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HOSTAGES: TACTICS AND NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUES— STATE OF THE ART

by

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What I will be talking about for the next hour or so, is all about dealing with people—people involved in incidents of hostage taking. I am going to be talking to you about talking to people who have taken hostages, and about how to deal with hostage-taking from domestic incidents to robberies, prison incidents, and terroristic activity.

Let me start by giving you a few words—words like Munich, Croations, South Moluccans, and Hanafi Muslims. If I had used these words five or six years ago, most of you would have had very little or no reaction to them at all. They are rather contemporary words in our vocabulary. The commonality of all these words has to do with something that is now coming forward facing every citizen in the United States. The impact of hostage-taking incident in the United States and in the world has a very definite meaning to everyone in this audience. The taking of hostages did not begin with Munich and will not end with the South Moluccans in The Netherlands, an ongoing situation right now as far as I know, unless it ended this morning. Incidents of hostage taking are not new. They are phenomena that have been with us, as far as we can determine, from the beginning of recorded history. You can read about such incidents in Roman and Greek mythology. The taking of a hostage to be held as a pledge for the fulfillment of a demand is a technique that has been with us a long time. What we have seen within the last decade is a resurrection of this technique. It is not brand new. It is not confined to the last decade. It is just that incidents have been terrifying to the public, in one respect from the amount of people involved, and in another from the amount of press coverage of the incidents.

Domestic disturbances and family crisis intervention problems occur on one end of the scale. For instance, you have a family unit where the husband and wife are separated, and children are involved. The husband has a few drinks, comes to see the wife, he wants to take the children, the wife resists, the police are called, a hostage is taken. The wife and children are held against the law enforcement authorities who respond to the incident. They are being held for the fulfillment of a demand. In other words, a human life or several human lives are being threatened.

On the next point of the scale is the personal grievance. The gentleman in Ohio who went into the city hall and took the police captain as a hostage had a personal grievance. Many people have a personal problem. It does not involve others, but it is a hostage incident as such because they have stepped forth into someone else's life and held them hostage, and they are making a demand.

Coming up on the scale, you have incidents involving the fleeing felon—somebody who is leaving the scene of a crime. The original crime in his or her mind was possibly the commission of a robbery, burglarly or rape. That original plan has moved to the next step because their action has been blocked. Police have responded (or someone has responded) to the incident and so the only way the criminal feels that he is sure of getting away is to take a hostage.

Another incident you are all familiar with is the taking of hostages in jail and prison settings: the taking of hostages for the purpose of having a demand heard or the taking of hostages to assure escape from the institution.

The far end of the scale includes the extremist or terrorist taking hostages. Be sure of definitions when you are talking about the religious fanatic and terrorist. The motivation of these groups is different—totally different. The hostage-taking here is a planned incident. There are definite plans involved, it has been thought out, and there is some demand ready to be made, unlike other incidents such as robberies or domestic incidents, where there is no plan involved and the hostage-taking is spontaneous.

Hostage incidents are important for a great many reasons. The contagious effect of hostage-taking upon others has indicated that it is on the increase, and in all probability and predictability it will continue to be on the increase. The severity of outdoing someone else in the sense of hostage-taking is also on the rise. If you have three simultaneous incidents of hostage-taking occurring in Washington, D.C., for example, perhaps the next one will include four. If you have a hundred children taken hostage in a school, perhaps the next one will be a hundred and fifty criminal justice practitioners attending a program in an auditorium somewhere in Texas. Each time, on the basis of a contagious effect, you have to look upon the probability of the next one being more severe.

Why? Because it would fit the pattern for one thing. The incidents that go beyond killing one person, the possibility of killing a dozen people or hundreds of people, by chopping off their heads or setting off nuclear devices is rather fascinating news to all. The other reason it is increasing is because potential acts of violence *seem* to be increasing in our society. The taking of one hostage in a domestic incident is interesting, but if it still going on tomorrow you will find it in the back of the newspaper. This will also happen with major hostage events such as that with the South Moluccans, going on for several weeks now on the front page of every newspaper. But the interest is still there due to the possibility of mass murder.

As a phenomenon, it has to be of interest to you because all of you are in a business of responding to the problems of people. For that matter alone, it should be of interest to you beyond your personal interest as a citizen of this country. When there was an increase in automobile traffic in this country, reactions to traffic accidents and investigations varied throughout the country. And when you had problems of delinquency after World War II you had police or correctional people beginning to formulate models of response, first by gradually collecting data. Ten to fifteen years ago, you would not have had as diverse a group as this audience meeting to discuss problems. Police would have met with police, correctional people with correctional people, judicial people with judicial people. Even though it was all part of the same system, and it remains the same, you would not have had people meeting with each other. Now that has all changed. There is a sharing of information among colleagues, and an acceptance of the fact that everyone is in the same system, criminal justice. When you go to models such as investigations of traffic accidents back in the 20's and 30's, police agencies responding were communicating with one another: "What did you do with it?" "Well, we started to ask three questions." "What did that tell you?" "Well, it told us we ought to put a stop sign over here." Gradually, these kinds of activities began to come together into the formulation of the collective, intellectual, professional response pattern.

In hostage-taking around the world, regardless of where it occurs, we are still in that first phase: responding individually, attempting to find the commonalities, and hopefully going to the second phase of developing a professional response. What will you do if you are in charge of a particular location where a hostage has been taken? Your boss has placed you in a position to make some kind of decisions to save someone's life or a series of lives. Now many of you are going to dismiss that and say "it will never happen to me." That may well be. But, if the incidents continue to increase, as I think they will, don't dismiss it too quickly if you are going to remain and act as a professional in the system of criminal justice. The probability factor is that this particular tactic will increase due to the ease with which a hostage can be taken. For example, right now I could very easily put my arm around

someone's throat and shove a fountain pen up that person's nose or in that person's ear. When anyone responds, I will tell them that I will slap that pen all the way in unless they do this, this, and this. That quickly. Think about it. You are in just as much jeopardy with a pen in your nose or your ear as you are with a knife across your throat. It's illegal, but it's a technique. With a fountain pen, or even a knife, they are endangering one person. With a gun, perhaps several people will be in immediate danger; a shotgun, even more beyond the pistol. With a machine gun, hand grenade, dynamite, or even nuclear device, the threat goes into the thousands, tens of thousands, or millions. The kind of scale, where you go from a fountain pen up on the technique of taking hostages is fantastic. Just leave it to your imagination. The issue becomes, then, what should you do in response? The first thing to do, naturally, is to have a response plan.

For law enforcement, corrections, the military, and even private security, the training program that the IACP conducts addresses the need for an overall response plan. It has to be formalized: you have to know the kinds of equipment you need, the kind of people you will use, and how to put it into effect. This planning goes back to the civil disorder days of the mid '60's. By 1971, every public agency in the United States was ready for a civil disorder, although they were all over. The plans are still available, though, and if you go back and look, you will find a response plan. By taking those plans and updating them, you will have a two-prong attack on the issue of hostage-taking: tactics and negotiation. They are two very distinct responses that must be used together. The tactical end is the SWAT team or the response assault, or tactics team, that you put together to isolate and consolidate the incident to keep it from getting worse. In a hostage incident, the first rule is the same thing. You keep the incident from getting worse by consolidating it, by cutting it off. Once the incident has occurred, the official or police officer who responded can do nothing else but back away and keep it from getting worse. You keep more people from falling under the control of the hostage-taker by setting up a defense position around him.

One of the key issues of hostage-taking is, first of all, what is hostage-taking? What is a hostage-taking incident? Remember from the beginning, a hostage is a person being kept pending the fulfillment of a pledge or an agreement by the hostage-taker. It took us a few years to put a semicolon there and add "being kept for the fulfillment of an agreement by a hostage-taker who is in fact himself or herself being held hostage by the responding forces." Who is in fact the hostage? When the hostage-taker has made the play and they have the hostage confined and there is absolutely no way to stop the incident and the forces respond and consolidate the incident, they are, in every case that I am aware, in possession of more fire power, more equipment, and more personnel than the hostage-taker. Therefore, the issue becomes a hostage-taker making a charge in that home or that au-

ditorium or on that train, but he is in fact the hostage of the responding unit.

Understanding the motivation of taking hostages varies from the domestic personal problem to the terrorist. After the incident is contained, the next move is to deploy the tactical force, to find out as much as you can about who you are dealing with as a hostage-taker, who the victims are, what clothes are they wearing, where exactly are they on a train or in a room, and everything you can determine. Questions to consider are: What led up to this? What might his game plan be? What does he think about? What is motivating him? What is hurrying him along to do this? Why is it done?

When a hostage incident occurs, the tactical unit responds to it by setting up their snipers; armed officers, guards, or military personnel in protective vests. They surround the hostage-taker. The hostage-taker is inside watching all this when an official comes on the megaphone and says, "We have you surrounded—surrender." The hostage-taker must then decide what he wants, which include getting out alive. He may just want to surrender. In other words, he bit off more than he could chew. He recognizes that the response is overwhelming and he surrenders. The incident quickly ends, because the responding agency employed a professional, instantaneous response. There is not a lot of floundering or running into each other by the responding team. They get into position, they know what they are doing, they are pros. The hostage-taker realizes this. His motivation is not taken into account at the moment because he really only came in to take \$20.00 from the Seven-Eleven store. All of this is just overwhelming to the hostage-taker and the incident ends. Some incidents can be over at the very beginning. For example, a correctional officer can walk in on a hostage-taking incident in progress, some inmate with a knife or weapon fashioned in a prison shop, and the officer might say, "Come on now, put it down for crying out loud. You only have six months to go. You are in deep now, and you are going to get in worse." The hostage-taker agrees, surrenders, and it's over. The same thing occurs during a domestic incident or even a robbery. "Put it down, knock it off. You are getting in deep. They are going to blow you away, put it down quickly." Many incidents have been quickly resolved in this manner, and it is a good tactic. The responding officials know what they are talking about, know the person they are dealing with, take immediate action, and they convince or persuade him to surrender.

During a hostage incident requiring a greater degree of response, an on-going incident, the officer in charge will utilize a trained negotiator to establish contact with the hostage-taker. This may not happen immediately, but it will happen because of the need of everyone to eventually talk over the situation. If there is nothing but a burst of fire power from the hostage-taker, or merely silence, the response unit need do nothing more than sit tight, because eventually the hostage-taker, and again this is a percentage across the universe of hostage-taking inci-

dents, must communicate a demand, a request, or a surrender. The negotiator is the ticket for the hostage-taker to be able to get out of the situation that he has created.

You need an entree to negotiate. Someone who has been chosen, hopefully well, and trained even better, must come in and say, "I am so and so. How are you doing? I know who you are and let's talk." If the negotiator can reach the hostage-taker, if he can make that human, one-to-one contact between the two of them, he can gain the trust needed to negotiate. But the negotiator must do more than just communicate to the hostage-taker. He also acts in the role of mediator. As a mediator, even though he is a police officer, a prison official, or a correctional officer, he is at the same time a mediator between the officials and the hostage-taker. He becomes the hostage-taker's ticket to end the incident. The negotiator must make the hostage-taker realize that, and also that the only way he will get out alive is to surrender and accept the consequences.

If the hostage-taker has developed rapport with the negotiator, this approach will work. However, the hostage-taker may want to talk to a relative or friend, or may, if a woman hostage-taker, demand to talk to a woman. In a situation where the first negotiator cannot reach the hostage-taker, you need to have alternatives available. The key issue is that you must have an entrance point, through the communication of one person, to make the human connection and try to negotiate. All of this is one response on a scale of four possible responses or any combination of these four.

In responding to an incident, you can set up snipers with telescopic sights. They can wait and if they get a shot, they can blow away the hostage-taker. They can kill him because a human life is being threatened, and they are going to do it if they can get a clear shot. Hopefully, they will be shooting the right person. Hostage-takers have been known to change clothes with their victims and give them unloaded weapons to put in their belts to confuse the sniper who may have been told that a person with a blue shirt and gray pants is one of the bad guys, and if the sniper gets him in sight, kill him. That is one tactic. Set up your snipers after you confine the area. The hostage-taker has made the announcement that he intends to kill the hostage. Legally, the sniper team is within the law in selectively shooting at the hostage-taker when the decision of the commander is if you get a shot, do it.

The second tactic you can use is a chemical agent. Throw in the gas and that will bring him out. But it isn't that easy. Some of the problems associated with this tactic include getting the gas in the right window; getting it in the right room; keeping from burning the place down (and three other buildings), along with the hostages; or killing the hostages if they have certain asthmatic problems; or young children that may not be able to absorb tear gas fumes in a confined area beyond a certain amount of minutes.

The third tactic is assault—go in and get them, hoping that the hostages will lay down and take cover when you start spraying the room with bullets. Any one of these tactics, singularly or combined, has been an accepted kind of approach and still is.

The fourth tactic is negotiation, and if you start with the other three, or any combination of those three, you can not very well switch to negotiation. If you start with negotiation, however, you can escalate to one of the other three as necessary.

The issue of negotiation will vary based upon the motivation of the hostage-takers, their state of mind, and their purpose. What do you know about these persons? How sincere are they? Can you deal with them? Are they paranoid or psychopathic personalities? Do they have a death wish? Do they fully intend to kill the hostages, or the hostages and then themselves? Where everybody loses, nobody wins. You may lose a lot of officers or guards and correctional people, and lose the hostage and hostage-taker as well. You have to be aware of the possibility of the murder-suicide. You have to be aware of the capability and the mental health of the person you are talking to. Most hostage-takers in situations in which they are neither terrorists nor experienced (even though experienced hostage-takers and terrorists could be included in this) are in a position similar to the author who has a plot but doesn't know the ending of the book. By that I mean they are in a position your message as a freedom fighter and we will get the hostages back. You win. I win. Sometimes it is not that easy. Sometimes the hostage-takers not only want the press conference, they want an airplane, they want 20 million dollars, they want the release of 21 colleagues in jail. The negotiations will continue under those circumstances, as you see now in The Netherlands. The issues vary, the problems vary from one end of the extreme to the other, and the answers are not that simple. Just as a skilled surgeon is called upon to share a new technique in operations upon human beings through publications, conferences and seminars, in the issue of hostage-taking, experienced officials around the world are in a position now of sharing their information of what works and what doesn't work. What is the percentage of

success if you tried this tactic or technique as opposed to the percentage if you try another one? The commonalities are very few at this point.

There are some universal rules that have been developed, however, that everyone must subscribe to at the very beginning. If they don't, it is going to add complexities to the eventual outcome of the incident. The first is that killing is an irreversible parameter. That means killing anyone. A few years ago when we studied the issue, we were talking about priorities of human life. People were saying the first priority is the life of the hostages; the second priority is the life of innocent bystanders; the third priority is the life of the responding police officials; the fourth priority is the life of the hostage-takers. Now, we are saying the first priority is the life of the hostage; the first priority is the life of the bystander; the first priority is the life of the responding officials; and the first priority is the life of the hostage-taker. If you have to kill, it must be done quickly and it must be the only thing you have left because someone's life is about to be taken, and you must react quickly to save that life.

The second rule is that one person is in charge and that is it. You can have a place on the side for all the politicians to come and have their picture taken, your top brass and your advisors can all have their pictures taken over in the press area. Only one person is in charge of the incident, *and one person only*. The person in charge is utilizing the tactical unit and the negotiation unit. He has set up a command post and a public information officer to deal with the press. If that commander decides negotiations are over, that the hostage-taker has the full capability and intent of executing someone in there at this time, then, as commander, his move is to get the tactical team ready, take the shot if they can get it, throw in the gas, and get him, because the negotiations are over. Or his decision by way of his negotiator may be to talk. However, keep everybody in their positions in case it does not work. Get ready to strike if you have to, but when you do there is a strong possibility, and all of us know that, of someone being injured or killed.

Can you de-escalate them with words? If you can, terrific. If you can't, do the best you can.



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