

Terrorism here? 'It's just a matter of time'

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

"In 1983, more U.S. citizens were killed in acts involving terrorism than the previous 15 years.

"Out of 500 incidents of terrorism, 200 (or 40 percent) were directed against Americans. And 70 incidents had some kind of government support."

Wayne County Sheriff Robert Ficano cited those statistics to back up his belief that international terrorism may soon find its way to our own backyards — not just the exotic backdrops of Malta or the Mediterranean Sea.

But how likely is it that a group of terrorists could take over a flight at Detroit Metropolitan Airport or infiltrate a local government building?



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could prevent a terrorist from committing violence on his victims for the first hour. Since he would not kill, hurt or maim them," Trojanowicz said.

"In addition, to immediately killing one or more hostages now, (terrorists) don't keep them at a central location; dispersing the hostages makes a take-over impossible."

Trojanowicz also dispels the myth that terrorists are fanatics.

"Today there are 170 identifiable terrorist groups worldwide, organized with their own networks," he said. "For every terrorist, there are nine support people."

"They are now so highly trained that they are using the same techniques as counter terrorists use to recapture hostages."

QUITE LIKELY, according to Ficano and other law enforcement officials.

"Sheer violence of the acts are picking up," Ficano said. "There is extensive travel of these groups outside of their own country."

The law enforcement community of southeastern Michigan is beginning to deal with the potential threat now — through special seminars and training sessions.

"The general feeling in our law enforcement community is that it's just a matter of time before terrorists are involved on U.S. soil," said Robert Trojanowicz, director of Michigan State University's criminal justice program.

"Terrorism is at a critical level now. Over the past decade, it has become worse. Dealing with the contemporary terrorist is a new ball game. Past theories on negotiating with terrorists don't seem to be working. The terrorists themselves are often out of reach, making it necessary to deal with the countries."

protecting Metropolitan Airport and the Detroit River, part of a 142-mile international waterway.

"We must share information with friendly countries worldwide. The U.S. is beginning to train foreign agencies in anti-terrorism techniques."

Ficano already has taken a number of actions at the airport. They include:

- Increased physical searches of carry-on bags.
- Elimination of curbside check-in service.

- Matching bags to persons boarding aircraft.
- Increasing the number of security checkpoints.
- Dogs trained to sniff bombs.
- More cooperation with airline private security.

"We also have a specially designed team at the airport running exercises," Ficano said. "It includes our own people and individuals from other departments, including Livonia (police). We

have a plan of action (to implement) if necessary. They train very efficiently."

OAKLAND COUNTY Sheriff John Nichols, who attended the recent conference on combating terrorism, sees the issue as one requiring a great deal of cooperation among law enforcement agencies at every level.

Fighting terrorism, he said, "is not something that can be done on a local level. The intent is to make us aware of the problem."

"What struck me is that you can leave (Michigan) and travel through 16 states to the coast without crossing a single border checkpoint," Nichols said.

"I think there is a closer network of cooperation in European countries because of their proximity. We need a free and easy exchange of information of intelligence agencies. I think we're starting to achieve that."

WHAT MAKES the contemporary terrorist more dangerous than his predecessor is that today violence is often committed immediately against hostages, MSTU's Trojanowicz said.

"There used to be a theory that if you

ALTHOUGH MICHIGAN "is fortunate because its law enforcement community is aware of the problem and is willing to deal with it," Trojanowicz said the issue of fighting terrorism in a democracy raises other questions.

"Are people willing to have their government bugged, (become) far less, no longer freely accessible?" he asked.

"Would citizens be willing to have their identifications checked and have intelligence information collected?"

"Democracy is being exploited by terrorists because we value our precious freedoms so much."

A RECENT conference on combating terrorism sponsored by the Detroit Police Academy stressed the need for international cooperation. Speakers were from Israel, Great Britain and West Germany.

"We must coordinate intelligence information with agencies from the federal level — who deal with the international arena — on down," said Ficano, whose department is responsible for

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