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ON PAGE 1A

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U.S. commando force to have submarines

By Walter Andrews
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The United States has formed a 2,000-man commando force complete with its own air force and navy to strike at terrorists worldwide, NBC News reported last night.

The network reported that the aging Polaris nuclear submarines, John Marshall and Sam Houston, each will soon be carrying 100 commandos from the Army's Delta Force or the Navy's Seal Team 6 instead of missiles.

In addition, about a dozen transport aircraft and two dozen helicopters have now been assigned to the commandos, NBC reported.

The existence of the Seals and the Delta force, both of which participated in last year's Grenada invasion, has been known for some time, but details have been a closely guarded government secret.

Defense Department spokesman Michael Burch told The Washington Times that he would not comment on the NBC story, or on the special anti-terrorism units.

"A three-month investigation by NBC News has determined that at least 2,000 men are part of the effort," correspondent Fred Francis reported.

He also reported that Delta commandos are psychiatrically screened for their willingness to kill and often practice using dummies at a so-called "shooting room" at Fort Bragg, N.C.

In October, Secretary of State George Shultz witnessed a demonstration at the shooting room in which commandos using special laser-guided weapons rescued a hostage in a few seconds, the network reported.

In the 1980 Iranian rescue attempt, the network said, the Delta Force failed because it did not have its own airplanes, radios or intelligence.

The network said Delta commandos have been sent on secret missions worldwide. They were waiting in the Persian Gulf last month for a crack at the terrorists holding a Kuwaiti airliner hostage. An American State Department official was killed in that incident.

A Kuwaiti newspaper reported that a Delta unit had been flown to a neighboring

Arab capital for an operation to free the hostages, who were finally rescued by Iranian forces.

The commandos were on standby for use during the Olympics last summer at Los Angeles, the network said, and they will be on standby during the presidential inauguration later this month.

They also were on standby at least once to strike at Iranian terrorists in Lebanon, the report said, but were held back because of poor intelligence on the location of the terrorists and because of the upcoming U.S. presidential election.

NBC was the first among the news media to assign a number to the size of the anti-terrorist force. Last month, the New York Times reported that the number of these small, special operations units had been increased and their training augmented.

The newspaper said Congress had approved \$500 million for special operations training this year.

Earlier this year, in remarks that caused some controversy, Mr. Shultz said the United States needs to hit terrorist forces before they attack even if doing so jeopardizes innocent lives.

The comments seemed to place the secretary of state at odds with Vice President George Bush and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. They emphasized that American forces should strike only when they are sure of the terrorists' location and when the danger to innocent lives can be minimized.

The defense secretary, in a major policy address in late November, announced six tests for the use of American combat forces overseas, one of them being that such use should only be a last resort.

But, just recently, Mr. Weinberger appeared to narrow his differences with the secretary of state regarding the use of U.S. forces against terrorists. He said no rules covering the use of force in response to terrorist attacks can be detailed in advance.

The defense secretary said such attacks would have to be dealt with as they arise, on a case-by-case basis.