... To change that is very, very hard.”

JAMES COMEY,
deputy attorney general

When it came down to the VCF matter, FBI and Justice Department officials say, Mueller wasn’t especially keen to hear the bad news. “I’ll be honest with you. I think he was so hopeful the software was going to work,” says Mueller’s chief information officer, Zal Azmi. “*Nobody* could believe that after three years and all of this money that we didn’t have it.” Justice Department Inspector General Glenn Fine warned congressional committees last May to view Mueller’s promises on the VCF with great skepticism. “He was overoptimistic,” says Fine, “about when the VCF project would be completed.”

Some FBI officials say the VCF mess shows just how much the senior leadership tends to withhold bad news from Mueller. “He is so isolated and shielded,”

Case in point: BlackBerries. Months ago, the FBI bought about 3,000 BlackBerry personal digital assistants to fulfill Mueller’s goal of creating a giant global Internet cafe. But FBI officials say IT managers went with a “nickel and dime” server.

FBI sources say Mueller’s

chief information officer, Zal Azmi, said he didn’t have the money to hire contractors to load the security packages and deploy the BlackBerries. The result: Hundreds of BlackBerries remain unpacked in boxes. “He [Mueller] has lofty ideas, but there’s no follow-

through; the finance people whittle it away,” says one source. Then, citing the same lack of funds, Azmi came close to allowing the BlackBerry contract to expire March 1, causing great concern. It isn’t just a question of E-mails or making calls. At some key airports,

for instance, FBI special agents carry “no fly” lists and terrorist watch lists on their encrypted BlackBerries. Bureau officials staved off the crisis by piggybacking onto another contractor. “They’re trying to band-aid it,” says an FBI source, “through the summer.” —C.R.

says one FBI official. Bureau insiders point to the culture in which the director is “like God,” and where the higher one climbs the management ladder, the riskier it is for the “palace guard” to alienate the boss. “The top guys around him,” says this official, “there’s no way they were going to tell him the bad news because VCF, it was his baby, and no one was going to say, ‘Your baby’s ugly.’”

Mueller knows all too well how easy it is for the person at the top to become isolated, but that danger is probably more real for him than for a *Fortune* 500 CEO. One reason is the head-spinning exodus of top-tier executives—five officials have held the top counterterrorism job since 9/11; five others held the top computer job in 2002–2003 alone. The VCF project had no fewer than 10 different project managers who redrafted the terms of the contract 36 times, according to congressional sources. Some inside the FBI attribute the brain drain to Mueller’s demanding management style. Whether that’s the case or not, the director’s job requires killer hours—for himself and for those work for him. Mueller is typically in his office by 6 a.m. to be briefed by the graveyard shift of analysts and managers who collect and analyze new threat information. Mueller briefs the attorney general by 7:30 a.m. Then both men head to the White House to brief President Bush by 8:30 a.m. A second Mueller briefing between 4 and 5 p.m. means that even noncrisis days stretch to 12 or 14 hours for Mueller’s bleary-eyed executives. “I don’t see it as a career anymore,” says FBI Deputy Director John Pistole. “It’s a calling.”

If there is a flaw in the way he manages the FBI, Mueller responds, it is probably his pedal-to-the-metal drive. “I tend to think I’m probably fairly demanding in terms of people knowing what they’re talking about,” Mueller said. “One of my failings is, I’m impatient . . . to provide support to the agents, to provide the latest technology to make this an even better institution, and that probably, in some cases, is a hindrance. But you know, I can’t think of an executive who I could think would be intimidated by me.”

Mueller’s impatience is certainly understandable. U.S. intelligence officials are convinced that al Qaeda is determined to mount another major terrorist attack on America. Which is precisely why, Mueller says, the FBI must master the threat-assessment challenge as quickly as possible: “My concern is and will always be that which we do not know—those persons in the United States who have not come to our attention, as much as we are searching

and looking for them, who may be poised to undertake an attack. In the same way that those who came in [on] September 11 were somehow underneath the radar and were poised to attack.”

“High marks.” At the FBI, the result of the attacks is the revolution Mueller is



A CHAT WITH THE MAN TO SEE

FBI Director **Robert Mueller** met with U.S. News & World Report Editor **Brian Duffy** and chief legal affairs correspondent **Chitra Ragavan** in his conference room on the top floor of the J. Edgar Hoover Building to discuss his efforts to transform the bureau into a proactive organization that can identify terrorists and stop them before they strike.

. . . I think we’ve made substantial progress in building our counterterrorism efforts,

and by that I mean the prioritization—the understanding that it’s a national priority that has to be managed and directed from headquarters, although the individual information gathering, information collection has to be done by agents and field offices.

On overcoming resistance from FBI agents who want the bureau to remain a traditional crime-fighting organization:

There are always going to be agents out there who think we ought to have stayed in

the war on drugs, that we shouldn’t have shifted those resources, that we ought to be doing what we traditionally have done in a number of arenas. It could be bank robberies, it could be government fraud, it could be war on drugs—and they’ve done them for a period of their career, and it will be very difficult for some of them to change.

On the bureau’s finding that most of the potential terrorists in the United States are primarily engaged in fundraising activities rather than running active operational cells:

I think, without a question of doubt, there are individuals, either by themselves or aligned with others, who are supportive of terrorist philosophy, theology, and engage primarily, at this point

struggling to complete. He has reduced the autonomy of the old field-office fiefdoms and centralized all major terrorism investigations at the Hoover Building while diverting hundreds of agents from working the bureau's traditional missions of drugs and white-collar crime

and assigning them to newly created counterterrorism squads.

The new intelligence directorate Mueller has created is staffed with 5,000 linguists, analysts, special agents, and support staff who collect, analyze, and disseminate intelligence. Mueller wants

to expand the bureau's reach into the far corners of world, creating a "global FBI" to better track potential terrorists overseas before they can strike here. Before 9/11, despite a spate of terrorist attacks going back to the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, counterintelligence had long been considered a stepchild within the FBI, the big promotions and the lion's share of the operational dollars going to the old Criminal Investigative Division. Mueller has made it clear those days are over—and not coming back.

Transformation. The results aren't all in yet, of course, but the signs of progress are there. A two-year study just released by the National Academy of Public Administration, chaired by former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, found that the FBI is "making substantial progress in transforming itself into a strong domestic-intelligence entity, and has the will and many of the competencies required to accomplish it." President Bush's new attorney general, Alberto Gonzales, credits Mueller's continued pushing for the results. "I have total confidence in Bob Mueller," Gonzales says. Fine, the Justice Department's inspector general, though critical of Mueller's handling of the Virtual Case File system, nevertheless says he is impressed by Mueller's progress. "I think he is moving the FBI in the right direction,"

CHARM OFFENSIVE.
Chatting up Thomas Kean,
the chair of the 9/11 panel



in time perhaps, in fundraising, recruiting, and perhaps in some level of training.

Now that does not mean that they are not poised to undertake operations . . . My concern is and will always be that which we do not know.

On whether the Virtual Case File failure indicates that he has become isolated:

Hopefully not. It is a challenge in any organization not

to be isolated. And it's something you always have to fight.

On his management style and whether his demeanor discourages his executives from bringing him bad news:

That's a charged question. I, you know, I mean, I'm probably different things to different people. I tend to think I'm probably fairly demanding in terms of people know-

ing what they're talking about. And give me the facts, I . . . one of my failings is I'm impatient, I'm impatient . . . to provide support to the agents, to provide the latest technology to make this even a better institution, and that probably, in some cases, is a hindrance. But you know, I can't think of an executive who . . . I could think would be intimidated by me.

And . . . I mean, the fact of the matter is you've got to move forward. And part of it comes from my background. You know, the Marine Corps . . . I took away some lessons from that. In every position I've had, I've had some people who are OK and some people who don't like the way I operate. Often there are people who are used to operating in a different way. And when I come in and have my own way of doing things that's . . . that's not the way they like things to be, but I try . . . I listen hard, and move quickly.



NEWBIES. Rookie agents being sworn in after training at the FBI Academy

says Fine. On Capitol Hill, one of the FBI's most aggressive overseers agrees. "Overall, I would give Mueller high marks," says Rep. Frank Wolf, a Virginia Republican. "He has transformed the FBI in a very difficult time."

Not everyone, of course, is pleased. Over the past three years, FBI executives, including Mueller, delivered hundreds of optimistic briefings on VCF to members of Congress and their staffs. The software failure has resulted in the erosion of confidence in Mueller's willingness to be candid about setbacks and obstacles. Sen. Judd Gregg, a New Hampshire Republican, called VCF "a very significant failure." Wolf, the Virginia Republican, says he's "personally disappointed" by the VCF fiasco and has launched an investigation. Democrats, if anything, are more critical. "It would indicate that he is being taken over more and more by the FBI's culture of not recognizing mistakes," Vermont's Leahy says of the earlier FBI testimony about VCF. "The director came in with so much goodwill on the part of both Republicans and Democrats, and that goodwill is just being thrown away."

On the job. For Mueller, such criticisms are not just unusual but unprecedented. For years, Mueller has been

the Teflon man, who has not only managed to keep the FBI's problems well under wraps, with an iron grip on media access, but has also generated enormous admiration from virtually all quarters of official Washington. "There's not much in life that I'm completely sure of," says Comey, the deputy attorney general. "But I'm sure that Bob Mueller is smart and honorable."

One intelligence official marvels at what he describes as a "cult of devotion" to Mueller. "After giving up a lucrative

white-collar crime practice to work homicide cases in the U.S. attorney's office in Washington, D.C., Mueller served as Attorney General John Ashcroft's acting deputy before he agreed to take the FBI job. Just after a successful fight against prostate cancer, Mueller had barely moved into his office when the first plane struck the north tower of the World Trade Center. "To those of us who were working the case intensely," says former Justice Department counterterrorism official Stuart Levey, now the

Treasury Department's under secretary for enforcement, "he gave the impression that he was put on Earth to do this job at this time."

But it wasn't long before the bureau was buffeted by criticism over its failure to identify and stop the 9/11 hijackers. Suddenly, Mueller was forced to two-track his leadership, overseeing the 9/11 investigation while trying to beat back efforts to take away the FBI's domestic intelligence-gathering mission. Using every bit of his personal charisma, doggedness, and political savvy, Mueller managed to convince the 9/11 commissioners that he was already on track to change the FBI without their urging a drastic overhaul to President Bush. Commission sources say



"We're not dealing with our father's FBI; it's *our* FBI."

GARY BALD, *counterterrorism chief, FBI*



DODGING A PECK OF TROUBLE

Down the line, Bob Mueller's greatest contribution to the FBI may be that he preserved its credibility on one highly controversial aspect of the war on terrorism. After the 9/11 attacks, when American forces began capturing Taliban and al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan, Mueller made a key decision: He refused to allow his agents to be present at

any of the interrogations by the CIA and military personnel at secret locations around the world and at the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The decision angered FBI agents who had worked on previous terrorism investigations involving some of these same shady characters—including Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the self-proclaimed mastermind of

the 9/11 attacks. But in hindsight, Mueller's decision has proved prescient. While the CIA and the military are under fire for the alleged use of torture against detainees, FBI agents have been praised for trying to bring attention to the controversial interrogation techniques, in numerous memos to the FBI. "Mueller has sent pretty clear messages down the FBI about the unacceptable nature of torture," says Anthony Romero, executive director of the

GUANTANAMO. Detainees at the U.S. Navy base in Cuba

American Civil Liberties Union. "It's probably the one bright hope in this entire torture debacle."

Mueller has been criticized, however, for being evasive with Congress about when he learned about the torture allegations. As to whether he tried to draw attention to the problem with the president, Mueller told *U.S. News*: "Well, I'm not going to get into that." —C.R.

Mueller met with them more than did *any* other agency head or official. "Mueller understood his job was on the line," says a former commission staffer. "And he understood better than CIA Director George Tenet did that whatever we were going to say, people would listen."

Mueller's efforts paid off, but not without difficulty. Representative Wolf told Mueller that the only chance for the FBI to survive more or less intact was by creating a "service within a service"—a new intelligence directorate inside the bureau staffed with well-trained, well-paid, career-track intelligence analysts who would focus on terrorist threats and look for clues to the next attack. Mueller, Wolf says, "was not supportive." Instead, the director told members of Congress and the 9/11 com-

missioners that he wanted *total* discretion in how to reform the bureau. Some commissioners, impressed by Mueller's recititude and credibility, were inclined to agree. But others resisted, and in the end, Wolf's idea of an intelligence directorate, presented first to Mueller as a *fait accompli* and then to the commissioners as a Mueller-Wolf proposal, became the only major recommendation for changing the FBI contained in the 9/11 commission's final report. "It was a vote of confidence in Mueller," commission executive director Philip Zelikow told *U.S. News*, "and we intended it as that."

Cops and robbers. Now, some 9/11 commissioners wonder if that confidence was misplaced. "He knows how to play the system," says one commissioner, "how to play Congress, and he certain-

ly worked the 9/11 commission." Commissioner Timothy Roemer says there's a lesson in the experience. "When you are doing oversight of the FBI," he says, "you really have to try to separate your respect for Director Mueller from evaluating in a fair and objective manner the FBI's performance during his tenure."

In contrast, the commission slammed the CIA and Tenet for their handling of pre-9/11 intelligence, causing tremendous resentment in the agency. "It's not that we minded them not being held accountable for their mistakes," says a former senior CIA official, "it was just that we grew tired of *us* being held accountable for them." Tenet and many on his staff were apoplectic at what they believe was disinformation provided to the commission that it was the CIA's fault for not

sharing information with the FBI about some of the September 11 terrorists; instead, they blame the FBI's balky record-management systems. "For too long, the FBI was a data-free zone," says the former senior CIA official. "Amazingly, because they had no data, their dubious recollections were accorded the status of proof." Mueller's supporters say the director just did his job. "It's the mark of a great leader," says a senior Justice official, "that Bob was able to steer his organization through all that unscathed."

Such bad blood raises questions about how much Mueller can fulfill his goal of integrating the FBI's intelligence mission with that of the broader intelligence community. Many in that community say the FBI can never change its cops-and-robbers mind-set. "Turning cops into covert agents," says the former senior CIA official, "is like asking choir girls to become call girls."

Some veteran intelligence officials question the quality of analysis the FBI is providing, saying it's often substandard—something Mueller emphatically denies. "I've seen a lot of intelligence products over the last 3½ years," Mueller responds. "I think our products are the equal of those that were put out by the rest of the community at this point in time and, in some cases, better."

Today, Mueller is working with CIA Director Porter Goss on a memorandum of understanding to better delineate and coordinate the FBI and CIA's intelligence-gathering activities in the United States and abroad. But FBI and intelligence sources say Mueller's efforts have been slowed in part by the intelligence community's instinctive distrust of Maureen Baginski. Mueller recruited her to head the Directorate of Intelligence from the National Security Agency, which collects signals intelligence through spy satellites, not human intelligence from sources. Intelligence officials say they're concerned that Baginski is still struggling to hire, train, and retain analysts, draft key policy agreements, and navigate the FBI's insular culture.

In such a contentious environment, it's no surprise there



BUM LEADS. The FBI alerted authorities in Boston to be on the lookout for these four Chinese nationals, calling them suspected terrorists. The information came from an uncorroborated tip and later was proved false. A key complaint of FBI agents is the directive to pursue every lead.

would be some flashpoints. One recently involved a veteran FBI agent assigned to a presidential commission investigating the flawed intelligence on weapons of mass destruction that led to the war in Iraq. The agent removed from the commission's secure space a classified CIA document critical of the FBI's intelligence-gathering efforts and handed it to FBI officials, who copied and distributed the document. Furious, commissioners asked Mueller to remove the agent from the commission and fire her from the bureau. Mueller refused. The agent has since been reassigned, pending an internal investigation.

In the clubby world of law enforcement, Mueller enjoys great credibility among police chiefs across the country. But state and local police, and homeland security and intelligence officials say that although the FBI has come a long way in its efforts to share information, it still has a long way to go. "There is still a huge gap between what they know and what they report," says a senior intelligence official who works closely with the FBI. "For every two pages they report, there's another 15 or 20 pages they don't want to provide." Some officials say the FBI is still hugely compartmentalized, a series of information stovepipes. When a lead comes in that crosses internal bureau boundaries, these officials complain, the FBI's bureaucratic instinct is still to create a task force and set it up in the bowels of the Hoover Building, promise to work with other agencies—and then shut them out entirely. This is especially true, these officials say, in terrorism cases. "Interviews happen, the FBI investigates, and there is the black hole," says the senior intelligence official. "With 14,000-plus investigations going, the FBI should be able to tell us in a more comprehensive fashion about where our threats exist—[terrorist] cell structures in the U.S. and

North America, emerging threats, and where we need to be looking."

Such opinions are anything but rare among intelligence officials. "Mueller has checked out on counterintelligence," says a senior counterintelligence official. "The FBI is over *here*, the rest of the counterintelligence community is over *there*." Mueller says he has greatly beefed up the counterintelligence and counter-terrorism programs. "There's, quite obviously, still a lot of work to be done," he says, "but I think we've made substantial progress . . . and by that I mean, the prioritization—the understanding that it's a national priority that has to be managed and directed from headquarters."

Mueller's big challenge outside FBI headquarters has been to win over his own agents. Many have not warmed to him because of his unflinching demand for instructional change. Others complain about his ap-

"I have total confidence in Bob Mueller."

ALBERTO GONZALES, *U.S. attorney general*

parent willingness to move them wherever it's necessary to meet the bureau's investigative needs. "He's more heartless than Hoover," grumbles one supervisory special agent. "He's not overly concerned about our personal lives."

The failure of the Virtual Case File system, once again, offers a window on Mueller's relationship with the rank and file. "When will the honeymoon be over?" asks one FBI official, regarding Mueller's perceived lack of accountability in Washington. "This is something you promised

The FBI's counterterrorism chief, Gary Bald, says that there has been "tremendous rallying" around the new intelligence-driven priorities. "We're not dealing with our father's FBI; it's *our* FBI," he says, adding that if headquarters has erred in any way, it has been in failing to trumpet what he characterizes as the many untold counterterrorism successes with all of the troops in the field.

Mueller understands that, in a fundamental way, this is a battle for the soul of the FBI. "There are always going

ism tip and lead be investigated thoroughly and aggressively. But almost none of the many thousands of tips and leads the bureau has pursued since 9/11 has resulted in criminal prosecutions, although FBI officials say they have been invaluable from an intelligence perspective. "Agents want to fish in a pond where there are indications of fish," says a retired agent. "That's the problem. How do you keep action-oriented people energized and focused and challenged looking for a needle in a haystack?"

Increasing the frustration, some FBI officials say, is the fact that, in the past year, the quality of the tips and leads received by the FBI and other agencies has declined significantly. Many, agents say, are false alarms generated by petty criminals and illegal aliens to exact revenge on rivals. "It's problematic," says the retired special agent. "It's very labor intensive, and it produces a lack of focus on initiatives and forces you to become fundamentally reactive."

Perhaps to address such concerns, or perhaps because the pressure from the 9/11 commission has finally relented, Mueller has been telling his executives recently that he wants to see more cases generated from the criminal division. But the director has also made it abundantly clear that terrorism will always be the FBI's No. 1 priority, and today's

FBI agents have little choice but to accept that verdict or to wait him out. In an odd way, one that many in the FBI still obviously don't get, Mueller's intransigence may be the thing that helps the world's pre-eminent law-enforcement agency survive intact well into the 21st century. "I don't think agents on the street sufficiently appreciate the impact of even one more successful attack on U.S. soil," says the retired agent. "If Mueller did some of the things that they would like to have him do to get back to business as usual, and then there was another domestic [terrorist] event

for which the bureau was blamed and Mueller was fired and the bureau was disassembled, they'd say, 'Damn, what happened?'" ●

With research assistance by Carol Hook



CONNECTED? Inside the Hoover Building. Technical setbacks still bedevil the FBI.

us on your watch." Many agents are angry that the director required them to get VCF training before the technology was ready, an edict some supervisors quietly ignored. "Maybe Mueller believed it was coming," says an FBI official. "But most of us had no faith in it. Many of us thought, 'There's *no way* he can't know this.'"

In the battle for hearts and minds, such issues, in the end, probably count for less than Mueller's insistence that FBI agents move from traditional crime-fighting work to counterterrorism investigations. Some veteran agents complain that the FBI is losing valuable sources, expertise, and relationships with police by walking away from its traditional missions. "I think if we become a terrific intelligence agency, we're one of 14 others," says one bureau official. "If we're the FBI, we're like none other."

to be agents out there who think we ought to have stayed in the war on drugs," Mueller says, "we shouldn't have shifted those resources, that we ought to be doing what we traditionally have done in a number of arenas. It could be bank robberies, it could be government fraud . . . and they've done them for a period of their career, and it will be very difficult for some of them to change."

Tip fatigue. Some FBI officials' objections to the new counterterrorism work are more than just philosophical. Mueller has insisted that every terror-

"I think he was ... hopeful the software was going to work."

ZAL AZMI, chief information officer, FBI