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## A Role for the Behavioral Scientist in Hostage Negotiation Incidents

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Brian Jenkins of the Rand Corporation has reported [1] that from 1968 to 1974 there were over 507 incidents of terrorism around the world, and, since 1968, terrorists have killed more than 520 people and wounded 830 worldwide. As shocking as these statistics are, the total amount of violence is not that large since the number of 520 people killed in an eight-year period is exceeded by the annual homicide rate of some major U.S. cities, and is far exceeded by the more than 18 000 homicides committed annually in the United States. However, what is illuminating about Jenkin's study is not solely the number of people injured or killed by terrorists, but the intricate relationship between mass media and terrorist activities. In short, terrorists attacks are often carefully choreographed to seize the interest and attention of the mass media. The abduction of hostages increases the drama, and Jenkins notes that in this sense terrorism is theater for it is aimed at people watching and not at the actual victims or hostages [1, p. 12]. Moreover, Jenkins observed that while terrorists may sometimes kill wantonly, the primary objective of the terrorist is not mass murder, since terrorists want people watching and listening to their activities and not necessarily murdered [1, p. 3]:

A credible threat, a demonstration of their capacity to strike, may be from the terrorist's point of view often preferable to actually carrying out the threatened deed.

According to Jenkins, terrorist groups tend to be relatively small bands of disaffected outsiders who occasionally resort to excessive violence to project themselves as forces with which negotiations must be developed. A prime example of this would be the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), which never really numbered more than a dozen hard-core members, but through a genius for media manipulation the SLA occupied the nation's attention for well over two years. The irony, of course, in the SLA and other terrorists groups which have small numbers of hard-core members is the vast multimedia attention that they received in comparison to the rural guerrilla warfare that went on in Angola, Mozambique, and Portuguese Guinea for 14 years without the world taking much notice [1, pp. 4-5]. Many people hypothesize that perhaps media coverage, especially television, increases terrorist activities throughout the world. Of course, the hard question which one has to ask is, "Has it increased the number of terrorist activities, or has it simply increased our awareness of terrorism that would have taken place anyway?" Whatever the answer, one cannot discount the impact of television and other media in terms of terroristic activities. It suffices to suggest that the media have projected the number of terrorist activities to a level of public consciousness that has never existed in the past, and therefore

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there is definitely a role for the behavioral scientist since hostage negotiation incidents will occur as a result of terrorist activities.

### **Accounting for the Increase in Hostage-Taking Incidents**

Hostage-taking incidents requiring hostage negotiations skills are an unavoidable outgrowth of terrorist activities both within this country and worldwide. Before hostage-taking incidents received so much public notice, many researchers in the criminal justice field recognized that mass killings, such as the Texas Tower incident, the Richard Speck slaying of eight nurses in Chicago, or the Juan Corona slaying of 26 itinerant workers in California, seemed to precipitate similar tragedies, and many researchers have suggested imitation in these tragedies. One explanation, in part, for the steady increase in hostage-taking incidents may be that television generates a degree of acceptance of violence in our society. The level of violence to which people are exposed from watching television, particularly youngsters who frequently in their early adolescent years spend anywhere from 20 to 30 h a week watching television, may result in a desensitization to violence, thus making violence more acceptable to private individuals.

Another explanation for this increase in hostage-taking incidents is the great improvement in police telecommunication systems that have increased police response capabilities to robberies and other crimes, and many officers are now able to get to a crime scene within 2 or 3 min. The dysfunctional aspect of this quick response time has been the increased possibility of hostages being taken simply as a means for egress. Some criminals have had no intention of taking hostages in situations such as bank robberies but have done so to escape from apprehension. Therefore, we must also analyze the criminal justice system in accounting for ways that may generate hostage-taking incidents.

An example of how the criminal justice system generates hostage-taking incidents can be observed within our correctional system. One of the few ways that prisoners can negotiate with state penal authorities is by taking hostages to seek redress of grievances. Short of the taking of hostages, there seem to be few effective mechanisms for prisoners to convey their plight of overcrowding, sexual abuses, inadequate food, racism, and other prison abuses. Perhaps it may well be that our system is generating the very phenomenon of hostage-taking through institutional insensitivity to the plight of prisoners and by the ineffectual mechanisms for redressing some of these very real grievances.

In my judgment, we have not fully tapped the total resources of behavioral scientists, particularly in the form of consultative assistance. This paper will enumerate seven ways in which criminal justice agencies can rely on the skills of behavioral scientists in enhancing the response to hostage-taking incidents.

The first role for a behavioral scientist is to minimize the level of manipulation of all parties involved in the hostage-taking incident. The behavioral scientist can impress upon criminal justice agencies that it is clearly not in the best interest of those who have been taken as hostages to have someone negotiating for them on a basis of manipulation. Instead, negotiators should handle an incident from the point of view of management, not manipulation. Negotiators have to recognize that they are working with divergent people and with joint sets of goals, and that while people generally do not mind being managed, they definitely resent being manipulated. A situation must be managed, not manipulated, or else the negotiator may well be jeopardizing the safety of the hostages. The behavioral scientist must also impress upon the criminal justice agency that the negotiation involves an exchange of viewpoints representing the interests of the hostage taker as well as the hostages. Kobetz and Goldaber<sup>2</sup> noted:

<sup>2</sup>R. W. Kobetz and I. Goldaber, comments made at the Crisis Intervention Hostage Negotiation Workshop, San Francisco, 21-26 March 1976. For further information on work in progress, contact the International Association of Chiefs of Police, 11 Firstfield Rd., Gaithersburg, Md. 20760.

When we are successful in negotiations in which we find hostages present, you will find that we have managed the conflict that exists, and by managing the conflict this has presupposed a degree of involvement in the conflict in which there was a consensus of protecting human lives and assuring safety for those concerned in the particular incident, and that means the hostage taker as well as the police officer and, of course, as well as the hostage himself.

A second role for the behavioral scientist is to assure that the mass media are not manipulated. The mass media have unintentionally contributed to the increase of terrorist activities; television programming has afforded terrorists too much air time and in the process has also taken these terrorist groups' own fantasy terms far too seriously. Thus the media have forged a real political force for terrorist groups. Dr. Frederick Hacker, a psychiatrist in private practice, has observed that there seems to be a dual need between the media and the terrorists. The terrorist obviously needs a medium to convey his message to the multitudes, and terrorist acts fit the programming needs of television quite conveniently since these are sudden acts of great excitement. In fact, Walter Laqueur, chairman of the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, suggests [2] that the media are the terrorist's best friends and that terrorists are becoming the "super entertainers" of our time. Along similar lines, Professor Raymond Tanter of the University of Michigan suggests that in effect terrorists are aiming their terror at the media and not the victim because they measure success in terms of media coverage and not victims killed, tortured, or mutilated.

The behavioral scientist may well be able to act as liaison between criminal justice agencies and mass media by minimizing the manipulative requests frequently made by terrorists. If such liaison is to be successfully achieved, it will entail an objective third party, such as a behavioral scientist; to do otherwise might simply put criminal justice agency personnel in competing, argumentative positions with media representatives over the principles involved in the communications of these incidents.

A third area is the conceptualization of the appropriate ingredients for creating a sound working relationship between the hostage taker and the negotiator. One thing that will, of course, be helpful is for the behavioral scientist to equip criminal justice agency personnel with a clear understanding of a theory or theories of communications. Another important factor is for the behavioral scientist to indicate the need for trust between the negotiator and the hostage taker. Also important is the behavioral scientist being in a position to convey how people share goals, particularly when the goals seem to be as divergent as the lawful interest of one party and unlawful interest of another. Finally, the behavioral scientist can further enhance our understanding of the reciprocal need that exists between a negotiator and a hostage taker.

A fourth role for the behavioral scientist, the conceptualization of knowledge about hostage-taking incidents, perhaps can be illustrated by the work of Kobetz and Goldaber on the question of what we know about the hostage taker. The following generalizations may be apropos to some hostage-taking incidents:

1. The hostage taker is caught in a situation he did not plan on or bargain for, as in bank robbery situations.
2. The hostage taker is confused, frightened, and distraught, facing an extremely intense situation in which he has to coordinate not only the hostage but also his negotiations with the police at a time when his anxiety level is at a high peak.
3. The hostage taker is frequently acting not with judgment but rather on the basis of estimates, simply because he does not have total knowledge of facts occurring outside his sealed-off area.
4. The hostage taker knows that he needs the hostage and, frequently, that he desires freedom. Therefore, if the behavioral scientist can convey to police agencies the urgency for establishing negotiation on the basis of safety and surrender, and not solely freedom of egress, success may be assured.

5. The hostage taker has an exceptional need for a reordering of his situation and a lessening of his anxieties; therefore, he needs a calming or a settling of the situation.

6. The hostage taker in many instances realizes that he needs a negotiator as his only way out.

7. The hostage taker wants to be led out of the situation as opposed to having to force his way out; therefore, he welcomes options, and the hostage negotiating team can offer them.

8. The hostage taker can be managed, and this conflict management is to be distinguished from manipulation; if the hostage taker is forced into a manipulative position, he may react very violently.

A fifth role for the behavioral scientist is a reiteration of our beliefs and values in human life. Behavioral scientists can facilitate the creation of policies and operational plans congruent with these beliefs of personal safety and human life.

A sixth role is facilitating baseline data collection on these and similar offenses to improve on knowledge about hostage takers and terrorists. Perhaps we can begin to develop profiles of hostage takers as well as predictive formulas that might be useful in dissipating the danger of these incidents.

A seventh role is providing a research capability. Research into areas such as whether officers invoke the use of deadly force as frequently as the opportunities arise may help to generate a great deal of data that may be useful to criminal justice agencies exploring these and many other questions. One explanation for not invoking deadly force might be found not in the altruism of police officers but more in their pragmatic experiences, particularly for those who have experienced shoot-outs where undisciplined police responses and firearms policies could have increased the police officer's own vulnerability. A behavioral scientist will have the ability to generate insightful research and, by virtue of his objectivity and freedom from the responsibilities that agency personnel might have, may provide greater enlightenment in the area of hostage-taking incidents.

### **Critical Areas for Further Study**

Perhaps the most urgent need is the development and accessibility of data on hostage incidents. To underscore this need, Dr. Harvey Schlossberg, director of psychological services for the New York City Police Department, recently reported that in 1976 the New York City Police Department responded to more than 200 hostage-type calls without experiencing any fatalities. Schlossberg also reported one of the basic principles of hostage negotiation is providing enough time for everyone's anxiety level to subside. The innuendo is, of course, that there is a relationship between successful negotiations and the relaxation of anxiety through extended negotiations. Schlossberg also reported [3] that the average time for keeping a hostage is 10 h. The problem confronting the behavioral scientist is acquiring and having access to a more specific data base so that he can not only validate assertions but also take into account various urban and regional hostage experiences. A more meaningful body of literature on this important subject area is necessary.

One of the few researchers who has been able to incorporate some baseline data into his analysis of hostage situations is Professor Allen Bristow of California State University, Los Angeles. While Bristow's elementary use and interpretation of the data might be criticized, he should be lauded for his attention to the requirements of scholarship that dictate the use of a data base [4].

Bristow raised five important hypotheses and displayed data to verify or reject his hypotheses. Unfortunately, Bristow tells us precious little about the data base, such as its source, thus preventing replicate studies. In any event, the five hypotheses raised by Bristow document the need for a national data base so that one can not only verify the

hypotheses but also validate or reject the host of impressionistic assertions made by criminal justice personnel. The five hypotheses of the Bristow study are as follows:

1. The longer a hostage situation continues, the less likely is the hostage to be injured.
2. There is less chance that a hostage will be injured if demands are granted.
3. Hostages in prison situations are safer than in other situations.
4. There is more probability of injury to hostages when the incident involves "terrorist," as opposed to "nonterrorist," hostage takers.
5. There is less probability of harm to the hostage when "trained" negotiators are used.

As a parenthetical note, Bristow reported that his data disproved Hypothesis 1 while proving Hypotheses 2 and 3. Hypotheses 4 and 5 "seemed proven," but he urged caution in full acceptance of these two because of certain parameters of the study.

Bristow's study documents the critical need for data collection, analysis, and interpretation since he claims to have disproven the hypothesis that the longer a hostage situation continues, the less likely is the hostage to be injured. My purpose is not to quarrel with Bristow's interpretation of data but to highlight the fact that a national data base might show similar results or that these results are unique to the area and organizations Bristow examined. Moreover, this study should be replicated so that cross-validation or the null hypothesis might be demonstrated. In the interim, we continue to train hostage negotiators in spite of our need for refined methods of data collection and for the greater accessibility to behavioral scientists of data for analysis and interpretation.

Bristow presented an appendix listing 94 items as data extracted from 185 hostage cases. While the presentation of these items is not fully explained, it nevertheless provides a useful start for those researchers who desire to collect, analyze, and interpret data relative to these or similar research categories. Bristow's items [4] are presented as follows:

#### Data Extracted from 185 Hostage Cases

##### Pre-Incident Situation

- VIP with protection
- VIP without protection
- VIP at place of business
- VIP at home or temporary residence
- VIP during transportation
- Group assembled for publicized purpose—no protection
- Group assembled for publicized purpose—with protection
- Group on tour to sensitive location
- Unknown

##### Situation

- Airplane hijack
- Other vehicle hijack
- Prison or other institution
- Kidnap to unknown location
- Kidnap to known location
- Kidnap to known location (safe)
- Held in building of seizure
- Hijack of art work, public treasure, or valuable property

##### Number of Hostages

- 1
- 2-5
- 6-10
- 11-20
- 21-50
- More than 51

Hostage Takers

Number

1

2-5

6-10

More than 10

Age (average)

15-25

26-45

45-60+

Sex

Male

Female

Mixed sex group

Knew or were known to hostages

Were armed with

Firearms

Bombs/incendiary devices

Simulated weapon (harmless)

Knife

Were confined in institution of incident

Psycho-history

Demand

Money

Release of prisoners held by government

Change of social or living conditions

Escape of hostage takers

Publicity

Combination of above

Time limit was set by hostage takers

Time limit was met by government

Time limit was not met by government

Threat was carried out when time limit was not met

Threat was never carried out

Government-Police Tactics

Negotiations involved

Negotiator Selected by

Government-police

Hostage takers

Negotiators were "trained"

Negotiations Were by

Telephone

Face-to-face—neutral location

Face-to-face—hostage takers' territory

Face-to-face—police territory

Public address system (yelling)

Combination of above

Police assault was attempted

Trained "SWAT" team

Firearms

Chemical agents

Surprise assault (with warning)

Police cordon established

**Outcome****Length of ordeal (holding)**

Less than 8 h

8-24 h

24-72 h

72 h to 7 days

8 days or more

**Hostage condition**

Freed unharmed

Injured/killed as a result of

Police effort to free hostage

Hostage attempt to escape

Willful act on part of hostage taker (as an example)

Combination of above

**Demands were**

Fully met

Partly met

Denied entirely

**Hostage takers**

Apprehended at time of incident

Apprehended later (escape)

Killed or wounded

Escaped completely

Combination of above

**Conclusion**

Presently the role of the behavioral scientist is being both ignored and inhibited primarily by the absence of a national data base relative to hostage situations. Unless and until we facilitate the behavioral scientist's ability to acquire such data, our long-range planning and policy development will be immeasurably restricted to crisis management proportions, certainly not the most desirable manner to address hostage situations. Criminal justice agencies would be well advised to prepare for hostage situations and to engage the services of behavioral scientists to assist them in presenting a response that will assure the temperate response of our criminal justice system.

**References**

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