

FBI Wants Wiretaps to Counter Terror Bombings

Washington

Contending that officers are nearly powerless to halt political bombings, FBI Director Clarence Kelley says his agency needs broad wiretap powers to deal with revolutionaries who plant bombs.

"It is very difficult to defend (against bombs)," Kelley said in an interview. "You can have guards and fences, but intelligent people can find ways of putting bombs in strategic places."

Recently, dynamite has been found planted at the United Nations, three people were killed at Los Angeles' airport by a bomb planted to protest U.S. handling of aliens, a judge in the state of Washington was murdered by a bomb, and bombs have exploded at military recruiting centers.

The FBI director said that with freedom to wiretap, the FBI could keep tabs on the leftist groups which Kelley said were responsible for many of the nation's 2000 bombings annually in recent years.

"We cannot now place taps on them," Kelley said. "It is difficult to monitor their operations and be alerted when they attack . . . Our plea at this time is for legislation permitting wiretapping of these people."

The FBI is now permitted to use wiretaps only with court authorization or in cases involving foreign subversion. The attorney general must approve all FBI wiretaps. Kelley did not spell out what additional authority he is seeking.

Have any of the nation's recent bombings involved foreign groups?

"We cannot pinpoint it," Kelley said. "There have been no prosecutions. But it

is not an unwarranted assumption."

Kelley concedes that the new wiretap authorization he seeks from Congress could be considered by some as a threat to civil liberties. But he contends that the more serious threat to society by bombers warrants new legislation.

"Law enforcement has grown up," he said. "We can act with discrimination. We are responsible people and are not going to cause people to needlessly lose their rights."

Kelley said that until 1970, bombings were comparatively rare, with most involving disgruntled employees, organized crime and insurance swindles. Then the radical left entered the scene, sending bombings to an average of 2000 a year

since 1970. It's a level still maintained today, Kelley said, although political extremism among the young has faded.

"I think we have kept (the bombings) pretty well stabilized; there has been no increase," the FBI chief said. But he added, "We have paramilitary organizations which threaten the country. They are still a threat. As long as we have these small groups, they must use terrorist activities. We must expect a continuation of political style bombings."

Kelley said the FBI has made bombing a top priority problem and has taken several steps to deal with it nationally. These include a national bomb data center and closer cooperation with law enforcement groups around the country.

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