

**"Hostage taking today":** Diverse hostage situations (in relation with terrorism)

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I'm not a specialist on practical hostage situations, as are the gentlemen around me. So, aside from hostage taking and liberation techniques, I will remain on the academic side of the question. I will try and propose a conceptual global framework for this touchy subject of hostage situations, and I will briefly suggest some ways of thinking for intellectual behavior when confronted with such situations.

First of all, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that today, we are all hostages and I will try and explain it.

Terrorism and hostage situations are linked from their beginning: it appears that through different means "terror" can be summarized as taking hostages and killing. This statement is maybe a little succinct, but I will try to demonstrate what I mean.

So, hostage situations can be divided into two main trends, an explicit one and an implicit one. However, they are mixed together and coexist with killing actions that may, of course, occur without a preliminary hostage situation.

1- One of these trends leads to explicit hostage situations: one person or a small group of persons is held as a lever to obtain something.

This "something" may be money as well as a political demand.

- Money, the first "sub-trend" of explicit hostage taking is quite common. That means that the terrorist group abducts people for the purpose of requesting money for their freedom.

For instance, this practice is very common with the FARC, (Fuerzas Armadas Revolutionarias de Colombia – EP – army of the people) the Colombian narco-terrorist group. The figures are terrifying.

From January of 1996 to March of 2001, 12 917 people have been kidnapped by all types of Colombian criminals. The FARC are responsible for 3 513 abductions and about the same figure represents unidentified acts. The total in 2000 was 3 705.

Today, Colombian specialists consider that at least 500 people are detained by the FARC in the Switzerland sized so-called "demilitarized" zone. This same zone that the UN and 10 so-called "facilitator" nations - including France – managed, a few days ago, to preserve under the rule of the terrorists.

According to our sources, a ransom's mean price is \$400 000 in Colombia and the starting price is \$2million for a foreigner.

It's a great deal of money that combines with the FARC's cocaine and heroin trade.

This is only one example of the hostage taking money business, but there are of course many others.

- The other "sub-trend" of explicit hostage taking, is the use of hostages to modify the political behavior of a government, internal or diplomatic. The hostage situation can last long or be short but is intended to put high media pressure on a government, which generally leads to negotiations.

The goal may be effective or symbolic but always using opinion as a main player.

For instance the objective can be liberation of so called political prisoners, usually other terrorists, and the means that comes first to mind is hijacking.

One among so many happened in January of 2000. 5 hijackers from the Islamist group "Harakat ul Mujahidine", Pakistanese, close to Oussama Ber Laden, kept 160 hostages in an Indian Airlines plane on the Khandahar airport runway for 170 hours.

They demanded the liberation of the Kashmiri separatist Masood Azhar, 36 extremists, the body of one of them and \$200 million.

But that time, the first demand the commandos dropped was the money and at the end of a hard negotiation, only three people were released.

None of the commandos was caught. India, under the spotlights of the world's media, had to change its attitude and free some islamists involved in Kashmir terrorist actions.

Of course, a hostage situation can include both, money and a political request, for instance Lebanon and French hostages. The situation was created to make France change its politics towards the Middle-East situation and particularly Iran, but hostages were exchanged for – controversial – money

It also has to be said that these explicit hostage situations can be very similar outside of terrorism in purely criminal actions.

2 - The other trend is the implicit or global hostage situation: an entire population is hostage to terrorism, i.e. a terrorist entity or a criminal group using terrorist methods. This is the concept of "total war", the ultimate political violence in which no one is kept outside of the so-called "conflict". That's why, ladies and gentlemen, I told you we are all hostages.

This global hostage situation can be incrementally direct or indirect.

- Directly, it can be a nationalist group within its own population or in its people's Diaspora (Kurds/PKK, Tamils/LTTE...). It can also happen in a sub-country in a revolutionary or civil war process (Basque country/ETA, IRA/Ireland catholic neighborhoods before the truce...).

The usual means are violence, extortion and revolutionary tax: the whole national group is an hostage of the terrorist and the consensus, if always emphasized, never real. Most of the people pay, not by will, but because they are obliged to; most of them do not agree with the violence which is usually used to show what can happen if they do not satisfy conditions of the terrorist group. They are hostages...

- This global hostage situation can be indirect too. Indirectly, it can be a whole country, even a group of countries facing a global terrorist threat, where people live in fear and concede to restrictions on their freedoms, while the government reduces fundamental freedoms through the imposition of measures intended to counter potential terrorist acts.

It's today the case of the freedom of travel, particularly in airlines and the global fear of anthrax coming through mail, i.e. the entire problem of NBC terrorism that should be developed separately.

That is the situation we face now here and in many of the western Countries.

We, today, are hostages.

3 – Of course, as I told you, both trends exist together in the terrorist context.

So, hostage situations, all of them, but maybe especially implicit ones, these total and permanent ones that global terrorism generates, should be considered the ultimate crime against Human Rights.

The response that satisfies the principle of due proportionality is, while trusting one's own people, to fight back in order to eradicate the cause of the hostage situation. This means combating terrorism.

- Trust. Political leaders and local governments have to make a clear choice that minimizes constraint and associates people. This might be thought of in the same way as neighborhood watches and reserves that work with diverse law enforcement agencies.
- Fight. Designation of the enemy is a “regalian power”, one of the fundamental powers reserved to governments, based on sovereignty. That designation is necessary even if now the protoplasmic and hybrid groups we have to face are more and more difficult to identify.

But, as long as the enemy is clearly identified, the principle of reciprocity may authorize intelligence based proactive actions to eradicate terrorism.

That may be the way to terminate the global hostage situation we currently suffer.

Thank you for your attention.

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