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# Multinational force eyed to fight terrorists

By William Beecher  
Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - A task force created three months ago to recommend a more effective policy for combating international terrorism is actively exploring the idea of forming a full-time multinational force that could move quickly to rescue hostages or preempt planned acts of terrorism, well-placed sources said yesterday.

"We may come up with four or five countries that might be willing to earmark specially trained and equipped personnel for fast reaction in a crisis," said one source who is familiar with the work of the task force.

"It would be much easier politically to have an international response than just a US response. International terrorism would be declared an international crime,

with an international response force set up to deal with it."

The task force was announced by President Reagan during the TWA hostage crisis in late June, with Vice President George Bush put in charge. It is scheduled to report its conclusions and recommendations to the president on Dec. 20, sources said.

Members of the task force will soon travel to Western Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. They will discuss with government security experts the problems each nation confronts, its methods of countering threats and whether any of them would be interested either in joining a standing multinational counterterrorism unit or establishing bilateral arrangements for joint operations with the United States in those situations where the two

countries share a common purpose.

"It would be useful to have an international organization that could constantly exchange information and have the ability to quickly preempt a terrorist operation by rushing in to make arrests or whatever else was appropriate," one official said. "We've already discussed it with some foreign leaders. There is interest. But there are also problems."

For one thing, the official said, a nation which joined such a force would not have the right to veto an operation, but presumably

could withhold its own unit from a mission it objected to.

Another problem could arise, he said, if a nation on whose soil the unit proposed to operate asked that certain nations not take part.

## Political sensitivities

For example, another source said, when the TWA plane was in Algiers the first time, Algeria conceivably might have permitted a counterterror team to try to surprise the three original hijackers before they were reinforced at Beirut, but might have made it a condition that certain nationalities not participate, because of political sensitivities. For example, if Israel was part of the counterterror organization, Algeria presumably would not want its operatives on its soil.

Sources said the task force is circulating some 50 issues throughout the Executive Branch, asking for recommendations on how to handle them.

One such issue is whether to create a new post of special adviser to the president on counterterrorism. His function would be to monitor the performance of all the agencies involved in the process,

including the State Department, the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. If a problem arose among them, he could go to the president with a recommendation on how to resolve it.

"Israel has a special adviser to the prime minister for just that purpose," one source noted.

## "Make-or-break issues"

Said a senior official, "The two make-or-break issues are to what extent we can get international cooperation and follow through, and whether a consensus can be arrived at in the US on the sticky questions of preemption and retaliation."

Preemption refers to moving to break up a planned assassination, for instance, before it can take place, if solid intelligence was developed in advance. But if a multinational team moved in to perform such a mission, some people might be killed or wounded who got in the way or resisted.

There is the further problem of deciding whether the intelligence was good enough to justify action, even when it might not be good enough to stand up as evidence in an American court of law. "The US tends to be legalistic and to confuse evidence with intelligence," one official said. "We would require legislation, as well as convincing the American public to accept the gray area between intelligence and evidence."

The sources said that in talking with foreign officials, American authorities have been urging that terrorists be clearly labeled and treated as international criminals, not as political activists who may not be extradictable. "They should be treated as international criminals pursued by international police," one official said. "Their acts are not political acts. These are criminals operating outside political constraints and should be treated as such."