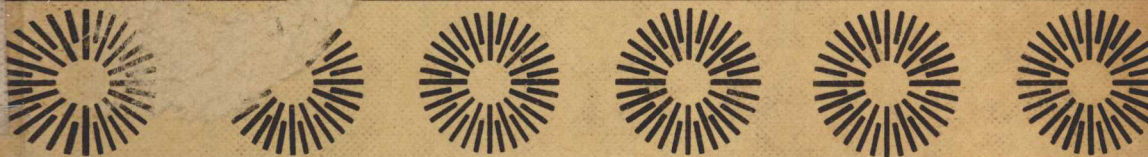# Hostage-Taking

Ronald D. Crelinsten
Denis Szabo

Hostage-Taking

Ronald D. Crelinsten
Denis Szabo
University of Montreal

Lexington Books
D.C. Heath and Company
Lexington, Massachusetts
Toronto

Preface

Hostage-taking is a very ancient form of criminal activity. In fact, it was even an accepted tool of diplomacy when used by legitimate authority. The hostage-taking with which we are concerned is of a more contemporary variety: extortion to achieve political, monetary, or psychological goals.

As far as the size of the phenomenon is concerned, we do not seem to face a phenomenon of epidemic proportions. Between 1968 and mid-1975, only 250 people were killed in terrorist episodes, not all of which even involved hostage-taking. This figure is considerably less than the annual homicide rate in any major American city. According to the testimony of Professor Richard Falk of Princeton University before the U.S. Congressional Committee on International Relations, there have been 647 cases of kidnapping in the United States in the past thirty years. All but three cases have been solved by the FBI, providing one of the highest clearance rates of any criminal activity. The very harsh penalties and the near certainty of conviction, coupled with the usually elaborate preparations which are necessary for committing the act in the first place, seem to keep this particular form of hostage-taking (kidnapping for ransom) under control on a national basis.

The main problem seems to be hostage-taking at the international level, however, where the conviction rate is very low indeed. Authors of hostage-taking are almost assured of immunity from prosecution and punishment.

Furthermore, any statistical argument tends to disguise the psychological and political impact of hostage-taking as a fear-provoking tactic involving the callous use of innocent people to achieve political or personal ends. The political and psychological potential of hostage-taking as a symbolic act of power is of the greatest magnitude. No social organization sharing in the power structure of any society is immune. The fear inspired by the possible use of hostages by very small groups to exert pressure on very large groups within the existing power structure is potentially one of the most disruptive forces in technologically advanced societies.

What could be the contribution of science and technology to the protection of democratic societies from such a threat? The first step is to collect relevant information and data on the phenomenon. At present, such information is very scanty. We need data on the personality of aggressors and victims, on scenarios of incidents, on analysis of control and preventive programs and so forth. Second, interpretation and evaluation of these data represent a major heuristic challenge; all the theoretical resources of natural and behavioral sciences should be drawn on to present testable hypotheses for further research. Third, given the different historical, geographical, and

sociopolitical contexts of the cases, the comparative approach seems of crucial importance. In sum, a multidisciplinary and comparative perspective is indispensable in the gathering and interpretation of facts and theories.

Concerning the public interest, there is an urgent need for decision-makers in private and public enterprises to be informed and to contribute to the analysis and understanding of this phenomenon, since all of them are potential targets. This includes government, air transport, banks, penitentiaries, industrial plants, embassies, etc. The majority of the data and the experience lie within these organizations. Only a joint effort by everyone can have the slightest chance of success in implementing a systematic study.

The importance of informed public opinion should not be underestimated in our political democracies. The extension of scientific inquiry may favor more rational understanding in this field and consequently a more dispassionate and less panicky appraisal of hostage situations. In addition, as far as politically motivated hostage-taking is concerned, scientific analysis may lead to a deeper appreciation of perceived feelings of injustice, discrimination, victimization, persecution, and so forth by those using hostage-taking as a weapon.

At present, there is really no appropriate forum or meeting place for all concerned to engage in the scientific exploration of facts related to hostage-taking. Specialized forums exist, to be sure, yet rarely is the forum widened to include all interested parties. The scientific community is traditionally concerned with theory and methodology. The practitioners not only have access to all data, but also are traditionally concerned with pragmatic, day-to-day problem-solving. Why should we not make an imaginative effort to combine everyone's interests and abilities to engage in this endeavor?

This book derives from an international, multidisciplinary seminar held in Santa Margherita, Italy in May of 1976. The seminar's primary purpose was to see if individuals who share a common concern, but who approach it from many and varied perspectives, could fruitfully collaborate to increase knowledge and understanding of hostage-taking.

The seminar represented an experimental approach to the scientific study of criminal justice operations concerned with crime prevention and control. The idea was to gather previously untapped sources of knowledge and expertise in combination with traditional criminal justice expertise. By bringing together a wide variety of national and professional experience and addressing one particular problem (in this case, hostage-taking) from a broad range of perspectives, it was hoped that a crossfertilization of ideas and knowledge would be achieved. This, in turn, might result in the opening up of new avenues of study and the providing of new insights into old problems. This aim was achieved to such a degree that the authors feel that further projects of this kind should be developed as soon as possible.

The interaction between academic and practical perspectives, research

and policy-making, private sector and public sector, provides a unique opportunity to grasp the full complexity of the problems faced in dealing with a particular criminal problem. The result is that individual experts establish new perspectives that are deplorably rare in our hyperspecialized society. In addition, an analysis of the interaction of ideas and knowledge provides clear guidelines on where to go next. This is accomplished by pinpointing which issues persist throughout the crossfertilization of ideas and by noting which issues seem to be avoided or quickly passed over throughout the information exchange. In this way, it becomes clear which problems are at the forefront of current knowledge and expertise and which problems seem to pose difficulties or seem easier to ignore because of lack of knowledge.

Part I of the book is a revised and updated version of a working paper written by R.D. Crelinsten for the seminar. Chapters 4-7 of part II are based on the proceedings of the seminar, while chapter 8 is a revised version of R.D. Crelinsten's analysis of the seminar that he prepared for the final report on the proceedings. Part III includes three papers that were prepared by three of the participants before the seminar and one paper deriving from a subsequent seminar, held a year later, which extended the work of the hostage-taking seminar.

The theme that unifies all three parts is the relationship between theory and practice and the interface between research and policy. While the analysis in part I is primarily theoretical, it has direct application to practical issues raised in part II. While part II focuses on prevention and control—surely a practical concern—it corroborates and amplifies the theoretical analysis in part I. Finally, the case studies in part III—three on police operations at the national level and one on terrorist victimization in general—highlight many of the theoretical and practical issues raised in the two preceding parts.

Terrorism and hostage-taking will probably remain two of the major international crimes in the coming decades. The United Nations attach a high priority to the study, prevention, and control of these phenomena. While this book represents but an initial survey of the problems encountered to date, it appears that it is both realistic and productive to proceed with a more systematic and detailed enterprise. In view of this, we feel that the joint, international effort that served as the impetus for writing this book should be continued, and we are ready to support any concrete proposal to that effect.

Acknowledgments

Contents

List of Figures

Part I
From Theory to Practice:
A Systems Approach
to the Study of
Hostage-Taking

In dealing with any particular criminal problem, there are two very important preliminary steps to understanding the problem and to developing strategies for controlling it.

First, the problem itself should be described and subjected to phenomenological analysis, that is, it should be broken down into elements, and these elements should be classified without any attempt at a causal explanation. Once this descriptive model has been developed, one can then proceed to use it as a tool in working out control strategies. In this context, research on cause and effect develops quite naturally, and theory and practice go hand-in-hand.

In practice, it is generally the case that control efforts lack this theoretical foundation and that, at best, such a foundation is built up very slowly through trial and error in the process of implementing control strategies. This is partly unavoidable, since many pressing problems need to be dealt with despite the lack of descriptive models that would provide the necessary knowledge and understanding. However, this should not mean that the phenomenological analysis is overlooked or set aside temporarily (until things are "under control"). It should be an integral element in all control strategies.

The second preliminary task is to describe and analyze those who wish to control the problem. Taken literally, this sounds a bit like looking through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars; one wants to focus on the problem, not on those who are focusing on the problem! Yet the two are inseparable. Anyone who is concerned with a particular problem views that problem from his own perspective. For example, the phenomenon of hostage-taking as viewed by a potential kidnapper planning his strategy can be very different from hostage-taking as viewed by a director of security of a bank. Interestingly enough, and quite to the point, the director of security might gain considerable insight into how to go about his own task if he tried to view his own problem through the "binoculars" of the potential kidnapper. In fact, many hostage training courses use this technique implicitly, if not explicitly. The second task is, therefore, to view the phenomenon of hostage-taking through the eyes of those who wish to control or study it. By doing so, we shall analyze how the phenomenon itself varies according to the perspective used. This in turn should lead to a greater understanding of the phenome-

1

non itself. By looking at an object from all angles, one gains a clearer picture of that object. Thus, the two tasks are related, and the observer and the observed, the controller and the controlled, are indeed inseparable.

This section attempts to set the stage for a fruitful attack on the problem of hostage-taking by sketching out the broad outlines for accomplishing these two important tasks. In chapter 1, a model is developed in which the phenomenon of hostage-taking is broken down into easily identifiable elements. The interaction of these elements is then analyzed in terms of their applicability and generalizability to concrete situations or incidents. This is the first task outlined. It is directly related to the problem of typology, which is widely recognized as a necessary first step in dealing with the hostage problem. The issue of typology is briefly explored in chapter 2.

Once the model is developed, the second task comes in. In chapter 3, the model is examined from the various perspectives of those who are concerned with the phenomenon of hostage-taking. Depending on the goals implicit in that perspective—preventive security, sociopolitical analysis, police response to individual incidents, or negotiation during an ongoing incident—one can analyze which elements of the phenomenon are more salient and thus can gain insights into how the phenomenon is being perceived from that particular point of view.

The idea is to make the entire complex phenomenon of hostage-taking easily accessible to all interested parties, to recognize the needs, goals, and experiences of each interest group, and to increase understanding at all levels. Only then can we hope for effective communication and cooperation among different groups who share a deep concern with a particularly tricky and delicate problem.

1 A Phenomenological Analysis of Hostage-Taking

The most characteristic feature of hostage-taking is its triangular aspect—three parties are involved. The hostage (a) is the means by which the hostage-taker (b) gains something from a third party (c). A booklet on hostage-taking put out some years ago by the French Ministry of the Interior (FMI)[1] introduces the terms "passive victim" and "active victim" to refer to the hostage and the party to whom the demands are made, respectively. These are very useful terms as they help to clearly define two of the basic elements of the hostage-taking phenomenon. The hostage-taker can variously be called "offender," "perpetrator," or "hostage-taker." Thus, we have the first three basic elements of our analysis. Figure 1-1 depicts them schematically. The direction of the arrows indicates that the passive victim is a means to an end—an intermediary in an exchange between offender and active victim. It is the active victim who can meet the demands of the offender: he is active, while the hostage is passive.

Two other elements come immediately into the picture to describe the relationship among the offender and his two victims. They are "threat" and "demand," and they obviously refer to the passive victim and the active victim, respectively. The triangular relation now becomes clear, as depicted in figure 1-2. To complete the triangle, we would have to connect the two victims. It is clear that the relation between these two is a critical element in itself. If the active victim feels no great concern about the passive victim and is loath to meet the demand in the first place, he is quite unlikely to accede to the demand and to avert the threat. We could come up with a label for this factor—for example, an "intervictim bond"—and the picture is complete with six elements: three persons and three links among them, as depicted in figure 1-3. However, we are trying to develop a model based only on observable elements. An intervictim bond is a hypothetical construct and therefore will be omitted in further discussion.

Taken together, these five elements—offender, passive victim (hostage), active victim, threat, and demand—describe the initial stage of any

Offender ————————> Passive Victim ————————> Active Victim
                        (hostage)

Figure 1-1. The Three Basic Elements in a Hostage-Taking.

3

```
                          Offender
                         /        \
                     Threat        Demand
                       /              \
              Passive Victim      Active Victim
```
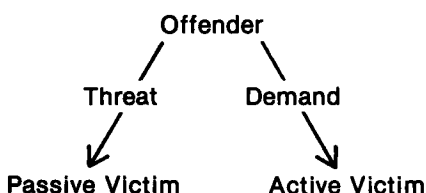
Figure 1-2. The Triangular Relationship Characteristic of Hostage-Taking.

hostage-taking incident. A sixth element completes the picture: "context" (in a situational or physical setting sense). Thus, the incident may occur in a bank, inside an airplane in flight, inside a prison, in a store, or on the street. Figure 1-4 includes this new element in the triangular model.

The picture developed so far clearly shares certain elements with other criminal activities, most notably extortion and blackmail. The only element really lacking in the latter is the passive victim or hostage. All the other elements are there, including the demand (usually financial) and the threat (often involving divulging of information). In this case, the picture could be depicted as in figure 1-5.

More intriguing is the parallel between hostage-taking and strikes.[2] Both phenomena share the common feature that at least three parties are involved. In the case of hostage-taking, the passive victim is obviously the hostage, and the active victim usually is determined by the demand and perhaps also by the threat, in the sense that those concerned with the well-being of the hostage, for example, relatives, may get involved, even though they cannot meet all the demands, for example, political ones. In the case of

```
                          Offender
                         /        \
                     Threat        Demand
                       /              \
          Passive Victim <-----------> Active Victim
                          Inter-victim
                             bond
```
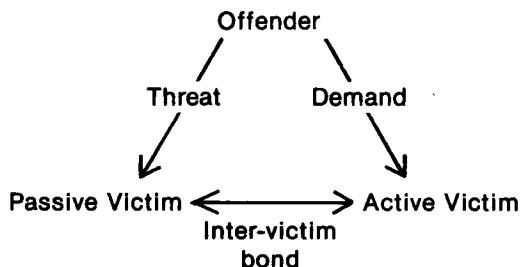
Figure 1-3. The Hypothetical Inter-victim Bond in the Hostage-Taking Triangle.

```
                    Offender
                    /      \
               Threat      Demand
                  /            \
                /   Context     \
              |/                 \|
        Passive Victim      Active Victim
```
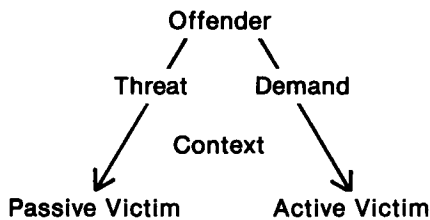
Figure 1-4. The Importance of Context in the Hostage-Taking Triangle.

strikes, the passive victim depends on the parties involved or, to keep terminology consistent, the context. In the case of teachers striking against the government, the passive victims are primarily the students, although parents and even other institutions, be they in the job market or in higher education, may also be affected. In the case of mail service, the passive victims are the public and all institutions carrying on business by mail. In this case, private delivery services and phone service would be affected—either by a welcome boom in business or an unwelcome flood of business. This was the case during a postal strike in Canada in 1976. The point to realize here is that the primary event may have specific secondary effects, which are determined by the context. Finally, in the case of different types of industry, the passive victim can range from consumers to supporting industries, for example, the steel industry during a strike in the automobile industry.

One point that emerges from this comparison is that the terms "active" and "passive," used to distinguish between the two kinds of victims, are not strictly accurate. The implication of these terms is that only one victim, the active one, can determine the outcome of the incident. This is not strictly true. In the case of strikes, particularly in the public sector, public opinion —admittedly closely tied to press reactions—is often a critical factor in influencing the outcome of the strike. So in a hostage situation, the hostage

```
                       Demand
                    ──────────>
        Offender                    Victim
                    ──────────>
                       Threat
```
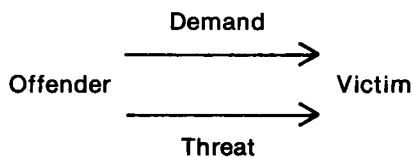
Figure 1-5. The Basic Elements as Depicted in Other Extortionate Acts.

can influence the outcome of the incident. The Stockholm Syndrome, whereby the hostage develops a positive bond with the hostage-taker, is evidence that the hostage can be far from passive. While the syndrome is based on a Swedish bank case, a much better example is the Patricia Hearst case, where Ms. Hearst was so active a hostage that she was finally prosecuted and convicted along with her captors.

In light of this, it is suggested that the terms "active" and "passive" be replaced with "primary" and "secondary," respectively. This preserves the distinction between victims and avoids the misleading implications concerning ability to respond or affect the outcome. Of course, many hostages are incapacitated by their captors, and, thus the term "passive" would be appropriate. However, the term "secondary" remains appropriate whether the hostage is potentially active or not, and the terms "primary" and "secondary" also convey the fact that the offender's primary target is the active victim's meeting his demands and that the hostage is merely a means to that end. FMI[3] points out that the constraints placed upon the two types of victim are different. There is a direct constraint placed upon the hostage, while an indirect constraint is placed upon the primary victim. This distinction might imply that the term "primary" should be applied to the hostage, but this would contradict the fact that the hostage is merely a means to an end. The active victim is really the primary victim. Thus, we have an indirect constraint placed on the primary victim via the placing of a direct constraint on the secondary victim. Finally, the primary/secondary terminology has the virtue of being extendable to tertiary victims, such as relatives of secondary victims, or airline companies, which must pay for planes destroyed in skyjacking incidents, even though they were neither primary nor secondary (hostage) victims.

We have analyzed the hostage-taking phenomenon in its initial stages, as it first occurs. We have also moved ahead into the later stages, in our discussion of the ability of victims to respond or to influence outcome. Here we have moved beyond the initial stage and entered the area of response and counterresponse. The schema developed so far (see figure 1-4) is a static one, depicting a system with its subcomponents arranged in a particular array or pattern. As soon as response is considered, we move into a dynamic schema and temporal elements become important. Dawe,[4] for example, identifies three stages in a temporal breakdown of hostage situations: the containment phase, the mobile negotiation phase, and the relocation or change of venue phase.

Let us look at the primary or active victim first. He can choose to act alone or to involve other parties. These other parties could include superiors, police, press, friends, and relatives. If involved in preventive planning he could call in an entire hostage negotiation team.[5] The instant other parties become involved, they become integral elements in the entire system

to the extent that their responses affect other elements in the system. Thus, police sharpshooters could kill the offender, a superior of the primary victim could accede to the demand, or a press reporter could, by his very presence, bolster the confidence of the offender, etc. A feedback mechanism is set up whereby the response of the primary victim and those whom he calls into the case feed back to the offender, who then alters either the threat or the demand or both, and so on. A continuous flow of back-and-forth interaction is not inevitable of course, and various forms of stalemate, impasses, and communication blocks can occur. It is generally agreed that a primary goal in hostage situations is to generate and maintain this two-way flow of communication as much as possible. It is here that the temporal factors become important, particularly as they relate to the psychology and physiology of stress.

Other parties can become involved even without being called in by the primary victim. Passersby are an obvious example. Also, the offender can directly contact the press, and the press can then involve more people. In the case of the Bronfman kidnapping in New York, some relatives of the hostage first found out that the youth was kidnapped by reading the newspaper. A more common example, particularly in cases where hostages are taken in an enclosed, usually public, area (referred to as barricaded situations in police circles), is the ''cop on the beat,'' who first comes in contact with the hostage-taker. He is typically faced with a list of alternatives different from, but reminiscent of, the list of alternatives faced by the primary victim. He could contact his superiors, initiate containment, terminate the incident himself, buy time until help arrives. This also would apply to the various security personnel who guard institutions or areas where hostage-taking could occur.[6] Again, each party becomes an element in the total picture to the extent to which he influences any other element in the system.

Turning now to the response of the hostage, three main possibilities exist. First, there is an attempt by the hostage to terminate the incident himself. This can involve fight or flight (overpowering his captor or escaping) or convincing his captor to release him or to surrender. This tactic is generally discouraged by preventive training experts, as it is considered very dangerous. Second, there is what can be called a ''medical response.'' Subsumed under this category would be heart attacks, fainting, hysteria, requiring medication which is not at hand, for diabetes or asthma, for example. This type of response would likely introduce a new dimension into the demand element, that of medical help, and would potentially introduce a new party into the picture. Finally, there is the response of identification or the Stockholm Syndrome, whereby a sympathy is developed for the offender, and, in the extreme case, the hostage teams up, so to speak, with the offender.

Figure 1-6 sums up the possibilities pictorially. In it are depicted the short-term responses of the main actors. While the figure introduces a new