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Ashcroft tightens Justice control over FBI on misconduct allegations

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Ashcroft

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Attorney General John Ashcroft Wednesday tightened the Justice Department's control over the FBI by giving his Inspector General jurisdiction over allegations of FBI misconduct.

Ashcroft's order also extends to allegations against DEA agents.

Previously, the offices of professional responsibility of the FBI and DEA had jurisdiction over such misconduct allegations.

The move comes in the wake of a series of congressional hearings to determine whether the Justice

Department is sufficiently policing the FBI. For decades, the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover maintained substantial autonomy within the Justice Department.

Officials at both the FBI and Justice Department said cooperation has improved significantly in recent years, but acknowledge tensions continue between FBI investigators and Justice Department prosecutors.

Former FBI Director Louis Freeh's public dispute with his boss, then Attorney General Janet Reno, over whether to appoint an independent counsel in the Democratic campaign fund-raising investigation fueled Justice Department complaints of an independent FBI.

The latest flap which prompted calls for increased control of the FBI was the bureau's failure to provide government and defense lawyers all of the documents from the Oklahoma City bombing investigation prior to the trial of Timothy McVeigh, who was executed in June.

In a brief statement, the Justice Department said the expansion of the Inspector General's authority was designed to provide "consistency" throughout the department. Misconduct allegations in other Justice agencies, such as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the U.S.

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Marshals Service, are already under the control of the Inspector General.

9 "This action now gives the Office of Inspector General the same authority to investigate misconduct allegations against employees of the FBI and DEA, that the Office of Inspector General has with respect to all other components of the Department of Justice, thereby promoting consistency in the disposition of such allegations," Ashcroft said in the written statement.

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