IMPROVING CRISIS NEGOTIATION CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

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Introduction

The focus of the First European Conference on Hostage Negotiations was on international aspects of crisis negotiation and the management of hostage incidents in a broad range of situations, including terrorist attacks, domestic crises, suicide attempts, criminal kidnaps and prison revolts. The participants exchanged information, discussed similarities and differences concerning hostage incidents and their management, identified training needs, innovative approaches and blockades to effective international co-operation. The conference was attended by 146 participants from 21 different nations (see table). Participants included researchers (14) and trainers (17), but the majority (almost 100) of the participants were hostage negotiators. Although some of them fulfil a co-ordinating or managerial function (apart from hostage negotiation) in their force, higher decision making levels and on-scene commanders were sparsely represented. As a result, the conclusions of the conference summarise practitioners' views on the ways in which international co-operation in crisis negotiations could be improved.

EU countries		**Other Countries**	
Austria	2	Australia	1
Belgium	10	Azerbeijan	1
Denmark	3	Chech republic	1
Finland	3	Hungary	4
France	2	Norway	4
Germany	28	Switzerland	1
Ireland	1	USA	1
Italy	1		
Luxembourg	2		
the Netherlands	54		
Portugal	1		
Spain	5		
Sweden	3		
United Kingdom	18		

Country of origin of participants to the First European Conference on Hostage Negotiations

Evaluation of the conference

Analysis of the 100 evaluation forms that were filled out learns that the conference seems to have reached its goals to a considerable extent. On a scale from 1 to 5 participants gave the following scores:

1. The conference has helped me map and understand similarities and differences concerning hostage incidents and their management in different countries: score 4,1

2. The conference has helped to identify joint training needs for law enforcement personnel involved in hostage incidents: score 3,9

3. The conference has made a contribution to improve law-enforcement co-ordination between Member States of the European Union, especially in cross-border incidents: score 3,5

4. At the conference innovating approaches to the management of hostage incidents were discussed: score 3,0

5. The conference has provided me with the opportunity to exchange information and to learn from one another: score 4,3

The opinions as to when a second European conference on hostage negotiations would have to be held were almost balanced: 56% of participants stated it would have to be held in one year (or sooner!), 44% in two years. No one thought it should never again be held.

International aspects

There are many ways in which more than one country may become involved in crisis negotiations. Nationals from one country may be taken hostage in another country, nationals from one country may take hostages in another country, hostage takers may move hostages from one country to another, hostage takers may make demands (e.g. release of prisoners) to the government of another country or hostage takers may operate in different countries (e.g. for the delivery of a ransom). In several plenary lectures the specific complications of hostage situations with international aspects were presented.

Patrick Peereboom and Ivo Vereycken from the Belgian Special Intervention Unit belonging to the Gendarmerie held an informative presentation about the

kidnapping of an eight-year-old child. The wanted the ransom to be delivered in another country. International co-ordination, liasing with the parents and psychological support proved to be of utmost importance, as well as implementation of a consistent media strategy.

Mike Dixon from the Organised Crime Group of the Metropolitan Police gave a presentation about the UK response to the kidnapping of British nationals abroad. Since 1994 the UK government response is more pro-active, involving a multi agency approach inside and out of UK. There is growing inter-governmental co-ordination leading to police mutual assistance. Co-ordination is also stimulated by the International Convention against the taking of hostages (1980) and the recent G8 'agreements in principle'. Based on several case studies Dixon was able to identify elements of 'good practice'. These included:
- intergovernmental co-operation;
- internal close partnership between government and police;
- international police co-operation;
- agreement regarding hostage negotiation strategy;
- one voice to hostage takers;
- opposition to concessions;
- close liaison with families, NGOs and companies involved;
- joint media strategy.

Michael Ljungström from the Office of the United Nations Security Co-ordinator informed participants about a number of cases in which United Nations International Staff were kidnapped and about the United Nations Security Management System.

The UN train staff how to avoid becoming a hostage, how to survive as a hostage. The UN also trains designated officials and a security management team on how to manage a hostage incident. Ljungström was able to inform participants about lessons learnt from hostage takings of UN personnel in different countries. He indicated that it is essential that the government of the country concerned and not the UN negotiate, that the UN participate in the negotiation process to ensure the safety of the hostages, that UN staff have knowledge of the principle of hostage taking and that military are sensitised to needs of civilian colleagues. Ljungström stressed that co-ordination amongst all parties is critical, as is a good media strategy.

Best practices and areas for improvement

Based on a staged hostage-taking incident, participants divided into internationally composed subgroups to exchange information, to discuss best practices and to make suggestions for improvement. Aspects discussed included the organisation of crisis incidents: who is responsible for building up the crisis incident organisation, who is part of this organisation, at what moment and how will negotiators be contacted? Criteria for deployment of negotiators and the position of negotiators in the organisation, especially in relation with other specialised units within the police were talked about, as was the organisation of negotiation teams.

An important part of the information exchange dealt with when and how a neighbouring country or region would be informed of a possible cross-border incident development and about legal procedures involved. Participants informed each other about problems in co-ordinating cross-border incidents with regard to general crisis organisation, negotiation strategy, operational procedures and legal issues.

Some participants indicated that they did have knowledge of the approach of neighbouring countries and regions, but many would not know what the most important differences between their approach and the approach of their direct neighbours would be.

In the discussions, participants agreed on many aspects, especially on the evolving mission and methodology of crisis negotiation, on the fact that a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach is often necessary. Enhanced communication (use of fax and Internet by hostage takers) and terrorism were perceived by all as future threats. At a working level willingness and motivation to co-operate clearly existed.

The participants also identified several areas where countries differed. These differences included a different role of authorities and differences in legislation and police powers in different countries. With regard to crisis negotiations itself, important differences were found in the means of communication used and favoured, in the way negotiation was used (as an alternative to tactical solutions or just to make a tactical solution possible), in views on what is and is not negotiable (e.g. drugs) and whether negotiators always have to be honest. Finally, negotiators from different countries differed in the way they did or did not liase with private firms during incidents.

Participants identified several training needs. Generally a need was felt to learn more about the psychological background of hostage takers, about consequences of hostage takers or victims coming from another cultural or ethnic background and about the perception of hostage takers (and victims) of crisis negotiations. With regard to international co-operation, joint training was felt to be needed as well as more knowledge about treaties and relevant legal procedures.

European law-enforcement co-operation could be improved by making it more formal. Formal structures to be enhanced include bilateral co-operation between neighbouring countries and international co-operation at a practitioner's level. Guidelines for cross-border co-operation should be established and national legislation should be harmonised. An important action to improve co-operation would be the exchange of best practices.

In the course of the conference, participants discussed several innovative approaches to crisis negotiation. Not everyone agreed on the feasibility of so-called parallel negotiations, where a second team of negotiators has contact with a hostage taker. Questions were raised about the legality and about when to stop. All participants agreed that the skills of hostage negotiators could be used in a wider array of situations, e.g. talking to victims of disasters/ big fires, public order situations, etc. On the other hand, a need was felt to teach basis 'crisis communication' dos and don'ts to policemen who may be the first to respond to a crisis situation. All participants agreed that joint training and the inclusion of a foreign negotiator as adviser could greatly enhance the success of negotiations with international aspects.

The participants identified several problems and obstacles for a professional use of hostage negotiators in crises. The way in which negotiators are alarmed often depends on a list in the control room or on an individual commander and involvement of negotiators may be accidental rather than structural. The hierarchical position of negotiators is often lower than that of tactical commanders or negotiation is often less important in the crisis organisation. Both aspects tend to diminish the potential impact of negotiation.

Especially in relation to cross border incidents, differences in legislation, different interpretations of Schengen, differences in the way the police are organised and a lack of joint training may render co-operation difficult. As one participant put it: the criminals are networking, but we are not.
In incidents where borders are crossed, differences of opinion may arise as to where control lies. Strategic country control should remain in the country where the incident originated, and tactical control in the country where the incident is

actually taking place. In practice, tactic considerations may lead strategic decisions.

Language poses another problem in international incidents (or in incidents involving nationals originating from another country). Use of interpreters may be necessary, but interpreters are usually not trained in crisis situations, their trustworthiness may be a problem, and interpreters may become the objects of personal threats.

Many countries lack national co-ordination regarding crisis negotiation. In some countries there does not appear to be a problem (e.g. Belgium, Norway). Especially states consisting of relatively autonomous countries (e.g. Germany) or having relatively autonomous forces may experience problems with co-ordination within the state and co-ordination with other states. The United Kingdom with 43 regional forces has established a manageable structure with 8 regions, co-ordinated by Scotland Yard. During the conference negotiators from the Netherlands (26 regional forces) formed a national platform.

Recommendations

In a concluding plenary session chaired by Maarten de Jong from the Association for European Law Enforcement co-operation, the participants to the conference unanimously agreed on the following recommendations to improve crisis negotiation co-operation in Europe.

1. Publish conference proceedings. The organising committee agreed to do this.

2. Establish a working group of national co-ordinators. Representatives from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands would take the initiative to establish a European working group. Within countries, negotiators will develop means to establish national co-ordination.

3. Involve higher decision making levels. All participants agreed they had a task in this. Availability of the conference proceedings with the conclusions and recommendations of the conference was considered crucial.

4. Organise more exchange of information through:
   - establishing a bulletin board (without compromising the need for data protection);
   - making a directory of names, training opportunities and organisations involved;

- creating a database of incidents;
- regularly holding meetings on techniques, tactics and co-ordination. In these meetings incident commanders and and public prosecutors should be involved as well. It is vital to invite higher level decision makers, because negotiation is just one part of dealing with a problem.

Initiatives will be taken bilaterally. European initiatives will have to come from the working group of national co-ordinators to-be-established.

5. Organise more exchange of negotiators, especially through:
   - joint cross-border training (several initiatives have been taken already, e.g. between Norway and Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium);
   - ad hoc observations of negotiations by colleagues from abroad;
   - active participation in each other's exercises;
   - active participation as adviser or interpreter in negations.

Initiatives may be taken bilaterally. European initiatives will have to come from the working group of national co-ordinators to-be-established.

6. Start research projects, especially concerning:
   - differences in legal procedures;
   - crisis communication from the perspective of perpetrators, victims and relatives;
   - existing theoretical models and application of these models.

Researchers from Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands agreed to make research proposals.