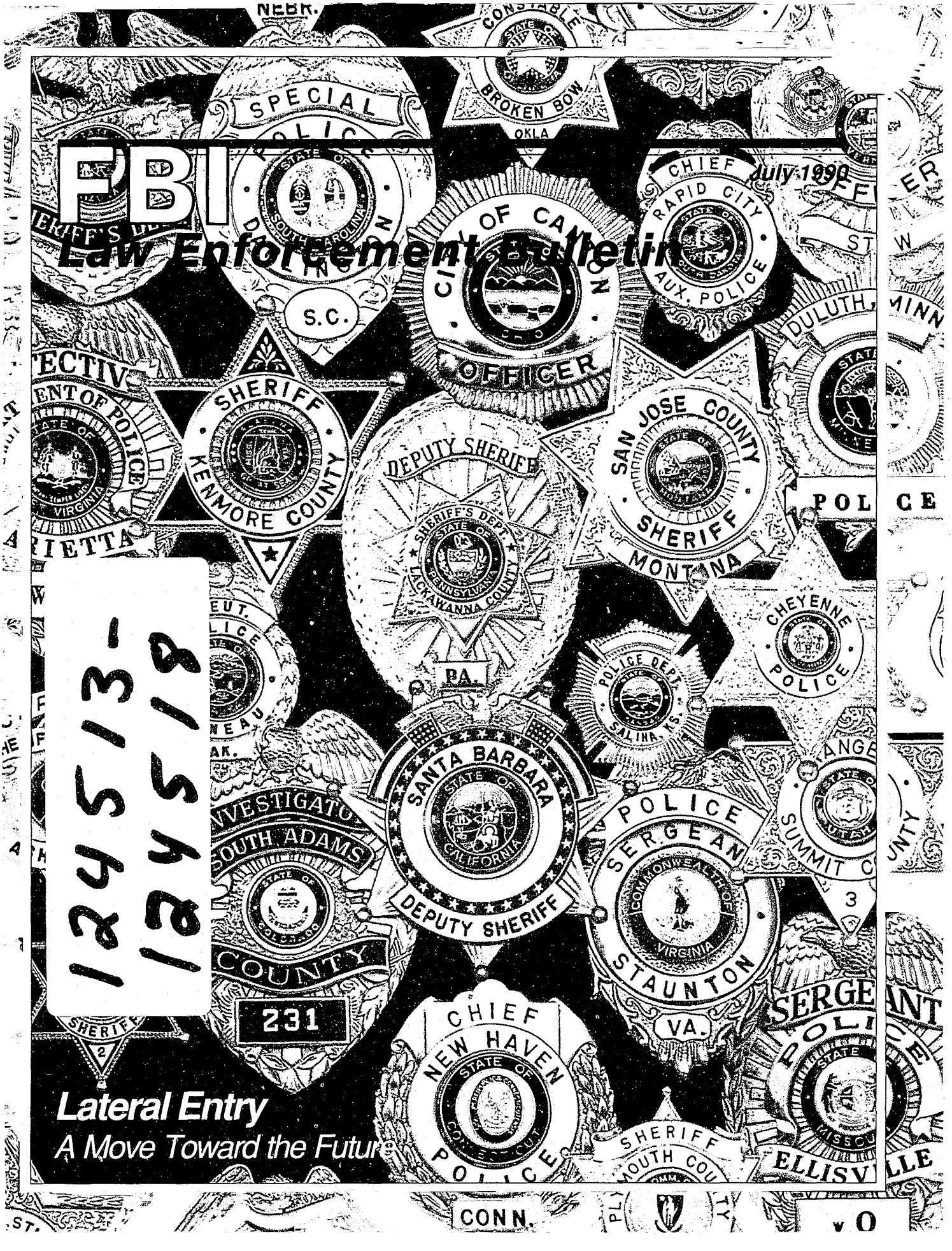

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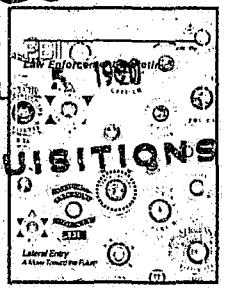

The Cover: *Successful recruiting in the future may depend on a full-scale lateral entry program. See article p. 1.*

United States Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC 20535

William S. Sessions, Director

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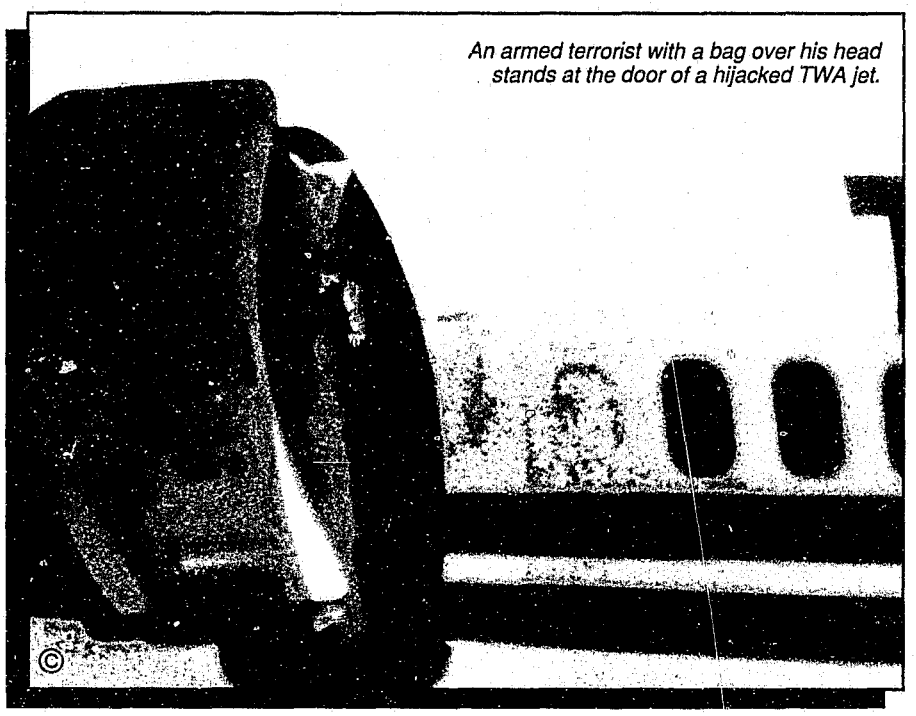
Confronting the Terrorist Hostage Taker



An armed terrorist with a bag over his head stands at the door of a hijacked TWA jet.

By
G. DWAYNE FUSELIER
and
GARY W. NOESNER

"For the foreseeable future, terrorism, both domestic and international, will continue to be a major concern to U.S. Government and law enforcement agencies."[1] Concern over terrorism is consistently voiced by officers attending the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Some officers have the impression that in a terrorist hostage incident, the crisis management approach would (or should) be substantially different from that in a criminal hostage incident. This is not the case.

Since the mid-1970s, the FBI has grouped hostage taking incidents into four broad categories—the terrorist, the prison situation, the criminal, and the mentally disturbed. State and local law enforcement officers at the FBI Academy have indicated that these four major categories are still commonly used by law enforcement agencies.[2] Further, there is also the consensus that the current set of negotiation strategies and tactics available to law enforcement provides viable alternatives from which to choose, whatever the motivation for the taking of hostages.[3]

Unfortunately, much of what is believed about terrorist conduct and behavior is derived from the media and the entertainment industry. Both the general population and the law enforcement community have come to accept the terrorist stereotype as accurately depicting personality traits, dedica-

tion, sophistication, commitment, and modus operandi.

All too often, the dramatic events surrounding a terrorist incident are misrepresented in fictional accounts or in media efforts aimed at recreating actual situations that have occurred. Further, a brief news flash, broadcasted during an ongoing terrorist siege, does not draw an accurate picture of a terrorist's total range of conduct and personality traits. Therefore, many of the expressed ideas regarding terrorists appear to be based upon incorrect perceptions.

The Terrorist Hostage Taker

The FBI defines terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social goals.[4] One major difficulty in discussing the terrorist hostage taker is that the words "terrorist" and "terrorism" have been used by the media to such an extent that they are virtually useless as valid descriptive terms. They have become political terms with almost as many definitions as speakers.

From the viewpoint of the crisis manager (i.e., the on-scene commander), does it help to distinguish a hostage taking as a terrorist act, separate from a criminal act? No, it does not. The label given the behavior does not change the act. In fact, the FBI now refers to such acts as "terrorist crimes" to underscore the fact that the motivation for the behavior does not change the criminality of such behavior. The emphasis here is not meant to imply a lesser risk but to stress that the act is, first and foremost, a violent crime in progress, regardless of the stated motivation of the hostage taker.

Too often, those who are quick to point out that an act is a "terrorist incident" (or any other kind, for that matter) mistakenly confuse the labeling with understanding. In this case, the label is one that is so subjective that it is meaningless. To describe an incident as only a "terrorist" event implies that all such events are similar. Even additional adjectives, such as "Palestinian" terrorists, fail to identify, for example, significant differences in motives, methods, and goals of the various Palestinian factions, and of course, individual differences among the members themselves.

The use of a label is helpful only if the term is associated with essential elements that differentiate one set of behaviors from another. Perhaps a more-descriptive term would be "planned political/religious" hostage taking, since this term does not have the emotional overtones currently attached to the word "terrorist." Such a term avoids the automatic, and potentially misleading, assumptions made when the word "terrorist" is used.

The essential question is: In confronting such an incident, will law enforcement agencies employ crisis management techniques that have been used successfully in a wide variety of hostage/barricade situations, or will those procedures be discarded as a result of faulty assumptions of how terrorists are supposed to behave? Popular perceptions regarding terrorists would lead us to believe that they comprise a unique and specific personality type, and that terrorists are to be

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differentiated from the wide range of criminal and mentally disturbed personalities more frequently observed by law enforcement crisis managers. To our knowledge, no scientific studies or analytical surveys exist that might serve to provide the basis for such a belief. In order to examine the validity of current crisis management/negotiation techniques in confronting such incidents, it is essential to separate common myth from factual knowledge.

The Terrorist Mystique

In a planned political/religious incident, the subjects typically take hostages with the intent of getting publicity for their cause, and in some cases, to demand the release of imprisoned group members. The fact that these are planned rather than spontaneous hostage takings indicates an increased likelihood of outside moral and/or operational support and creates a virtual certainty of extensive media coverage.

It appears that some political and religious extremists, particularly in the Middle East, have been successful in one very basic way—they have generated an extreme interest and concern for their activities among Western law enforcement officers. Former Chinese Communist party leader Mao Tse Tung maintained that terrorists should kill one to influence a thousand, and some radical Palestinian groups and extremist Lebanese Shia (e.g., Hizballah) seem to have accomplished this.

However, in an article reviewing the terrorist psychosocial profile, Strentz concludes that terrorist groups (particularly those of Middle Eastern origin) have changed dramatically.[5] Contrasting left-wing Middle Eastern groups of the 1980s to those groups active a decade earlier, he found the more-recent Middle Eastern groups to be poorly educated, unskilled, unemployed, illiterate, undisciplined, and ill-trained. Does this mean that a planned political/religious hostage incident is not dangerous? Obviously not. As Strentz notes, "While one should never consciously underestimate adversaries, neither should one make them into supermen. They are a force to be reckoned with, but must be viewed within the perspective of reality."[6]

> ***"...many of the expressed ideas regarding terrorists appear to be based upon incorrect perceptions."***

Beginning in 1985, the FBI began investigating violations of the Hostage Taking Statute (Title 18, USC, Section 1203) and in 1986, the Overseas Homicide/Attempted Homicide Statute (Title 18, USC, Section 2331). These statutes provided for the first time the investigative vehicle through which FBI Special Agents could actively and aggressively respond to major terrorist incidents abroad wherein American citizens and property were the victims.

Starting with the June 14, 1985, hijacking of TWA Flight 847, FBI Special Agents came into direct contact with a number of American victims. Through detailed debriefings in pursuit of criminal prosecution, they collected a large volume of data concerning observed terrorist behavior. Subsequent FBI victim debriefings and interviews of incarcerated terrorists involved in almost all of the planned political/religious incidents that have occurred during the second half of the 1980s expanded this database significantly.[7]

Understandably, the information-gathering process during this investigative activity was not designed as an orderly scientific examination that would provide the basis for personality assessments. Rather, it aimed at developing evidentiary material. Nonetheless, relying on these interviews, and on the experience and observation of FBI Agents, a clearer and more accurate picture of terrorist behavior can be drawn. This picture should serve to demystify the terrorist, to separate fact from fiction, and to support the position that decades of significant crisis management experience in a variety of circumstances has prepared American law enforcement to deal with a political/religious hostage incident.

It appears that the average terrorist is not as sophisticated as is commonly believed. Terrorist interviews and victim debriefings show that most of the terrorists of the 1980s received very marginal training prior to deployment for an operation. They were provided with only a minimal set of instructions as

to how to conduct themselves during an operation. And while these terrorists may have been given a list of demands, for the most part, they were not trained to negotiate with authorities to achieve those demands.

In the course of the FBI's investigations, it became evident that these subjects are seldom prepared to deal with the unknown variables and unforeseen changes that routinely play an integral part in such sieges. As a general rule (and more specifically applicable to Middle Eastern subjects), the terrorists are young males with little or no formal education. These individuals come from deprived economic conditions and are without any significant positive work experience. Contrary to popular notion, they do not employ sophisticated false documentation or disguises and most certainly do not fit the "jet set" multilingual, worldly, and savvy profile so often projected in popular literature.

For example, before going to Italy to initiate the October 1985, Achille Lauro incident, the four young terrorists involved never traveled outside of Lebanon. Only one spoke a second language. They received little training, were afforded only minimal instructions regarding their mission, and traveled on Scandinavian passports. These terrorists stood out as four young Arab males aboard a ship populated almost entirely by elderly American and European tourists. Once the operation began, they were confronted with unexpected responses from government officials. This put them in a panic, since they failed to prepare contingency plans and could not adapt to the circumstances.

During the September 1986, hijacking of Pan Am Flight 73 in Karachi, the four terrorists who boarded the Boeing 747 immediately rushed to the front of the aircraft looking for the cockpit in order to gain control of the crew. They were dumbfounded when they discovered the cockpit was not located at the nose of the aircraft, as anticipated. They did not know that a Boeing 747's cockpit could only be reached by ascending a stairway located at the rear of the first class cabin. This delay allowed the cockpit crew to escape.

The April 1988, hijacking of Kuwaiti Flight 422 has been cited as demonstrating terrorist sophistication. However, during this incident, when Beirut International Airport controllers denied landing clearance and blocked the runway, one terrorist demanded the pilot land in the ocean and taxi from there onto the land. When the pilot argued that such a maneuver was impossible, the terrorist displayed the plastic safety card found in the back of all passenger seats and pointed to a drawing depicting a floating aircraft with passengers exiting and gathering on flotation equipment. The terrorist firmly believed that this picture proved that the aircraft could land in the water, float, and then be driven onto land.

Such incidents clearly do not support the popular belief that all terrorists undergo extensive and detailed aircraft hijack training at so-called "desert terrorist academies." However, these examples should not suggest that political/religious hostage takers are harmless or incompetent. These subjects, like all hostage takers, should be treated with the utmost caution and respect. These unsophisticated, uneducated, and ill-trained young men have killed many innocent victims. Indeed, they probably should be considered even more dangerous because of their inadequate preparation and the acts of violence they tend to commit when their plans do not materialize.

> ***"...negotiation strategies and tactics for terrorist incidents are identical to those that would be used during any hostage or barricade incident...."***

The Law Enforcement Response

One question frequently asked by police officers during training sessions is, "How would you negotiate differently during a terrorist incident?" Once the distinction is made between kidnapping (where the location of subject and victim are typically unknown) and hostage taking (where the subject and victim are contained within a police perimeter), officers are surprised (or perhaps disappointed) to hear the answer. Basically, negotiation strategies and tactics

Guidelines For Negotiation

- Stabilize and contain the situation
- Select the right time to make contact
- Take your time when negotiating
- Allow the subject to speak; it is more important to be a good listener than a good talker
- Don't offer the subject anything
- Avoid directing frequent attention to the victims; do not call them hostages
- Be as honest as possible; avoid tricks
- Never dismiss any request as trivial
- Never say "no"
- Soften the demands
- Never set a deadline; try not to accept a deadline
- Do not make alternate suggestions
- Do not introduce outsiders (nonlaw enforcement) into the negotiation process
- Do not allow any exchange of hostages, especially do not exchange a negotiator for a hostage
- Avoid negotiating face to face

for terrorist incidents are identical to those that would be used during any hostage or barricade incident, regardless of the political or religious backgrounds of the subjects.

Simply stated, there are a finite number of strategies (and particular tactics to support each of those strategies) to choose from when negotiating with hostage takers that are contained and isolated. The fact that a particular group of subjects puts forth political or religious reasons for taking hostages does not call into play a conceptually different set of strategies. The negotiation team assesses the motives, demands, and behaviors of these hostage takers and makes recommendations to the on-scene commander as to the most appropriate strategy, drawn from the same set of possibilities as in any other hostage incident.

However, the specific factors the team considers crucial to a particular incident, in all cases, depends on the circumstances of the hostage taking. For example, suppose a person, claiming harassment and persecution by Federal authorities who are stealing thoughts from his mind, took hostages in a public office building and threatened to kill the hostages unless the FBI stopped the persecution. The negotiation team would logically focus on the subject's medical history, seeking records of past treatment for mental disturbance, interviewing any mental health professional (MHP) who may have treated the subject, and perhaps using the MHP as a consultant. On the other hand, if a group of subjects took the same hostages in the same building, but claimed to represent the "People's Holy Liberation Forces," the team would certainly value any information on the origins, composition, and any previous actions by this group. Knowledgeable sources on both the political and religious dogma of the group, as well as language experts, would be consulted and perhaps incorporated into the negotiation team. As one can see, the process of assessment and recommendation remains the same, but clearly the specific factors or issues that the team considers critical vary with each incident.

This is not to say that when a politically motivated incident occurs in the United States, there is not a greater amount of involvement by the higher levels of the U.S. Government, because there is. In fact, "The desire of terrorists, both international and domestic, to focus media attention on their causes by staging attacks at locations or events of international interest has made it necessary for governmental and law enforcement authorities to closely coordinate their preparations for special events."[8] That involvement, however, does not call into play "better," or even different, negotiation strategies or principles. The negotiation recommendations are simply reviewed by a longer chain of command.

Even as long as 12 years ago, Stratton stated that social, political

or religious terrorists are the most difficult to deal with because of their commitment.[9] However, he also pointed out that negotiation with political/religious hostage takers has been successful.

When hostage takers plan to be surrounded, as in the takeover of a public building, the probability of a prolonged incident increases and the risk to the hostages is considered to be very high. However, notwithstanding the fact that such an incident was deliberately planned, the commitment of the hostage takers may not be a "total" commitment. Post-incident review of the behavior of some of the hostage takers in planned political incidents indicates that there may be a difference in being "willing" to die for a cause and in "wanting" to die for a cause. Once the subject has been away from a support system for days or weeks and emotional and physical exhaustion sets in, that person may be more willing to accept the rationale presented by the negotiator.

Political hostage takers have been negotiated with effectively by stressing that their point has been made, their demands have been heard, their cause has been "aired" to the world, and therefore, killing hostages would only serve to discredit them and their cause in the eyes of the public. One author concludes that police negotiating tactics are most likely to succeed in planned, political/religious situations if the subjects are primarily interested in making a symbolic statement and obtaining publicity.[10] These negotiation tactics have, in fact, been successful in resolving a number of planned political/religious hostage incidents in the United States and elsewhere.[11] Even incidents that required a tactical resolution, such as the siege at the Iranian Embassy in London in April 1981, confirmed the appropriateness of these negotiating techniques.

> ***"...law enforcement should respond to these incidents in a manner that is consistent with the crisis management procedures...."***

Conclusion

The dangers posed by planned political/religious hostage taking incidents should in no way be minimized. Rather, law enforcement should respond to these incidents in a manner that is consistent with the crisis management procedures that have been developed and validated through thousands of hostage/barricade situations worldwide.

If political/religious situations are accorded special status or are the cause for law enforcement to ignore effective crisis management strategies, then law enforcement falls victim to the "terrorist mystique" that has allowed terrorism to become a potent weapon in recent years. However, if a planned political/religious incident is not treated as a special case, and hostage takers instead are dealt with as any other high-risk subject would be, then law enforcement will be better able to employ the professional skills learned through the lessons of the past years. LEB

Footnotes

[1] Oliver B. Revell, *Terrorism: A Law Enforcement Perspective* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1988).

[2] Statements received from officers attending negotiation classes conducted by the Special Operations and Research Unit at the FBI Academy.

[3] Participants from major U.S. cities, England, Germany, and Hong Kong during an advanced hostage negotiation seminar held at the FBI Academy in February 1989.

[4] *FBI Analysis of Terrorist Incidents in the United States, 1986*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Washington, D.C., 1986.

[5] Thomas Strentz, "A Terrorist Psychosocial Profile: Past and Present," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, April 1987, pp. 13-19.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Incidents included the Achille Lauro hijacking, the EgyptAir hijacking in Malta, the Rome and Vienna airport attacks, the bombing of TWA Flight 840, the hijacking of Pan Am Flight 73 in Karachi, Pakistan, The Royal Jordanian Airline hijacking, the hijacking of Kuwaiti Flights 221 and 422, and dozens of attacks directed against American diplomats and citizens worldwide.

[8] Supra note 1.

[9] John Stratton, "The Terrorist Act of Hostage Taking: A View of Violence and the Perpetrators," *Police Science and Administration*, vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 1-9.

[10] A.H. Miller, *Terrorism and Hostage Negotiations* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1980).

[11] Incidents included the seizure of a train by South Moluccans in the Netherlands in December 1975; the Balcombe Street siege by IRA members in London in December 1975; the hijacking of TWA Flight 355 by Croatians in September 1976, finally resolved in Paris; the Hanafi Muslim siege of three buildings in Washington, D.C., in March 1977; the hostage taking by Croatians at the West German Consulate in Chicago, Illinois, in August 1978; the takeover of the Turkish Embassy by Armenians in Ottawa, Canada, in March 1985; and the Oakdale, Louisiana, and Atlanta, Georgia, prison sieges by Cuban inmates in November/December 1987.