

# Far and Away: Police Negotiators on Overseas Deployments

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## Abstract

The growing presence of Western expats and travelers in fragile states and conflict zones has led to a rise in the deployment of police negotiators overseas to assist in the management of kidnap cases. However, despite the fact that the conflict setting and dynamics of overseas cases arguably differ from domestic deployments, police negotiators in many countries are not specifically selected nor trained to operate overseas. There is also a lack of research on the subject. Based on semi-structured interviews with police negotiators from a number of different countries, this article seeks to fill this gap. We report our findings in relation to three main themes: the type of incidents overseas negotiators are involved in and the consequences for the negotiation process, the negotiator role and (team) context, and the multitude of parties involved. We conclude with identifying ways through which operational deployment and negotiator training can be improved to account for overseas deployment issues.

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been an exponential rise in international kidnapping incidents (Moor & Remijnse, 2008; Romano, 2007), which we define as incidents in which one or more persons are kidnapped in another country than that they reside in and in which the abduction takes place to extract some form of concession in return for the safe release of the hostages (Wilson, 2003). One important reason for this

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is that in recent years, there is an increased presence of foreigners working or traveling to fragile states and conflict areas. Aid workers and employees of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and international organizations like the UN are increasingly working in places where kidnappings regularly occur. In addition, multinational corporations have an increasing presence in volatile regions, in an effort to establish business in low-salary countries and to explore new markets and resources. Finally, the increasing popularity of adventure holiday packages also exposes a greater number of travelers to the risk of being kidnapped in a foreign country (Deinum, 2009). In such contexts, foreigners make interesting kidnapping targets primarily for financial reasons, as they are seen as being worth more money than domestic hostages (Moor & Remijnse, 2008). Foreigners are also interesting targets for politically motivated kidnappers as they guarantee worldwide media attention and frequently have great symbolic value in relation to the cause (Moor & Remijnse, 2008; Romano, 2007).

In response to such incidents, most Western and East Asian countries deploy police negotiators outside of their regular (domestic) area of operation. Despite obvious differences between domestic deployments and international cases, police negotiators in the Netherlands, as well as in many other countries, receive a training course designed for domestic negotiations. In addition, while the dynamics surrounding domestic incidents (particularly barricaded sieges) are well documented in crisis negotiation textbooks (e.g., McMains & Mullins, 2006; Charles, 2008) and empirical research (e.g., Taylor & Thomas, 2008; Donohue & Roberto, 1993), the dynamics of international incidents are shrouded in mystery. In sum, international kidnap negotiation is becoming increasingly important and there is almost no evidence base for good practice.

Based on semi-structured interviews with police negotiators and other involved parties from a number of different countries, this article aims at identifying key issues related to such deployment. We focus our inquiry on hostage taking incidents of citizens of Western countries in non-Western regions, and will further refer to them as overseas or international incidents. The first part of this article provides an introduction to the domain, highlighting three areas of attention for overseas deployment: (a) the type of incidents overseas negotiators are involved in and the consequences for the negotiation process, (b) the negotiator role and (team) context, and (c) the multitude of parties involved. Next, we describe the method we used to conduct 19 interviews with directly involved professionals to explore these themes and report the main findings of our exploratory analyses. A section with practical recommendations follows each of the themes. We conclude with some limitations of our research and recommendations for the selection and training of overseas negotiators.

## International versus Domestic Deployment

One of the key differences between domestic and international deployments may relate to the types of incidents in which negotiators become involved. While international operations primarily concern kidnapping incidents, in domestic operations, negotiators are deployed to handle various types of scenarios, including barricaded suspects, suicide attempts, and public order incidents (Noesner, 1999). However, there is not much

information available on how often police negotiators are deployed in each of the different situations. With respect to domestic situations, we know of two datasets that shed some light on this. The first is McMains and Mullins (2006, p. 8) report on data from the US Hostage Barricade Database System (HOBAS), a nationwide database on hostage or crisis incidents. The second is Giebels (1999) collection of occurrence rates from incidents coordinated by 10 European countries prior to the First European Conference on Hostage Negotiations (Arnhem, The Netherlands, 1998). A comparison of both datasets shows that the large majority of crisis incidents negotiators are deployed in—in both the U.S.A. and Europe—and are barricaded situations and suicide attempts (see first two columns in Table 1).

To compare these relative frequencies with more recent data, the first author of this article recorded for a period of 1 year (2006) the data of three of the in total seven regionally organized negotiation teams in the Netherlands (see Nieboer-Martini, 2011). The resulting relative frequency of occurrence for each category of incidents is depicted in the third column of Table 1. While for the latter dataset, barricaded suspects and suicide attempts are also leading categories, the number of kidnapping incidents police negotiators are involved in also appears somewhat larger. Further inspection of these incidents shows that over half of these cases concerned kidnappings within a (former) romantic relationship, complemented by children withdrawn from parental authority (most of the times by the other parent) and kidnappings between criminals, mostly to settle a dispute. In the period covered by the data, no domestic kidnappings for ransom took place in which police negotiators were involved.

In contrast with domestic practice, a review of recent cases of overseas negotiations clearly shows these incidents predominantly concern ransom-oriented kidnapping incidents. This included, for example, the kidnapping of Medicines sans borders aid worker Arjan Erkel in Dagestan and Leiden university student Roelant Jonker, who was abducted in Columbia. Indeed, it has been recognized that in most international kidnappings the ultimate goal is to obtain money (Romano, 2007), although some

Table 1  
*Relative Frequency of Occurrence from Three Datasets*

	HOBAS (U.S.A.) McMains & Mullins (2006)	Europe Giebels (1999)	The Netherlands Nieboer-Martini (2011)
Barricade	49.1	36	20.3
Barricade w/victims	19.1		
Suicide (attempt)	34.6	31	35.3
Kidnapping or hostage	4.5	9	20.3
Extortion	–	11	6
Public order	–	–	6.8
Other or combination	1.8	13	11.3

*Note:* Relative frequencies are used for comparison.  $N = 4680$  in the HOBAS dataset;  $N = 747$  in the Giebels' dataset;  $N$  in the Nieboer dataset withheld for security reasons. Please note that the studies have used somewhat different labels categorizing the incidents.

kidnappings are also politically or religiously motivated. In some cases, there is a collusion of these factors, and even politically motivated kidnappings sometimes have a financial component, as kidnappings for ransom have in recent years become a major source for fundraising for terrorist groups such as FARC in Colombia, Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, or al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (cf. Hagedoorn Auerbach, 1998; Romano, 2007). This suggests that the majority of domestic cases and overseas kidnappings differ on a basic distinction: where most domestic cases are expressive, often involving an overwhelmed and highly emotional individual, overseas kidnappings are more instrumentally oriented (cf. Romano, 2007). With regard to such conflict negotiations, research shows that cultural issues highly influence negotiation dynamics (Gelfand & Brett, 2004). For example, Giebels and Taylor's (2009) examination of 25 instrumental crisis negotiations shows that an important distinction is whether perpetrators originate from non-Western high-context cultures rather than Western, low-context cultures, with the latter negotiations revolving more around logic and rationality.

A second key difference between domestic and overseas negotiation assignments relates to the constellation in which negotiators work. Most countries work with a set structure of roles in what is usually called a negotiation cell. Such a cell distinguishes between different roles. Teams can decide on their own structure. McMains and Mullins (2006, pp. 358–369) distinguish five roles:

- (1) Team Supervisor (assigning team duties and coordinating with the command and tactical teams).
- (2) Primary Negotiator (speaking directly to the perpetrator).
- (3) Secondary Negotiator (supporting the first negotiator: morally, but also practically by writing notes, giving signals, etc., also supporting the first negotiator in developing verbal tactics, preparing scenarios, and preparing the next conversation, maintaining the log).
- (4) Intelligence Officer (gathering intelligence and maintaining the status board).
- (5) Mental Health Consultant (evaluating the personality of the hostage taker, recommending negotiation techniques, monitoring team stress, and consulting with command).

In simple operations, several roles can be combined, but negotiators will never work alone and in Europe over 80% of the cases involve fixed teams (Giebels, 1999). Indeed, in their discussion of (domestic) negotiations, both Magers (2009) and McMains and Mullins (2006) emphasize the importance of team work as well as the need to work, train, and study together to get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses (Magers, 2009; McMains & Mullins, 2006).

Because of costs and time constraints, it is likely that in overseas negotiations, the negotiators operate in a different team constellation. More specifically, it is likely that in overseas assignments, police negotiators will operate in much smaller improvised teams with combined roles. Also, we anticipate that operating in a different country will also require a different kind of preparation for the negotiators, using alternative means of collecting intelligence, in a context with which they are much less familiar and have no formal jurisdiction.

Finally, overseas negotiations may differ from domestic cases in terms of the (type of) parties involved, particularly in terms of TPIs and the media. In overseas operations, it is often not possible for police negotiators to talk directly to the perpetrators. In these cases, they will make use of the so-called Third-Party Intermediaries (TPIs). Although sometimes necessary, Magers (2009), McMains and Mullins (2006), and Lanceley (2003) all discuss the risks when using TPIs. These include the fact that TPIs are: (a) untrained persons who can be difficult to control, (b) may be emotionally involved, (c) may not be accustomed to violence, (d) are usually not familiar with police procedures and tactics, and (e) could have conflicting goals that are different from those of the police. Furthermore, the use of TPIs may inhibit the building of rapport. Building rapport is paramount in all negotiations, and this is naturally reflected in negotiator manuals and training which emphasize the use of active listening skills (Lanceley, 2003; McMains & Mullins, 2006; Womack & Walsh, 1997).

There is also another side to this. First, building rapport may be less important in instrumentally oriented negotiations, as well as have different foundations when dealing with high-context others. In contrast with popular belief, building rapport with individuals from high-context cultures does not necessarily revolve around liking, but rather around respect, positional trustworthiness, and (preventing and repairing) loss of face (cf. Giebels & Taylor, 2010). Also with regard to cultural aspects, Hammer (1997) argues that the use of TPIs can be useful and successful in high-context cultures. Whereas low-context negotiators tend to use more direct and personal communication strategies like direct confrontation, self-disclosure, and assertiveness, which gives them a sense of control, high-context negotiators more often use less direct communication strategies and the use of "*a third party actually increases one's sense of control*" (Hammer, 1997, p. 111). Giebels and Noelanders (2004) also conclude that in many negotiations with perpetrators from high-context cultures, third parties have an important and natural place in the course of the negotiations.

With regard to media involvement, Wright (2009) observes that in most cases, kidnappers and the family or company of the victim will try to keep the media unaware of the incident, as media attention puts pressure on achieving a (hasty) resolution, forces posturing by both sides, and attracts unwanted attention from the authorities (Wright, 2009, p. 83). At the same time, some hostage takers will make use of the media to support their cause and gain worldwide attention for their grievances (Giebels & Noelanders, 2004). Media can be used to assist negotiations or by passing on messages to and from the perpetrators (Wright, 2009). We will therefore also explore the role and experience with additional parties, particularly TPIs and the media.

## Method

### Respondents

To examine key elements surrounding international deployment, 19 individuals were approached for an in-depth interview through the international network of the first

author using the snowballing technique. The interviewees were selected to provide information from different perspectives on the topic, so they included people with different roles, experience, and educational backgrounds. The interviewees included seven experienced overseas negotiators from three European countries (range = 4–34 overseas negotiation deployments), the head of the Department of International Relations from The Netherlands Police Agency, a former police liaison officer, a psychologist from the Military Police of The Netherlands, the head of the Brigade of Special Protection Assignments from the Military Police, two members of the Critical Incident Management Team from an NGO, an independent advisor or negotiator (former police negotiator), two officials from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the head of the Department of Special Interventions from The Netherlands Police Agency (responsible for negotiations in overseas operations), and two Dutch psychologists who are closely connected to and work with police negotiators.

All prospective interviewees that were approached were willing to participate in the project. Before the interview session, they received a leaflet explaining the goal of the interview, the setting in which this would occur (at work), how long it would take (2–3 hr), the assurance of confidential treatment of the information, and an informed consent form to sign.

## The Interviews

The first author conducted in-depth interviews, as a qualitative research method, because they are specifically suited for examining relatively unexplored topics (Eisenhardt, 1989). Based on the themes and literature mentioned in the introduction section, an interview scheme was developed and discussed with a second, independent researcher specialized in qualitative research methods. Furthermore, the ethical committee of Charles Sturt University approved the research design and method.

A pilot interview was conducted with a Dutch police negotiator who had overseas experience. Based on his comments, the questionnaire was adjusted and finalized. All interviews were semi-structured, involving open-ended questions, and started with a recollection of the cases the interviewees were involved in. After that, the interviews were organized around the three main themes paying more emphasis to themes the interviewee had experience with, with room for additional issues at the end.

All interviews were conducted face to face, except for one, which for logistic reasons, was conducted by telephone. Audio tapes of the interviews were later transcribed and we used a triangulation method to identify key issues. Particularly, issues were highlighted that were mentioned by more than three interviewees, and which originated from different perspectives. Following the grounded theory approach (Glaser, 1992), all of the answers were first grouped under the different elements and surveyed for themes, similarities, and differences in the answers by the first author. After that, and based on a discussion with the second and third author, final issues were selected for the results section.

## Results

### The Negotiation Process

#### *Type of Negotiation*

As expected, of the 72 operations the interviewees reported being involved in, 70 were ransom-driven kidnapping cases. The remaining two cases involved extortion and an oilrig siege. Interestingly, a majority of respondents indicated that as much as negotiators might want to negotiate about ransom, sometimes the local law of the country where the kidnap is taking place prohibits this. The fact that most European Governments will not pay ransom has little to do with preserving the life of the specific hostage at that time, but this policy is specifically in place to deny criminals or terrorists access to funds and to prevent other citizens from that country from being specifically targeted as financially attractive victims in the future.

Another important difference the respondents indicated in contrast with domestic negotiations was that the option of arrest of the perpetrators tends to be rather limited in overseas kidnap cases. While in domestic situations, more efforts are put in localizing the perpetrator(s) and victim(s) and if possible, to do a tactical assault, in overseas cases a tactical intervention is on many occasions impossible and sometimes even undesirable. At times, the local police are poorly trained or cannot be trusted. On other occasions, the arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators may also lead to the increased motivation to kidnap fellow countrymen staying or traveling in that area, to demand the release of the imprisoned perpetrators.

In the absence of the tactical resolution as a backup plan, the policy of not paying ransoms significantly ties the hands of negotiator in their struggle to free the hostages. The alternative that was most frequently mentioned was to attempt to alter the nature of the demand to provide humanitarian help (e.g., building schools or wells). Another alternative is to try and influence the perpetrator(s) by the locals, the family, or the tribe, either to release the hostage or to settle for the promise of humanitarian help.

*Recommendation* Overseas negotiators should realize that although instrumental by nature, arresting criminals is not one of the aims of negotiations and saving the life of the hostage(s) is not always possible. It is important that overseas negotiators have knowledge of the processes and reasons behind government policy.

#### *Contacting and Time Issues*

The respondents indicated that in the majority of the kidnappings, the telephone is the communication line. When no telephone network is available, negotiators use alternatives such as GSM and satellite phones. Sometimes in international kidnappings, it takes days, weeks, or even months before the perpetrators contact the outside world, to claim the kidnapping and or to make a demand. Several interviewees highlighted that they have experienced that in overseas negotiations, the issue of time was somewhat less pressing. There were four reasons mentioned for this. First, in many non-Western cultures, time in itself has a different meaning, with time limits reflecting preference rather

than being absolute (cf. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). Related, in cultures where communication is less direct, overseas negotiators frequently work with intermediaries, which naturally takes more time than direct communications. A third reason has to do with the logistical reality of the respective context where the kidnapping is occurring. Finally, respondents mentioned that because the threat of being discovered or arrested is relatively low, perpetrators are less concerned with timing. Together, these dynamics contribute to the finding that international kidnappings can last for much longer time periods than domestic kidnappings, ranging up to several months or even years.

*Recommendation* As it is unknown where the perpetrators and victim(s) are, it is difficult to get in contact and sometimes creative alternative ways to establish (first) communication need to be explored, for instance placing messages or videos on television, radio broadcasts, or the internet. Sometimes leaflets can be spread in the area where the kidnappers and hostages are expected to be located.

### ***Cultural Aspects***

Much has been written in academic literature about the importance of culture in negotiations (see, e.g., Gelfand & Brett, 2004). All interviewees recognized that it is impossible to have detailed knowledge of all countries and cultures (beforehand), and perhaps even undesirable because of the risk of “*dangerous stereotyping of that kidnapper in that culture, which is an assumption that may not be helpful.*” For overseas negotiators, it is important though to improve their knowledge about the culture of that country or area where they will have to operate, so that they can adjust their own strategy and behavior, and to interpret others’ communication and behavior in the right cultural perspective. Some of the respondents interviewed for this project also claimed that while cultural differences in communication or negotiation are important, they should not be overestimated.

Besides the cultural differences between the negotiator and the perpetrator, in overseas negotiations, cultural differences also play an important role in the interaction between the police negotiators and the diplomatic environment of the embassy, and between police negotiators and their colleagues from other Western countries that they may have to work with in cases of multinational kidnappings. In overseas negotiation, it is not only about communication with the perpetrator, but also about how negotiators should behave in general, for example, the dress code and how to move around and spend their free time respectfully as a foreigner in that specific country.

*Recommendation* Overseas negotiators would do well to seek assistance of cultural anthropologists to help formulate a strategic plan for the negotiations. Cultural training focusing on history, customs, symbolic references, differences in perception of fairness and time, body language, and other relevant factors should also be a central theme of a training program for negotiators preparing for overseas deployments.

### ***Demands and Deadlines***

In financially motivated kidnappings, the actual ransoms demanded can vary significantly (Romano, 2007; see also Wright, 2009). This is especially the case in overseas



kidnappings where the amount of ransom demanded is largely dependent on the area where the kidnapping is taking place, and the actual amount usually reflects the local economy or previous kidnapping experience in the region.

The respondents indicated that the main differences between demands in domestic cases and international kidnapping are not only the type of demand (financial possible accompanied by political or religious motives) but also the (in) directness of the demand. Whereas in domestic kidnappings it is mostly clear what the actual grievance or aim is, in overseas kidnappings these factors can be more difficult to establish. Respondents gave examples of recent cases, where many kidnappings in which a purely political demand was initially given, the eventual settlement revolved around money. This makes sense, as politically motivated kidnappers can easily reframe their demands from political to financial ones, as they can always justify this shift as “fundraising for the continuation of their struggle.” In addition, in a handful of recent cases in Somalia, negotiators have also encountered situations in which the opposite dynamic could also be observed: several cases that initially featured purely financial demands have after ongoing negotiations featured a substitution from financial to political demands (i.e., release of comrades from prison). Another difference overseas negotiators have to deal with in relation to demands, aims, and motives is that in domestic kidnappings the perpetrators are mainly individuals with an individual aim or motive, while in overseas kidnappings, the group plays a more important role.

In spite of the fact that in some countries time is less important for the perpetrators, all negotiators interviewed for this project agreed that in overseas kidnappings, as in domestic kidnappings, deadlines are important to recognize and negotiators have to acknowledge them. However, talking through deadlines may be easier on overseas kidnapping assignments than in the domestic context given the availability of a wide array of “acceptable” explanations for why a certain deadline cannot be met. One obvious reason is that negotiators need to confirm what was said because it is being retranslated by an intermediary.

*Recommendation* Overseas negotiators should be knowledgeable about the fact that in international kidnappings, the demand does not always directly reveal the grievance or aim of the kidnappers. The negotiators need to try to figure out what is really behind the demands, to be able to influence the situation.

## **Organizational Aspects**

### ***Team Composition and Embedment***

The interviewees clearly indicated differences between domestic and overseas cases. Unlike in domestic cases where the structure of the team is dependent primarily on the size or the complexity of the case, in an overseas negotiation the team structure is influenced by other considerations, such as the roles the negotiators have been assigned (communicator or advisor), financial considerations (it is costly to send a full negotiation team abroad), and the country they have to go to (sometimes the respective embassy can only safeguard one or two people). All negotiators interviewed for this

project agreed that in most cases they have to operate individually or are partnered with only one other negotiator. All but one of the respondents stated they prefer to send a minimum of two police officers abroad to work on a single case. Reasons they gave for this were: (a) the broad scope of tasks that need to be performed, (b) safety considerations, (c) the need to facilitate brainstorming, and (d) to prevent loneliness and alienation that may occur when negotiators are deployed in areas where it is not safe to leave their hotel, the embassy, or the compound.

Another difference between the structure of a domestic negotiation team and an overseas one is the existence of a multidisciplinary support team in an overseas negotiation. Unlike in domestic negotiations where the negotiation cell is more or less self-supporting, negotiators overseas are frequently supported by a team of experts based in the home country, which serves as a link between the negotiator and the policy team, the intelligence officers and investigators. This introduces a scope of logistical issues, such as the need to operate in different time zones, and to communicate with colleagues working out of a completely different world with little appreciation for the realities of the country in which the kidnapping is taking place. In addition, international kidnappings increasingly feature a multiplication of these challenges, as the multinational dimension of the kidnap for ransom business frequently introduces the need for collaboration with other police services in other countries, in situations where the victim is a part of a larger group of hostages representing different nations. In such situations, negotiators from different nations have to work across multiple time zones, with different policy guidelines, levels of authority, and political support. They may also have different negotiation policies, particularly regarding guidelines surrounding the payment of ransom. Because the fates of the hostages are intrinsically intertwined, but each country can act independently, any step taken by any of the countries involved can directly impact the expectations and treatment vis-a-vis the other hostages from other nations.

*Recommendation* As domestic negotiators and their police organization are not used to working with a support team, it is necessary to decide (beforehand) what disciplines need to be represented on such a team and after that, specific persons need to be assigned to the individual tasks.

### ***Role of the Negotiator***

In an international kidnapping, the local authorities are always in charge and the Ministry of Foreign affairs of the country whose citizen has been abducted can only offer the local authorities (police) support and/or expertise. The Ministry can request police negotiators and police advisors to offer this expertise.

So, unlike the command structure in domestic cases, in which negotiators are usually operating under the authority of a police commander who has familiarity with the theory and practice of crisis negotiations, in overseas incidents, negotiators work under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, typically represented by the country's ambassador, high commissioner or *chargé d'affaires*. This of course represents challenges for both parties, as police negotiators have to operate in a diplomatic environment with which they typically do not have a high level of familiarity. By the same token,

personnel working at Foreign Affairs departments are frequently also unfamiliar with the way police negotiators operate, which can sometimes lead to tension. Many diplomats feel that they understand negotiation by their title of “diplomat” alone, which is not necessarily the case. The situation is also not helped by the misleading depictions of police negotiators in popular culture. This also contributes to the false sense of familiarity outsiders imagine they have about the practice of police negotiations and what is and is not common practice. Unlike in domestic cases where the first or primary negotiator mainly acts as a communicator (in overt operations) or as the coach of a third-party intermediary (TPI; in covert operations), in overseas operations the negotiator’s role is typically reduced to being an advisor (as opposed to communicating directly with the hostage takers). There are a number of reasons why police negotiators should not be the actual communicators in overseas negotiations, including the probable lack of deep enough cultural knowledge and language, a comparative lack of experience in overseas situations, the fact that police negotiators are bounded by the rules and laws of their own country which may or may not apply in the country of operation, and the frequent desirability of maintaining secrecy about police or governmental involvement in the case. In some countries, policy considerations do not even allow police negotiators to get directly involved in the negotiations.

The key implication of the different dynamics vis-a-vis command structure and negotiator roles are that overseas negotiators are currently not specifically trained to perform the role of an advisor, neither are they accustomed to working under civilian decision makers who have limited knowledge of their work and common practices.

*Recommendation* In selecting (domestic) negotiators, much emphasis is placed on the ability to work in a team. Overseas negotiators should be more independent and possess the ability to improvise and handle multiple roles simultaneously. They also need to be good investigators as much as negotiators—i.e., they may have to go out and find relevant intermediaries, etc. As overseas negotiators work within diplomatic circles and serve in most cases as advisors to an Ambassador, this role requires a high level of abstraction, credibility (e.g., experience, age, rank), general knowledge of political issues, presentations skills, and a developed diplomatic demeanor and etiquette.

### ***Logistics and Intelligence***

The interviewees mentioned that preparations involved in overseas assignments are naturally different from preparations required for domestic deployments, as they include elements such as keeping vaccinations up to date, arranging at least one personal and one diplomatic passport for each negotiator, making sure negotiators are able to leave within a short period of time (scheduling of negotiators to be on call), having country-specific checklists for quick reference, and having in-depth knowledge of the communication equipment, etc. Only one of the negotiators interviewed mentioned that his organization conducts a kind of a risk assessment by maintaining country files, which can be quickly referred to when traveling to one of those countries. While in the literature reference is made to practicing, educating, and getting in contact with stakeholders (McMains & Mullins, 2006, p. 76–78), none of the negotiators with overseas

experience mentioned any such preparations as being a part of those missions. However, in such cases most of the information will not come from police sources, but through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is not always possible to access all necessary information prior to deployment owing to time constraints and a more urgent need to attend to other logistical issues such as permissions, visas, packing, country-specific field equipment that cannot be procured locally, etc.

Intelligence is another crucial aspect of police negotiation. Intelligence needs to be gathered and analyzed to be able to decide on strategies, to anticipate on possible scenarios, and to assess the situation (McMains & Mullins, 2006, p. 426–428). To ask the right questions at the beginning of an incident, many negotiation teams work with checklists (Lanceley, 2003).

The interviewees agreed that while the nature of the intelligence overseas negotiators need to obtain about a case is basically the same as in domestic negotiations, there is additional intelligence that is needed about the context: about the country where the incident has occurred, local politics and culture, trends in kidnappings of foreigners, their treatment and eventual outcomes, kidnapping organization operating in the area, and their usual MOs, etc. In addition, intelligence is needed on the nature of the local police services, individual players and their trustworthiness, and potential TPIs. Whereas in domestic negotiation cases police sources are the main source of (criminal) intelligence, in overseas negotiations other intelligence sources come into play. These include secret services (civilian and military), foreign colleagues, (foreign) embassies, and NGOs.

*Recommendation* As logistics and intelligence are crucial in any operation, and especially in overseas negotiations, it is vital that in a police organization specific persons are assigned to the coordination of overseas negotiations. The latter should be responsible for all logistics (equipment, arrangements for vaccinations, passports, checklists, etc.). In overseas negotiations, intelligence services play an important role and in multinational kidnappings, also foreign police officers are an important source of intelligence. Overseas negotiators should be familiar with these sources to establish contacts and relationships of trust and cooperation with them, which in itself is a challenging and time-consuming task. For police negotiators it is also important to have the right clearance level, which makes it possible for them to share information with intelligence services and or foreign colleagues.

## Parties Involved

### *Third-Party Intermediaries*

Most of the interviewees indicated that in most overseas kidnappings, working *without* a TPI is “impossible.” First of all, this is practical: many times it is impossible to get in direct contact with the perpetrators. Culture is the second reason: in negotiations with perpetrators from high-context cultures, TPIs have an important role, in relation to indirect communication and raising status. The respondents indicated that the biggest challenge in finding TPIs is in assessing them (can he or she provide proof of life or proof of control) and to control him or her. Interviewees indicated that next to TPIs,

interpreters might also play an important role in the communication with perpetrators. They indicated that it is always complicated to work with interpreters: it is an extra layer in the communication line, making it difficult to get the right message through and to put emotion and spontaneity into a conversation. Overseas negotiators can sometimes usefully use an interpreter as a TPI, as he or she is familiar with the language and culture and this step removes one layer from the communication chain, but it is important to first ensure that the interpreter will be accepted by the perpetrators and that his or her safety (also after the incident) is taken into account.

Most interpreters are not used to working in kidnapping situations, including the accompanying high levels of tension and stress, and they are not familiar with the way negotiators work.

*Recommendation* Overseas negotiators should be aware of the importance of the use of TPIs in overseas kidnappings. They should know where they can source TPIs, how to assess their reliability, and how to work with them in the most effective way.

It is a useful step to instruct a preselected cohort of interpreters into relevant languages about the basics of crisis negotiations beforehand, to ensure that the negotiators' skills and effort will not be lost because of missed opportunities within the interpretation processes.

### **Media**

Next to the media involvement mentioned in the introduction section, three other ways of utilizing the media in overseas kidnappings were identified during the interviews. A first way is by making an appeal for the initial contact from the perpetrator where none has been forthcoming, for example, the family can place a message on the internet or broadcast a message in which they invite the perpetrator(s) to contact them. Another possibility is to use the media to influence the local society. For instance, the family may make a public emotional appeal to help them get their loved one(s) released safely. This was, for example, the case in the Erkel case: his family traveled to the abduction area on several occasions and made a public appearance in the media. In the case of an abduction of an aid worker or journalist, another way to influence the local population is to show what work has been carried out by the person and his or her organization and to make clear that the continuation of this work will be good for the society. In these ways, the local population may be encouraged to assist in some way to end the kidnap. The last but not least important way negotiators can make use of the media is to provide potential support to the victims. Some hostages are able to listen to the radio, or to world services. Broadcasting their favorite music or (hidden) messages reminds hostages that they are not forgotten, which is mentally encouraging for hostages, and helps strengthen the all important determination and will to survive (cf. Giebels, Noelanders, & Vervaeke, 2005).

*Recommendation* In any international kidnapping case, there should be a clear agreed communication plan. This plan should not only include how to inform the media, but also how to use the media to support the negotiations or to provide emotional support

to the hostage(s). Overseas negotiators need to think beforehand about how to get in contact with, or about building up a network with (local) media and how to reach into local communities.

### ***The Hostage Victim***

Previous research has argued that because of the oftentimes close proximity between the hostage (or victim)<sup>1</sup> and his or her captor, the type of victim and his or her relationship with the hostage taker is likely to impact the negotiations (Giebels et al., 2005). Comparing the type of victims in domestic and overseas kidnappings, one important difference was mentioned. Domestic kidnappings are mostly personal: the victim is deliberately chosen because of his or her money, the money of his or her company, or because he or she has a dispute with a criminal. By contrast, in overseas kidnapping the victims are mainly chosen because they are clearly foreigners who represent money or represent a multinational company who is seen to be exploiting the country's natural sources. Westerners are also interesting victims for terrorist groups for attracting attention to their cause and perceived grievances. Therefore, overseas kidnappings are less personal and victims tend to be taken at random, because of what they represent rather than who they actually are as individuals. In addition, the location of the overseas kidnapping can also imply something about the nature of the victim, as traveling or working in conflict zones is not for everyone and victims kidnapped in such areas tend to have a specific profile in relation to risk aversion, adventurous personality, etc.

*Recommendation* For overseas negotiators, it is good to learn from debriefings of released hostages as this enables them to better understand what a hostage goes through, what surviving mechanisms they undertook, how they experienced the negotiations, messages, etc. to be able to support future hostages in the best possible way. Increasingly, multinationals and aid organizations prepare their employees for possible hostage taking as part of a "conduct after capture" program. An avenue yet to be explored is how such preparedness influences the experience and recovery of victims from hostage takings.

### ***Victim's Family***

There is no collective agreement about who should be responsible for contacting the family of the victim in an international kidnapping case, as different countries entrust the responsibility to different agencies, typically ministries of Foreign Affairs, the police, or a combination thereof. In the literature, it is underlined that the victim's family should be informed and supported in a professional way, but little detail is provided with respect to who's responsibility this support role should be (Giebels & Noelanders, 2004; Wright, 2009). Wright (2009) only mentions that the police should be responsible for taking care of the family, but this is only related to domestic kidnappings.

There was consensus among the interviewees that an overseas kidnapping is frequently even more stressful for the family of a victim than a domestic kidnapping, for a multitude

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<sup>1</sup>We use the term victim and hostage interchangeably.

of reasons. Firstly, in most cases the family does not really know the country where the kidnap is taking place, they do not know the circumstances, they do not know what to expect from the local authorities. In addition, the duration of the kidnapping is frequently long, and the media attention can be overwhelming. On top of this, family members find the distance a big stressor; they know they cannot do anything in a domestic kidnap either, but the fact that they are sometimes thousands of kilometers away makes them even feel less able to do anything for their family member or loved one.

*Recommendation* Negotiators should not assume that family members all have good relationships with the victim of a kidnapping. In many overseas kidnappings, these relationships have often been tense. Therefore, the family contact person should check the current or historical status of relationships first to know what role they can provide the family in negotiations and what role or benefit the family may have in relation to contacting or messaging the victim.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for (Advanced) Training**

Statistics of international kidnappings are largely unknown. This is arguably caused by the perception that publicity may increase the perceived value of the hostage. It may raise the ransom demand, or may negatively affect prospects of a successful resolution in countries where payment of ransoms is illegal. It has been suggested, however, that the number of kidnappings is still rising owing to the popularity of the tactic in unstable countries or conflict zones (Moor & Remijnse, 2008). An important reason for this is that kidnappings are increasingly considered a powerful weapon to publicize causes and to influence governments, as well as to gain money (Hagedoorn Auerbach, 1998; Romano, 2007).

Despite the fact that overseas negotiations differ tremendously from domestic negotiations, most police negotiators today receive only a basic training course focusing on domestic negotiations and are not specifically selected or trained to operate in the different conditions involved in overseas deployments. To maximize chances on a successful outcome, this research project tried to identify key issues to consider with respect to such overseas deployment. Although our research delivered some important recommendations, there are also some obvious limitations. The number of respondents is limited and their views may not be representative for negotiation practices worldwide. In addition, some of the respondents were understandably hesitant to enter into detail when answering some of the questions because of confidentiality issues, which naturally may have resulted in incomplete answers. Furthermore, the interpretation of the data may have been influenced by the specific experiences and interpretations of the researchers. Therefore, our findings are exploratory and require follow-up. However, our project also delivers several recommendations for (overseas) negotiator training with which we conclude:

- More attention could be paid to kidnapping scenarios during basic training (Dolnik, 2004). Also, overseas negotiator courses should focus on training negotiators to combine different roles, and to handle these independently as an individual, or as a

part of a two-man team and how to team up with a support team. Also, more cooperation and synchronization of approaches with colleagues from other countries is needed.

- Overseas negotiators most frequently play the role of advisors, as opposed to actually talking to perpetrators. Since this role of advising an Ambassador or (frequently untrained) communicators is radically different and requires a significant adjustment in approach and mentality, training sessions should focus on acquainting negotiators with this specific role.
- Overseas negotiators usually work under the command of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As the police and diplomats usually have low understanding of each other's work, operational procedures, and policy limitations, this deficiency needs to be addressed during training. Lectures clarifying perspectives of both sides are a good starting point, but involving diplomats in practical exercises will go even further in increasing mutual understanding and respect.
- In domestic operations, negotiators obtain their intelligence through police channels. In overseas operations, oftentimes negotiators will have to collect their own intelligence when they are abroad. In the training, attention should be paid to basics of interacting with local intelligence services, but also to other means of collecting intelligence (international colleagues, NGOs).
- Culture and communication in countries and areas that are known as high-profile kidnapping hotspots should be one of the major issues in the training for overseas negotiators.
- In overseas kidnappings, and as opposed to many domestic cases, many perpetrators operate in a group. In the training for overseas negotiators, attention should be paid to group dynamics and collective responsibility, particularly in relation to cultural issues. Working with TPIs and interpreters should also be an important subject.

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