

Police Officers, Charging a Risk, Challenge Duty at Cuban Mission

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About 100 police officers, charging that their safety was being endangered, have gone to court to challenge the Police Department's authority to assign them to foot posts outside the Cuban Mission to the United Nations on Lexington Avenue and 37th Street.

In addition, the officers challenged similar foot patrol duties outside the United States Mission to the United Nations at 45th Street and First Avenue.

The officers described the Cuban Mission as a "bomb-prone location" that had already been bombed twice by terrorists and said that the assignments endangered their "health, safety and welfare." They asked that they be allowed to sit in parked police cars so they could "view the premises from a safer distance" and be better able to take follow-up action should another bombing attempt occur.

Justice Sidney H. Asch, in State Supreme Court in Manhattan, acting on the officers' petition, signed an order directing Police Commissioner Robert J. McGuire to show on March 29 why the department should not be restrained from continuing the present policy.

The department currently assigns

three officers to guard the mission during each eight-hour tour of duty.

Legal Opinion Awaited

A Police Department spokesman said that the court order was received shortly before 6 P.M. yesterday and that the department's legal experts would have to study the papers before making any comment.

But Deputy Inspector Peter Prezioso, a former precinct commander who is now in the Public Information Office at headquarters, said that the action was "very unusual."

The officers bringing the suit, all attached to the 17th Precinct, are represented by Richard Hartman, the lawyer for the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association.

Last Oct. 27 and Dec. 7 the Cuban Mission was the target of bombings by individuals who said they were members of

Omega 7, the anti-Castro terrorist group. In the second bombing, two police officers on duty outside the mission were slightly injured.

In their petition, the officers said that the foot posts to which they were currently being assigned gave them no protection or opportunity to escape harm should another bomb be set off.

They also said that they had never received proper training on what action they should take in an emergency involving a bombing.

Last December, members of Omega 7 also took responsibility for a bomb that was set off at the Soviet Mission to the United Nations at 136 East 67th Street. That mission is being guarded by officers from the 19th Precinct.