A COMPARISON OF CRISIS NEGOTIATION ACROSS EUROPE

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Introduction

Hostage taking is a major problem in a broad range of situations including terrorist attacks, domestic crises, suicide attempts, criminal kidnaps, and prison revolts. Law enforcement professionals in many European countries increasingly rely on negotiation as a peaceful alternative to tactical assault in ending hostage incidents. Little is known about similarities and differences concerning the management of hostage incidents across European countries. To gain insight into these matters, a Hostage Negotiation Inventory was designed and distributed among national and regional hostage negotiation co-ordinators from the Police Forces in the European Member States, and some Candidate Member States.

The Inventory explored:

1. National and/or regional organisation, negotiation team composition, and ground rules;
2. Characteristics of hostage negotiation incidents and perpetrators from September 1997 to September 1998;
3. General psychological processes and requirements, and needs for evaluation, selection, and training.

To minimise the time to complete the Inventory, the majority of questions provided the response categories or simply asked for an estimated number or percentage. Since there is no international database containing the details of hostage negotiation co-ordinators, members of the board of advisors and the organising committee of the First European Conference on Hostage Negotiations helped identify co-ordinators. Co-ordinators were also traced through the individuals that registered for the conference. Approximately 60 inventories were distributed among the identified regional or national co-ordinators.

The current overview is based upon information provided by 29 co-ordinators reflecting a response rate of 48 %. Although this percentage may appear somewhat low, it must be noted that 13 of the 18 European countries represented at the conference participated in the research, which indicates an alternative response rate of 72 %. The difference in percentages may be explained by the fact that some

countries have only one national co-ordinator, while other countries have many regional co-ordinators. While most of the national co-ordinators returned the Inventory, some of the regional co-ordinators did not. Since the participants in the research were assured that the information provided is treated confidentially, the results presented here will not refer to the outcomes of individual countries.

Respondents
The Inventory was returned by *10 national co-ordinators* from: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, and Slovenia. Also, *19 regional co-ordinators* from: Germany (6), the Netherlands (4), Sweden (1, Stockholm region), and the United Kingdom (8; including Scotland and Wales), participated in the research. The co-ordinators were predominantly male – only 3 co-ordinators were female –, and they were 42 years on average with a range from 29 years to 59 years.

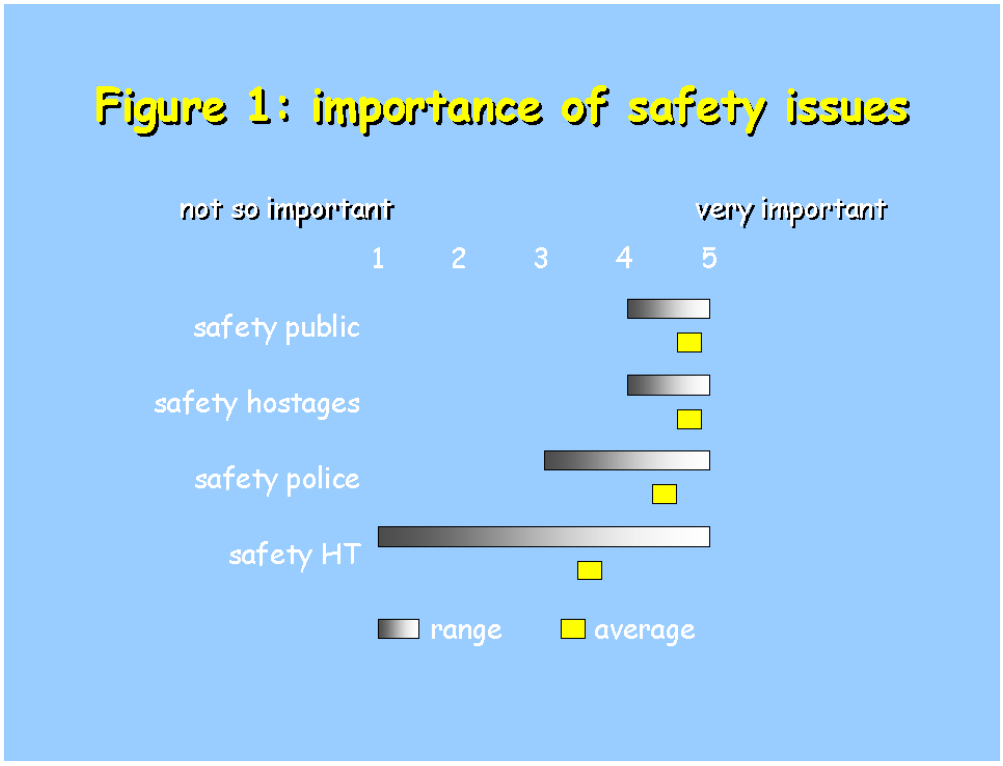
Results
The overview of results given below will be presented in 5 paragraphs, that is (1) negotiator profile, (2) negotiation team characteristics, (3) ground rules, (4) incident types, and (5) training and information needs.

(1) Negotiator profile
As a rule, hostage negotiator is considered a part-time, secondary police function. In one country only, some regions employ full-time negotiators. Many countries require a minimum rank of inspector (or sergeant on the list of promotion) and a maximum rank of superintendent. Some countries have a minimum of four to five years one is assigned on the job. Once selected by superiors or a team of experts, negotiators follow a 1 to 3 week hostage negotiation course, which also includes exercises with tactical teams. An exception to this general rule was found in one German region where negotiators received a one-year training. On average, one out of 5 negotiators is female. The highest percentage of female negotiators reported is 42 %. Yet, some countries do not have female negotiators at all.

(2) Negotiation team characteristics
Clearly, hostage negotiation is a team effort. None of the co-ordinators report having negotiators work alone. On average, negotiators operate in teams of 2-5 negotiators, while the number of negotiators involved increases with the severity and complexity of the incident. Most co-ordinators (80 %) report working in fixed teams; the remaining 20 % usually work in variable teams.

(3) Ground rules

Without exception, the participating countries agree on two important ground rules: (a) minimum use of force and (b) save all lives. Figure 1 gives the relative importance of safety for each of the four involved parties, i.e., public, hostage(s), police, and perpetrator(s).



All co-ordinators agreed that the safety of the public and the hostages is of utmost importance. However, they were more divided about the importance of safety for the police involved and even more so about the importance of safety for the hostage-takers. Yet, on average, these were still considered rather important.

We also asked which issues are considered negotiable when talking to a perpetrator. While designing the Inventory experienced negotiators helped us to identify the issues that could come up during a hostage-taking incident. Food, drinks and medical supplies are issues that can be discussed in all countries, while the exchange of hostages for police or non-police is out of the question.

(4) Incident types
In the Inventory we distinguished between 7 incident types police negotiators can be deployed in, to wit:

- Barricaded suspects
- Criminal kidnaps
- Political kidnaps
- Criminal high risk arrest situations
- Suicide attempts
- Domestic situations
- Prison riots

All the countries that participated in the research employed negotiators in two types of incidents: criminal kidnaps and barricaded suspects. Of the remaining categories police negotiators often do not deal with criminal high-risk arrest situations and prison riots. Several co-ordinators added the following types of incidents negotiators are deployed in:

- Extortion (blackmail/product contamination)
- Hijack
- Demonstrations/environmental protest barricade situations
- Industrial disputes

Figure 2: negotiator involvement in national incidents

747 incidents in 10 countries

• suicide attempts	31%
• domestic situations	26%
• criminal high risk arrest situations	12%
• extortion	11%
• barricaded suspects	10%
• criminal kidnap	9%
• other	1%

We also tried to get insight into the occurrence rate of these incident types. Figure 2 and 3 provide statistics for the period September 1997 to September 1998. Remarkably, a considerable number of co-ordinators reported not being able to provide these statistics due to insufficient or incomplete registration.

With regard to national incidents, the co-ordinators from 10 countries reported 747 incidents. As can be seen in Figure 2, over 50 % of these incidents concerned emotionally or psychologically disturbed individuals in domestic situations or in suicide incidents. With regard to cross-border incidents we see that these primarily concern more 'rational' perpetrators involved in criminal kidnaps and extortion (see Figure 3). Furthermore, we observe a much smaller occurrence rate of 34 incidents. Thus, approximately, the ratio between cross-border and national incidents is 1:20. Twenty-four of the 29 co-ordinators (83 %) reported having national guidelines for crisis negotiation, while only 4 co-ordinators reported having international guidelines (14 %).

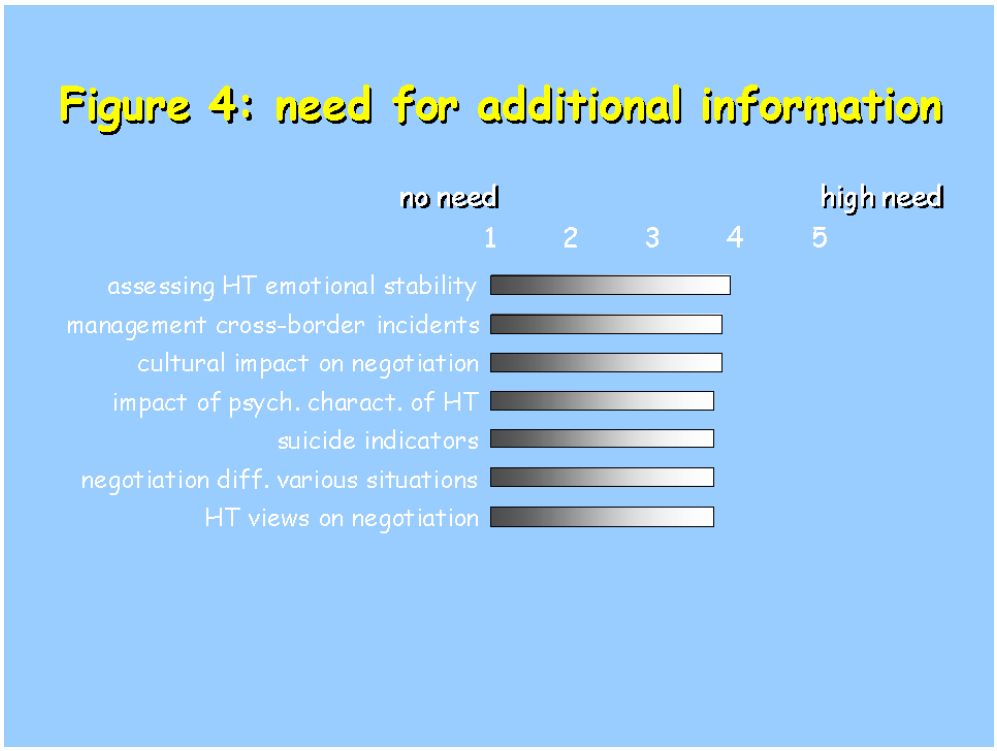
Figure 3: negotiator involvement in cross-border incidents

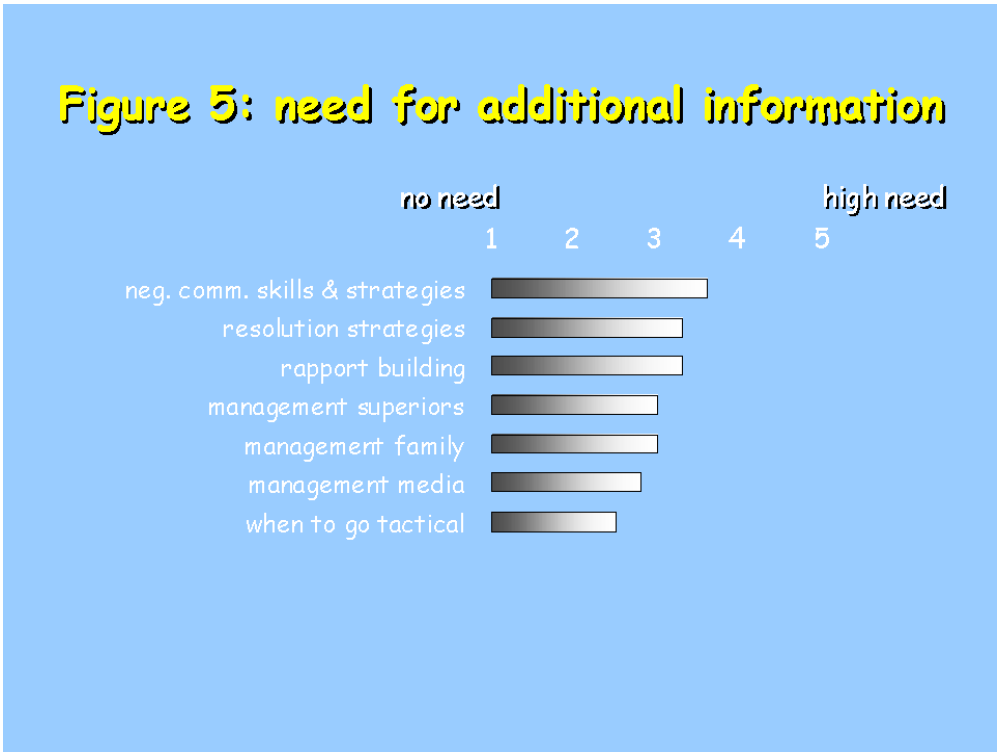
34 incidents in 10 countries

- criminal kidnaps 62 %
- extortion 24 %
- political kidnaps 9 %
- other 5 %
- problem areas
  - language & culture
  - legislation
  - organisation

(5) Training and information need

Figures 4 and 5 give – in order of priority – the issues negotiators feel they should have more training in and information about. In accordance with the relatively high occurrence rate of the emotionally focused domestic and suicide incidents, negotiators indicate a specific need for more information about assessing the perpetrator's emotional stability, and, to a lesser extent, suicide indicators. In fact, many of the high priority issues have to do with an accurate psychological assessment of the hostage-taker as well as the situation. Please also note the high need for more information and training in the area of cross-border incidents.





Concluding remarks

This research provided a first comparison of the organisation and management of hostage-taking incidents within Europe. Despite some differences, the similarities between countries and regions are striking. Most countries seem to have adopted the same concept for negotiation in hostage-taking incidents, especially in terms of the team organisation and the ground rules. However, some of the issues that appeared to be negotiable in one country were not negotiable in another country, which may cause problems when encountering cross-border incidents. Concurrent with international developments, national and regional co-ordinators also indicated a high need for more training and information for the management of cross-border incidents. Although cross border incidents represent only a small part of all hostage-taking situations they are by no means rare events.
All in al, the Inventory increased insights in terms of working methods for hostage negotiations. However, it also highlighted the often incomplete or insufficient registration of actual incidents, situational and perpetrator characteristics and the final outcomes. This is unfortunate because these data not only may uncover flaws in the deployment of negotiators as well as the equipment they use; in comparing findings over years important trends may unfold. Such insights may be of help in anticipating future developments.