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FBI joins city law groups to fight terrorism in U.S.

By John McCaslin
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NEW YORK — The FBI, concerned that international terrorism will reach American shores in 1986, has begun forming anti-terrorist task forces with law enforcement authorities in several major cities that are likely terrorist targets.

"On the negative side, our biggest concern now that 1985 ends... is that international terrorism will soon breach our shores," said FBI deputy assistant director Tom Sheer, whose New York office investigates up to 50 percent of all domestic terrorist activity.

Despite successes in fighting domestic terrorism, Mr. Sheer said specially trained task forces made up of FBI agents and police officers are being created or are now ready for operation in Washington, New York, Newark, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles to counter the growing threat.

Mr. Sheer said he was unable to talk about evidence the bureau has gathered on international terrorists who might be preparing to attack U.S. targets, but he did confirm ongoing investigations into information gathered through intelligence channels.

"I can only say to you that the FBI... is attempting to keep the intelligence system on an international level as current as we possibly can and to react to potential threats as soon as we learn about them," he said.

"I can assure you that the intelligence system is at work 24 hours a day, seven days a week to keep terrorists from blowing up the United Nations, or whatever example you want to use," he said.

Mr. Sheer's remarks came during a news conference about international terrorist incidents during 1985, the prospects for increased terrorism in 1986, and the most vulnerable targets worldwide. The conference was sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Terrorist expert Yonah Alexander, a senior research member of the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University and director of the Institute for Studies in International Terrorism at the State University of New York, predicted that 1985 will go down in history as possibly "the bloodiest year" ever — "the so-called 'Year of the Terrorist'."

However, he cautioned, 1986 could prove

worse, especially in the United States.

"It is very clear that the United States is the No. 1 target world wide," he said, pointing to Americans singled out to die in recent overseas terrorist attacks.

The failure of the international community to label terrorism as a criminal act and as a form of "low-intensity warfare" has only encouraged the terrorists of the past 15 years, he said.

Figures cited by Mr. Alexander showed there were 293 incidents of terrorism recorded worldwide in 1970. From January through September 1985, some 2,265 incidents of terrorism were reported that resulted in the deaths of more than 4,900 innocent people.

"So we see an increase, and the year isn't even over yet," Mr. Alexander said.

"As for 1986," he said, "We are not prophets. But we believe there will be two trends.

"First, continuity. Bombing will remain the most popular weapon, along with hijackings and assassinations.

"Second, perhaps the escalation into more dramatic events — new targets and new vulnerabilities... such as maritime sabotage," he said.

In the long term, Mr. Alexander said there is tremendous concern of "mass-destruction" weaponry.

"Nuclear terrorism might be just around the corner, perhaps chemical or biological," he said.

The hot spots for terrorist activity in the coming year, Mr. Alexander said, are Central America, followed by Western Europe, the Middle East, and then Africa, especially South Africa.

The official charged with public safety for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Edward J. O'Sullivan, said the three major airports in his jurisdiction — Kennedy, La Guardia, and Newark, N.J., — have developed contingency plans in consort with the FBI, Federal Aviation Administration and other agencies, in case of a terrorist incident.

"Bombing or sabotage of airport facilities is of particular concern to us," he said.

"We realize that despite all of our best efforts, the potential exists for a terrorist incident succeeding at one of our airports," he said.

"The challenge, therefore, is to minimize the impact of that act," Mr. O'Sullivan said.