



Prem Mahadevan

The role of SWAT units

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THE ROLE OF SWAT UNITS

AMIDST CHANGING DYNAMICS OF COUNTERTERRORIST HOSTAGE RESCUE

This essay examines whether tactical counterterrorist (CT) responses are optimised to handle suicidal assaults that potentially involve hostage seizure. It suggests that they are not: such responses are instead based upon an anachronistic model that has diminishing applicability to today's terror threats. There is a need to review and update the concepts that underlie them, in line with the peculiar challenges posed by nihilistically driven mass casualty terrorism.

The essay shall first study the evolution of CT responses, showing how Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) units have become crucial elements of government strategy. It suggests that the use of SWAT to resolve political hostage-taking incidents was a

post-1972 development, grounded in lessons learnt from Israeli counterterrorist experience as well as the Munich Olympics Massacre. The tactical concepts that guided the use of CT-SWAT were defensive or 'reactive': they did not encourage immediate and aggressive responses to an ongoing crisis.

The essay shall compare and contrast six terrorist incidents that had to be resolved by SWAT personnel. Three of these incidents are cases of 'conventional' terrorism, in which terrorists took hostages with the aim of obtaining political concessions through dialogue. The remaining three cases are terrorist attacks where the main purpose was not negotiation, but mass murder. The essay will conclude by assessing the implications of this trend for CT-SWAT units.¹

ORIGINS OF COUNTERTERRORIST RESCUE UNITS

According to some observers, one of the first countries to create a dedicated CT response unit was Israel. In 1957, the Israeli army raised a commando force called Sayaret Matkal to carry out cross-border raids against Palestinian guerrilla bases. Its offensive tasking allowed the unit to assume a 'proactive' mission profile. Sayaret Matkal could choose the target, timing and technique of its assaults, thereby taking the Palestinians by surprise and forcing them to fight defensively.

During the late 1960s however, a new threat appeared which reversed the balance of advantages. The Palestinians began to carry out airline hijackings. Suddenly, it was the Israelis who had to learn how to operate in reactive mode.² They needed to improvise techniques that would permit them to contain and resolve a crisis initiated by their enemies. In opera-

tional terms, reactive counterterrorism was far more difficult than proactive counterterrorism because it allowed little time for preparation.

Owing to its established expertise in counter-guerrilla operations, Sayaret Matkal was given additional responsibility for anti-hijacking operations. On 9 May 1972, the unit carried out the first ever commando assault on a hijacked aircraft. Sixteen soldiers, disguised as fuel technicians, approached an airliner that had been seized by four Palestinian terrorists. While Israeli negotiators kept the terrorists preoccupied, the assault team moved into position and, upon a pre-arranged signal, stormed the plane simultaneously through three different entrances. All four terrorists were neutralised and only one hostage died.

The same year, another development proved that specialised CT response units were a necessity and not a luxury for democratic countries. On 5 September 1972, eight Palestinian terrorists infiltrated the Olympic Games Village in Munich, Germany and took nine Israeli athletes hostage. Two other Israelis were killed by the terrorists while resisting. The local police considered a number of options, before deciding to mount a rescue operation when the terrorists were exiting the country. Five snipers were positioned at vantage points around a local airfield, from where the terrorists and their hostages were to be flown out of Germany.

The rescue operation went horribly wrong. The snipers had been incorrectly briefed that there were only five terrorists. When they realised that there were in fact, eight, they could not warn the remainder of the rescue team because they did not have radios. A seventy-five minute gun battle followed, during

which the terrorists were offered several chances to surrender. Eventually, the security forces had to mount an infantry assault using armoured personnel carriers. As soon as the terrorists realised they were cornered, they killed all nine hostages. Three of the gunmen were arrested, while five others died in the battle.

The fiasco at Munich demonstrated that hostage rescue operations required specific intelligence and specialised training, particularly in firearms usage. Within weeks, a number of European governments, worried about the risk of copy-cat operations by the Palestinians, issued orders for the creation of hostage rescue teams. Germany raised one such team from its border police, while Britain opted instead to create a hostage rescue team within its premier army commando unit, the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment.

FUSION OF TWO CONCEPTS – NEGOTIATION AND SWAT

There was, however, one important exception to this general trend towards militarisation of CT capabilities. The United States was averse to the idea of deploying military personnel for domestic security operations. Accordingly, responsibility for handling hostage incidents remained solely with the civilian law enforcement community. At the time of the Munich Massacre, this community had been developing a hostage rescue concept that would soon be copied across the globe, including by European governments. Pioneered by the New York Police Department, the concept was called 'contain and negotiate'. It emphasised that the use of force to resolve a hostage crisis should be a last resort. Instead, focus should be put on isolating the terrorists from outside contact and then opening a dialogue with them. Specially trained negotiators should convince the terrorists that since they were completely surrounded, the best option would be for them to surrender peacefully.³

The 'contain and negotiate' concept had three advantages. First, it would keep open the possibility of a hostage situation being resolved without bloodshed.

The long-established police norm of using minimal force would be maintained, which was important from a public relations perspective. From past terrorist incidents and especially the Munich Massacre, it had become obvious that public opinion would blame the government for any hostage deaths. In the 1970s, democratic countries were not yet prepared to take hard line policies against hostage-takers, with Israel being a notable exception. Therefore, it was important that a rescue operation should be seen as solely motivated by concern for the hostages' safety, rather than by political considerations of wanting to appear 'tough on terrorism'.

The second advantage of 'contain and negotiate' was to buy time for an assault plan to be developed. If a rescue operation became necessary then the operation needed to be as quick and surgical as possible. Munich and subsequent attacks had shown that if confronted but not instantly overwhelmed, terrorists would kill their hostages in order to create a backlash against the government. Thus, it was vital that the assault force be briefed in detail about the number of terrorists, their weapons, physical appearance and

location within the engagement area. Acquiring this kind of information required time, as did rehearsals for the assault. Negotiations were intended to buy such time – and also, to wear down the terrorists.

Lastly, the concept would ensure that, if and when a decision to storm was taken by the government, negotiators could distract the terrorists at the moment of assault. This would buy vital seconds and confuse the terrorists' response, minimising harm to the hostages. When well executed, rescue missions using the 'contain and negotiate' concept proved quite successful at lowering the risk of hostage-taking (as will be demonstrated later in the essay). However, the concept was based on a crucial assumption: that the terrorist(s) wanted to keep the hostages alive in order to bargain for their common safety and would only kill a hostage if provoked. There was an implicit recognition amongst the concept's NYPD originators that if a hostage-taker was intent on killing his/her victim, little could be done to prevent it.

Meanwhile, on the west coast of the United States, a parallel development was taking place. Facing difficulties with breaking through armed barricades and serving arrest warrants against hardened criminals, the Los Angeles Police Department raised a specialist urban assault unit. Called Special Weapons Attack Team (later modified to Special Weapons and Tactics), the unit consisted of sixty highly-trained marksmen. They drilled in secret, purchasing specific-to-task gear with their own personal funds.

'CONVENTIONAL' HOSTAGE-TAKING

For want of space, this essay shall only discuss three cases where the 'contain and negotiate' concept has been combined with a SWAT assault, resulting in a successful rescue mission. Each hostage-taking incident was non-suicidal, i.e. the terrorists initiated it believing that they would be able to negotiate a favourable compromise that would allow them to walk away unscathed. In each case, they sought to use hostages as bargaining tools, which required keep-

The unit only came to public attention in May 1974 when it stormed a hideout of the Symbionese Liberation Army, an anarchist group.

The LAPD SWAT's tactical philosophy took a pragmatic approach to hostage situations, planning for the worst (an armed assault) but hoping for the best (a negotiated solution). The sophisticated combat skills of unit members, many of whom were ex-soldiers, made LAPD SWAT the gold standard of police urban assault teams the world over. Even so, the unit almost never had to deal with *political* hostage-takers; most of its opponents were gangsters or emotionally unstable 'lone wolf' gunmen. In case a standoff with such individuals involved the presence of hostages, it was almost always accidental – the result of a bungled robbery or a broken relationship. Killing a hostage in cold blood was not the perpetrator's aim; a factor which allowed police negotiators to try to talk him/her into surrendering. Notwithstanding its considerable merits, the LAPD's SWAT concept was not really tested against the toughest opponent of all – mass murderers irrevocably committed to dying for a political cause. In the following sections, this essay shall demonstrate that the 'contain and negotiate' concept came to dominate tactical responses to terrorist incidents since the 1970s, with SWAT being kept as a standby option. This led to the emergence of a predictable behaviour pattern by security forces, which terrorists are now learning to exploit to devastating effect.

ing them alive. This worked to the advantage of both negotiators and SWAT units, with the former buying time for the latter to prepare an assault plan based on detailed intelligence.

EXAMPLE 1: OPERATION FIRE MAGIC

On 13 October 1977, four Palestinian terrorists hijacked a Lufthansa flight with eighty-six passengers and five crew members. For three days, they forced

it to fly aimlessly around the Mediterranean and Middle East, making refuelling stops in five countries. Eventually, on 17 October, the aircraft touched down at an airfield in Mogadishu, Somalia. During this time, the terrorists demanded a ransom of USD 15 million and called for the release of several terrorists being held in German and Turkish jails. The German government was initially prepared to concede the ransom demand. Even as it prepared contingency plans for a rescue mission, it dispatched the money along with an official team of negotiators.

By the time the plane touched down at Mogadishu however, the situation had changed. In one of his many fits of rage, the terrorists' leader had shot dead the captain of the aircraft. News of the killing prompted the German government to harden its stance: compromising with the hijackers had become impossible since they had already taken a life. All that negotiations could do was keep the terrorists distracted while a rescue attempt was made. The assault was carried out by a unit raised after the 1972 Munich attack. Known as Grenzschutzgruppe (GSG) 9, it had been shadowing the hijacked aircraft since day one of the crisis. Even before receiving final clearance for the mission, the thirty-man assault team carried out several rehearsals in cooperation with a two-man advisory team sent by the British SAS.⁴

The advisors provided GSG 9 with stun grenades; at the time, a new weapon for counterterrorist units. Using these, the assault team stormed the airliner at night, neutralising all four terrorists. The entry technique was innovative for that era: ladders were used to silently raise operators to their start positions. At a prearranged signal, Somali troops lit a fire 300 yards in front of the aircraft, distracting the terrorists. Two of the hijackers were in the cockpit at the time, where they had been negotiating over the radio with German officials. The fire focused their attention to the front, away from the passengers who were concentrated in the rear of the aircraft. When the assault commenced, the terrorists were too disorientated by the stun grenades to respond effectively. The GSG 9 team meanwhile, used their superior firearms training to swiftly neutralise any threat to themselves or the hostages. As a result, there were no friendly

deaths during the entire assault, which lasted under five minutes.

EXAMPLE 2: OPERATION NIMROD

The next example of a textbook hostage rescue mission occurred in May 1980. Six terrorists seized the Iranian embassy in London, taking twenty-six hostages. Within fourteen minutes of the attack, 22nd SAS received unofficial word of it through the Metropolitan Police. Without waiting for an official request from civilian authorities, the unit deployed its twenty-five-man hostage rescue team to London and placed another team on standby to move as well. The first troops assumed pre-assault positions in a building adjoining the Iranian embassy some sixteen hours after the crisis had begun. They were relieved twenty-four hours later by the standby team.

Over the next three days, the two teams rotated between rehearsing for a deliberate assault and being prepared for immediate action if the terrorists began killing hostages. The SAS already had details of the internal layout of the embassy, but needed specific information on the location and resistance capabilities of the terrorists, as well as identifying data about them. They were helped by information collected from microphones and cameras which were inserted into the embassy walls from adjacent buildings and debriefings of released hostages.

From the onset of the crisis, the British government adopted a policy of negotiating with the terrorists, but only to get them to surrender. There was no question of them being allowed to go free. In addition, the government decided that if the terrorists killed a hostage deliberately, it would authorise a rescue mission. Since the terrorists had issued deadlines, suggesting that they would kill the hostages one-by-one rather than altogether, the government negotiating team sought to buy time. Even after one of the hostages had been killed, it kept up a pretence of negotiating in order to lull the terrorists into a false sense of security.

When the SAS finally stormed the embassy, over 151 hours had elapsed since the crisis had begun. The assault was almost flawless, despite glitches caused by faulty equipment and outdated intel-

ligence about the hostages' exact location. When the attack commenced, negotiators made sure that the terrorist leader was kept preoccupied talking to them, thus causing confusion among the remaining terrorists over what was going on. All six terrorists were neutralised, one hostage died during the assault and the SAS suffered no fatalities.

EXAMPLE 3: OPERATION CHAVIN DE HUANTAR

The last conventional hostage crisis that this essay shall examine is the seizure of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Peru. On 17 December 1996, fourteen left-wing terrorists attacked a diplomatic reception, taking almost 700 hostages. Within a few hours, 300 of these were released. Over the following weeks and months, the Peruvian government made a show of negotiating for the release of the remaining hostages. However, it had already made a secret decision to go for a rescue mission, using the negotiations as a cover. For 126 days, the government stalled the terrorists, on some occasions by openly stating its contempt for them and refusing to talk. The terrorists meanwhile, did not carry out any

of their threats to execute hostages and kept scaling down their demands while releasing more hostages. Through the course of the negotiations, the government realised that it was not dealing with hardened killers and could afford to play for time indefinitely.

Beginning in January 1997, the government secretly hired sixty miners to build seven tunnels into the ambassadorial compound. It planted listening devices throughout the building and even managed to smuggle in a transmitter to the hostages so that rescue forces could have real-time intelligence on the terrorists' whereabouts. Once all preparations were complete, 140 commandos stormed into the compound through the tunnels. The breaching charges attached to the tunnel exits killed five of the terrorists outright, while the remaining nine were gunned down throughout the building. No hostages were killed, although this was partly due to the terrorists' reluctance to shoot unarmed civilians. The security forces lost two officers, including the commander of the rescue force and one soldier. Of the seventy-two hostages still left in the compound, only one died (of a heart attack).

SHIFT TOWARDS MASS CASUALTY TERRORISM

By the turn of millennium, it was becoming obvious to more sophisticated terrorist groups that taking hostages and hoping to extract political concessions were not a viable strategy. Many governments had developed sufficiently advanced capabilities for hostage rescue to ensure that any prolonged siege ended on their terms. Airline hijacking was nearly impossible due to better airport security and international treaties that prohibited states from providing shelter to hijackers (an obvious exception here being the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC814 in December 1999). Even if an aircraft could be seized, inability to find a safe haven ensured that, short of going in for a suicide mission, terrorists would have difficulty in 'winning' in a hijack situation. It was within this context that Al Qaeda adopted suicidal hijacking as an attack technique, with spectacular results on 11 September 2001.⁵

Around the same time, the Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) began experimenting with suicidal assault or 'fidayeen' attacks. The innovation was reportedly introduced by a former Special Forces soldier who had become a jihadist. He had previously served in a counterterrorist unit and knew how police first responders as well as SWAT teams were trained to react to hostage incidents. He therefore developed an attack technique that focused on causing maximum damage during the initial minutes of an attack, i.e. *before* security forces could respond. Instead of prolonging a crisis through dialogue, the terrorists were to massacre as many people as possible and then die fighting. Initially, fidayeen attacks were concentrated on 'hard' or protected targets, such as military bases. From May 2002 however, LeT realised that it could produce a much higher body count by attacking 'soft' targets.

Through combining suicidal tactics with mass casualty attacks, Al Qaeda and LeT had inadvertently discovered a way of sabotaging the 'contain and negotiate' concept. No longer could CT-SWAT units rely on negotiators to buy time, while they planned and rehearsed for carrying out the perfect assault. The proliferation of 24/7 news coverage had removed a major bargaining chip held by governments: that of providing media coverage of the terrorists' actions. Previously, one of the demands made by terrorists would be that news organisations give publicity to them and their cause. The same effect could now be achieved by carrying out a spectacular attack upon a soft target in full view of the international media. Moreover, since the terrorists were not concerned about the personal consequences of their actions, negotiators could not appeal to their survival instincts and persuade them to surrender.

The result of this adaptation in terrorism has been the emergence of a highly virulent threat: suicidal attacks that focus on killing as many people as possible in a short span of time. Any hostage situation that might unfold is only incidental and meant to slow down the security forces' response, by increasing the risk of collateral damage. The hostages themselves are not intended to be ransomed off in exchange for money and/or political concessions. Rather, they are human shields whose sole purpose is to allow the perpetrators to prolong the duration of their attack and maximise the media attention it receives. Unlike terrorists of the 1970s and '80s, who were prepared to die but preferred to live, today's terrorists have created commando-style martyrdom teams whose sole purpose is to sacrifice themselves for the cause. The essay shall now focus on three cases where massacre was the primary objective of a terrorist attack, rather than a by-product of rescue efforts by security forces.

EXAMPLE 1: BESLAN 2004 SCHOOL MASSACRE

What happened at Beslan, a small town in southern Russia, in September 2004 was so horrific that scholars have since been at a loss to explain it. A group of between thirty and fifty jihadists from Chechnya and Ingushetia, plus a few Arab mercenaries, seized a school and took over 1,100 people

hostage. The victims were not only small children, but also their parents, grandparents and teachers. The day of the attack, 1 September, was the beginning of the Russian school year and was traditionally marked by celebrations across the country. The choice of timing showed that the terrorists wanted to take as many hostages as they could.

The attackers came extremely well prepared, with military uniforms and weaponry. Eight people were killed in the initial assault, of whom two were security personnel who instinctively confronted the terrorists, not knowing how badly they were outnumbered. By executing another six civilians and displaying their bodies to the hostages, who included relatives of the dead, the terrorists established total control over the compound within fifteen minutes. The sheer brutality of their assault, together with its suddenness, had anyway caused many hostages to go into shock. They told themselves that what was happening could not be a terrorist attack, but was only a security drill.

Over the next two days, the terrorists methodically selected another twenty-one men and boys for execution. Their aim was to crush any thoughts of resistance among the hostages by eliminating everyone who seemed physically capable of challenging them. Before being killed, the victims were made to lift heavy furniture and barricade some of the school entrances. Other entrances were rigged with explosives.

The Beslan attack was a hybrid of conventional and suicidal terrorism. On the one hand, the terrorists issued a list of demands and threatened to execute the hostages in batches if Russian forces made any moves against the school. On the other hand, their demands were of a tactical nature, intended to buy time for the building to be fortified. There was no explanation for the motive behind the attack, or what they wanted in return for the hostages' release. Efforts by government officials to open negotiations on these broader issues were rebuffed.

Gradually, it became clear that the terrorists had no endgame in mind. They modified their stance on talks as time passed, agreeing to negotiate with

the government through an intermediary. After a promising start, during which they released thirty-two hostages, the terrorists suddenly upped the ante by demanding that Russian forces withdraw from Chechnya and grant the region independence. Such an unrealistic demand, allegedly made at the urging of jihadist masterminds who were observing the crisis from afar, drastically reduced the chances of a peaceful resolution. The authors of the demand must have known this.

Russian Special Forces (known as Spetsnaz) had alerted their elite CT units to the takeover of the school within seventy-five minutes of it occurring. The units took another thirteen hours to reach the site from Moscow, owing to shortfalls in airlift capacity. In total, about 400 Spetsnaz troops were eventually deployed at the school. These were organised into three teams of 133 men each. While one team began rehearsing for a deliberate assault at a secret location eighteen miles away, the other two took turns standing guard at the security cordon around the school.

A massacre of the hostages suddenly began on day three of the crisis, due to a tragic accident. At 1305 hrs, an improvised explosive device suspended mid-air in the school gymnasium came loose and detonated upon hitting the floor. Most of the hostages were being held in the gym and the terrorists had planted a large number of pressure-release IEDs there. A chain reaction occurred, with several blasts happening within seconds in the densely packed room. After ten minutes, the roof caught fire and began falling in, trapping the hostages under burning debris. Meanwhile, the terrorists fired in every direction. Some shot at the security forces, mistakenly believing that a rescue mission had been launched. Others concentrated on killing as many hostages as they could, knowing that they would soon die as well.

The 133-man Spetsnaz team then on standby outside the school was initially unsure of how to respond. Although they immediately retaliated to the incoming fire, they did not advance upon the school since they had no orders to do so. It was

only at 1340 hrs that some junior officers, perceiving that a full-scale slaughter was taking place, decided to storm the building without clearance from above. They then tried to enter through a door on the southern side. Finding it booby-trapped and coming under fire, they used a tank to clear the entrance. Meanwhile, another group of commandos launched a separate attack from the east side of the compound, entering through the windows. Between them, the two groups of soldiers engaged the terrorists and provided covering fire for hundreds of panicking hostages to escape.

The battle at the school went on for ten hours, during which the initial 133-man assault team was reinforced by the other two teams. Entry was effected from multiple points, without any coordination. The rescue personnel relied entirely on their training and experience to pull them through the battle, since they had no real-time intelligence on how the internal topography of the building had been altered by the terrorists over the past two days, or even where the terrorists were. When the fighting wound down on the night of 3 September 2004, thirty-one terrorists had been killed and one captured. An unknown number is thought to have escaped by masquerading as hostages or aid workers. Eleven commandos had died, as well as ten soldiers from supporting units. The final death toll for the hostages was 338, including those killed before the assault – a level of carnage which guaranteed international attention.

EXAMPLE 2: MUMBAI 2008

The second suicidal-cum-mass casualty attack that this essay shall examine is the 2008 Mumbai Massacre. The facts are well known: ten Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorists, who had been trained for eighteen months in assault tactics, conducted a *fidayeen* raid that killed 165 people at five different locations. Having reached Mumbai by boat, they carried enough ammunition on their persons to fight for some days. Interrogation of the sole surviving terrorist has revealed that the tactical objectives of the attack were two-fold. First, the terrorists were to manoeuvre in buddy pairs and kill as many people as they could in the initial hours of the assault. Thereafter, they were to take hostages, fortify themselves and issue

demands to the Indian government. The nature of these demands was to have been revealed to them via telephone by LeT handlers based in Pakistan. Information on the responses of Indian security forces would be relayed by the handlers, who would monitor media reports of the situation.

Investigations have revealed that the attack was not motivated by any grand plan, other than to boost the morale of jihadist groups and deflect domestic Pakistani turmoil onto India. It was preceded by months of tactical reconnaissance. Consequently, the gunmen had no difficulty navigating through heavy traffic to their assigned targets. However, it appears from eyewitness accounts that they had only a general idea of the layout of the buildings. Once the initial shock effect of the coordinated assaults had worn off, most civilians in the vicinity of each attack site hid or barricaded themselves. The gunmen thus had no more targets to shoot at. Their operation fragmented, with each fidayeen team fighting independently of the others and relying on encouragement and tactical advice provided by their controllers in Pakistan.

The Indian security response varied from one location to another. Poorly-trained and underequipped policemen were gunned down in sizeable numbers by one fidayeen buddy pair, which attacked a train station and a hospital. At two other locations, which were hotel complexes, the police conducted reconnaissance probes to assess the situation and then settled into a static defence role. At a fourth location (the city's Jewish cultural centre, located in a densely crowded neighbourhood called Nariman Point), they focused on evacuating nearby buildings and creating a security cordon, since it was too dangerous to approach the terrorists.

Responsibility for closing in with the terrorists fell upon two specialist assault units drawn from the Indian military: the MARCOS (Marine Commandos) and the NSG (National Security Guards). Both units performed as best they could within the limitations of the 'contain and negotiate' concept that guided their employment. As per this concept, the military had to wait for a formal request from civilian authorities before intervening. The MARCOS, who

were already based in Mumbai, moved swiftly after receiving the request. Within an hour and without any tactical intelligence, they entered both hotel complexes simultaneously. At the Taj Palace and Tower Hotel, their prompt action probably saved the lives of 200 civilians. These people had been hiding in an isolated part of the hotel and the terrorists were specifically looking for them. The MARCOS' sudden arrival drove the terrorists away. Meanwhile at the other hotel complex, the Marine Commandos blocked key passages, restricting the terrorists' mobility.

Between them, the MARCOS and NSG evacuated over 800 civilians from the two hotel complexes and cleared over 1,500 rooms. The NSG arrived within twelve hours of the terrorist attack beginning - which is around the average time that a CT-SWAT unit would take to deploy for a cross-country rescue mission under the 'contain and negotiate' paradigm. Subsequently, the NSG was criticised for being too slow to reach Mumbai, but this criticism misses the point: no counterterrorist unit in the world is politically authorised and logistically supported for immediate engagement in a situation where there are no ongoing negotiations to buy it time. (In 1980, the SAS took much longer to reach the Iranian embassy from its base in Hereford. At the time, nobody paid any attention to this fact, because the British unit was only confronting a conventional hostage siege and not a massacre.)

It was due to the NSG and MARCOS that the Mumbai terrorist attacks never reached their planned second stage: that of multiple hostage sieges.⁶ Instead, once the terrorists came under fire from these units, they concentrated on retaliating and tactical manoeuvres and did not spend any more time looking for civilians to kill. Whatever civilian deaths occurred, happened within the first six hours (with over one hundred in the first sixty minutes alone). No counterterrorist unit could have prevented them, unless it had been authorised to deploy and engage the terrorists literally within minutes of the first shots being fired. For this, existing concepts of SWAT employment in rescue missions would have to be revised.

EXAMPLE 3: OSLO-UTØYA 2011

The third and final suicidal/mass casualty terrorist incident that this essay shall examine is the bombing and shooting spree that happened in Norway on 22 July 2011. The attacks were carried out by a single individual, operating alone, who managed to kill seventy-seven people in three hours, sixty-eight of them by gunfire. The killer was a right-wing militant angry at the changing political landscape of Norway. He first planted a vehicle-borne IED (improvised explosive device) in the government quarter of the Norwegian capital Oslo and then drove forty-five kilometres to a scenic lake in the countryside. At the centre of this lake was a large island called Utøya, where an annual summer camp was being held by 600 youth activists of the Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet), the leading party in the current Norwegian government. Dressed in a policeman's uniform, he arrived at the island by boat. After initially claiming that he was there for a routine security check, he opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle and a handgun.

The car bomb in Oslo exploded at 1526 hrs.⁷ Within a couple of minutes, the Norwegian police's CT unit, nicknamed 'Delta Force', was alerted. Having rehearsed many times for a terrorist attack, it responded immediately. Twenty operatives in assault gear left for the bomb site from their base a few kilometres away. They arrived at 1535 hrs, nine minutes after the explosion and three minutes after the first news reports had been broadcast. Their leader contacted emergency services, to find out if the explosion was deliberate or accidental.

At 1710 hrs, Oslo police confirmed to the media that the explosion had been caused by a bomb. There was no information as yet on the number of people killed. Around the same time, campers along the lake shoreline across from Utøya island started hearing gunshots. Panic-stricken teenagers on the island dialled police hotlines on their mobile phones. At 1726 hrs, police in a town near Utøya were informed about gunfire on the island. They contacted the Oslo police within four minutes to update them

and, eight minutes later, made a formal request for support from Delta Force. Within a minute, eight Delta operatives were on the road towards Utøya.

There has been some criticism about the team's decision to travel the forty-five kilometres from Oslo to Utøya by road. Some commentators have argued that the team should have been airlifted by helicopter, so that they could have arrived earlier and saved more lives. The unit had a surveillance helicopter on standby, equipped with the latest tracking technology. However, it was too small to transport an assault team. For that, Delta Force had maintained an arrangement with the Norwegian military that allowed it to use army helicopters for rapid deployment. Once again, there was an intervening variable: the helicopters were not stationed on-site at the Delta base, but at a military airfield fifty kilometres south of Oslo. By the time they would have arrived to pick up the assault team, more lives would have been lost. A snap decision was therefore made, to let the Delta operators travel to Utøya by road.

The team reached the lakeshore opposite the island by 1809 hrs, just as the local police were arranging a boat to transport them across. They reached the island at 1825 hrs, roughly an hour and fifteen minutes after the gunman had first opened fire. At the time of landing, they did not know how many terrorists were on the island, or even what they looked like. Their task was made easy, however, by the gunman's own intentions. He had already decided before the massacre that he would surrender to the police, so that he could explain the rationale for the killings. As soon as he saw them, he walked towards the Delta team with hands raised. At this juncture, the attack had a near-suicidal element to it, since the leading Delta operators were receiving orders over the radio to shoot him dead. Their chief was worried that the terrorist might have been wearing a bomb vest. Only at the very last minute did the team realise that the killer actually intended to surrender. They arrested him at 1827 hrs, two minutes after landing at Utøya.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN BESLAN, MUMBAI AND OSLO-UTØYA

From an operational perspective, the last three incidents discussed above share four similarities. Firstly, they were focused on soft targets, with the aim of maximising civilian deaths. Secondly, they were reckless to the point of being suicidal (since the perpetrators did not care about the consequences of their actions). Thirdly, they were characterised by complex challenges, which security forces had difficulties in overcoming. Fourth, in each case, specialist hostage rescue units performed well as per the existing model of their use in counterterrorist missions. The problem was, that model did not match the type of situation these units faced on the ground. The units therefore, had to improvise tactically.

At Beslan, Mumbai and Utøya, the concerned CT-SWAT units were thrown into situations for which they were tactically unprepared. In the absence of coordinated support from other government agencies, they had to fall back on the individual combat skills and tactical judgment of their field operators. It was these qualities, more than any other factor, which limited the number of lives lost.

Unlike most incidents that counterterrorist SWAT units are created to handle, Beslan, Mumbai and Utøya were not conventional hostage situations. There was no time to prepare an ideal assault plan, while negotiators stalled the terrorists. The deliberate killing of civilians at the start of each incident had, in any case, negated the prospect of peaceful resolution through dialogue. Even at Beslan, which superficially resembled a hostage siege, the terrorists understood that their chances of survival were low, due to the hard line policies of the Russian government. Accordingly, they planted IEDs all over the school, intending to kill themselves and as many hostages as possible, once a rescue mission started. At Mumbai and Utøya, there was no hostage crisis to begin with. In the former case, this was because of the relentless pressure maintained by Indian commandos. Quick reaction by the MARCOS, coupled with the NSG's clearance operations, averted any standoff involving the use of civilians as human shields by the LeT terrorists. As for Utøya, it was the gunman's own plan that deviated from the conventional hostage crisis script: he never intended to take hostages.

OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF BESLAN, MUMBAI AND UTØYA

This essay shall now examine what it considers to be the biggest mistakes made by security forces in the three cases of mass casualty terrorism studied above. It shall also list the tactical actions by CT units which mitigated the damage done.

BESLAN

Mistake: Failure to prepare to a contingency assault

Russian security forces were conscious of the political sensitivity of the target – a school with hundreds of children – which hugely narrowed the margin for error. Emphasis was therefore put into planning and rehearsing for a perfect assault. There were no emergency protocols for an immediate storming action if one became necessary. In Russia's centralised political system, decision-making was monopolised by the top-most political leadership, thus robbing tactical commanders of the initiative. While jump-

ing off points for an attack had been pre-identified and the Spetsnaz commandos deployed quickly to these once fighting started, there was still no guiding framework for the assault that was eventually launched.

Mitigating factor: Competence in close quarters battle

Spetsnaz operators did a good job of saving lives once fighting began in earnest. Here, they were helped by their tactical skills, plus confusion among the terrorists themselves. Everyone was caught off guard by the IED explosion in the school gymnasium and the subsequent battle forced the terrorists to divide their attention between shooting at the commandos and killing the hostages. Of the 338 civilians killed in the school, roughly 295 died in and around the gym as a result of explosions, small arms fire and fall-

ing debris from the roof. Since their deaths had been caused by the terrorists' own carelessness and subsequent panicky reaction, CT-SWAT personnel on-site could have done nothing to stop the massacre. Another twenty-nine victims had been executed in the preceding two days of the crisis, for no provocation whatsoever. Only nine hostages died in the rest of the school compound during the entire ten-hour battle. This extremely low death toll was due in part, to the Russian commandos' tactic of continuously engaging the terrorists at close quarters, while also serving as human shields to absorb fire directed towards the hostages.

MUMBAI

Mistake: Failure of local police to engage terrorists aggressively

The Mumbai police responded to the attacks as per the 'contain and negotiate' concept, which only makes first responders responsible for cordoning off an engagement area. The tasks of engaging and neutralising the terrorists are supposed to be handled by specialist assault units. Thus, once the scale of the attacks became obvious, the police waited passively for commandos to take over. It did not use its 450-member Anti-Terrorist Squad, which was equipped with sixty assault rifles, to engage the terrorists in continuous firing. Such a move might have prevented the additional deaths that took place while the MARCOS were waiting for civilian authorisation to intervene and the NSG was flying in from Delhi. Furthermore, the police should have used the MARCOS offensively instead of just asking them to secure key points until the NSG arrived. As highly trained fighters, the MARCOS would have been more than a match for the terrorists, if they had received police backup.

Mitigating factor: NSG prioritised rescue efforts, even at the cost of prolonging the operation

By focusing on evacuation, the NSG inadvertently limited the damage done by the terrorists. Once the initial bursts of firing had taken place, the terrorists were unable to gather large numbers of hostages/human shields. Most hotel guests barricaded them-

selves in their rooms, while others were evacuated by staff. The choice of attacking hotels in any case, meant that the terrorists had unintentionally limited the number of hostages they could seize. Within each compartmentalised and sprawling hotel complex, civilians could hide or fortify themselves and simply wait out the crisis. This luxury would not have been available in a more open-plan building structure. The NSG made optimal use of its finite manpower by focusing on floor-by-floor clearance, giving priority to civilian evacuation while also keeping the terrorists engaged. However, it needs to be said that this slow approach could have been a costly mistake if an actual hostage situation had been created by the terrorists.

UTØYA

Mistake: Decision to send a small team without backup or tactical intelligence

Delta Force reacted to a fluid situation with whatever resources they had readily available. This also required snap decisions regarding the employment of such resources. Unfolding events at the time suggested that a large number of terrorists could have been involved at Utøya. Had there been more gunmen, or had the terrorist ambushed the police when they arrived, the result could have been as catastrophic for security forces' morale as the deaths of senior Mumbai police officials was in India on the night of 26 November 2008.

Mitigating factor: Dispatching additional commandos in a larger group

Although Delta Force took a calculated risk by sending a small team into a massacre site, it mitigated the danger by sending a large follow-up team minutes later. The lesson to be drawn by other CT-SWAT units from this incident is clear: even if extreme circumstances call for a piecemeal insertion of rescue teams, these must be reinforced at the earliest opportunity, since they could be manoeuvring into a trap. They are only reacting to tactical conditions created by the terrorist and still do not have full control over the engagement.

LESSONS FOR FUTURE RESCUE OPERATIONS

There are two lessons that can readily be drawn from the recent cases described above. These relate to the constantly changing standard by which 'success' in CT rescue missions is measured and the biased nature of non-expert commentary on operational performance.

Number of civilian deaths is still important, but now so is speed of SWAT deployment and duration of engagements

At Beslan, only one location was attacked and the bulk of civilian deaths occurred late in the crisis. These factors prompted many commentators, especially outside Russia, to assume that the entire incident had been a 'normal' hostage siege as would often occur in the 1970s. Progressing from this logic, they blamed the Spetsnaz for the large number of hostages killed. It was believed, erroneously, that fighting had broken out because the commandos launched a planned assault without concern for the hostages' safety. No thought was given to the possibility that the siege ended in bloodshed because that was what the terrorists had intended all along. Although they did not deliberately trigger the IED blast that brought the gym roof crashing down, they had knowingly engineered a situation over the preceding two days that could only have produced the same outcome.

At Mumbai, the sheer dynamism of the initial attacks, with near-simultaneous massacres at five different locations, made clear that taking hostages was not the primary intention. Accordingly, so-called 'security experts', both Indian and foreign, quietly shifted the goalposts for evaluating counterterrorist rescue efforts. Since they could not criticise the government's decision to use force, they focused instead on the length of time that it took to neutralise the terrorists. Suddenly, the number of civilian lives saved during rescue operations was not an indicator of a CT unit's professional competence. Instead, the new yardstick became the speed with which such units reached the engagement area and the duration of their 'render safe' operations. Probably, those who criticised the NSG for being slow to reach Mumbai and then taking two days to neutralise the terrorists

were unaware that they were challenging the very foundations of the 'contain and negotiate' concept. According to this concept, within which the NSG and other hostage rescue units have been trained to function, the longer a crisis lasts, the better it is being handled. This is because a slow-moving approach by the government shows that it is keen to minimise casualties. In 1988, the NSG had received international praise for using precisely such an approach to clear the Golden Temple of Sikh separatist terrorists, in what became known as Operation Black Thunder. Yet, when it adopted the same method in Mumbai, thereby preventing harm to civilians, it was criticised.

Even the remarkably swift Norwegian response to the killings at Utøya has been scrutinised in a lopsided manner. Commentary has focused on the time that it took Delta operators to reach the island from Oslo. Less attention has been paid to the intrinsically destructive potential of the situation itself. The terrorist could choose his target at leisure and he picked a physically isolated spot. Despite acting alone and not having automatic weapons, he was able to kill sixty-eight people in less than ninety minutes, due to the lack of a countervailing threat to himself. It was only the arrival of Delta operators that stopped him from shooting more youngsters.

Biased and non-professional analysis of rescue operations disguises the real problem, which is the changing nature of terrorist threats

With 24/7 media coverage and satellite television, there is considerable scope for commentators far from the action to make their views heard. Such views might be informed by facts, or by prejudice. Unfortunately, since most non-governmental security analysts focus on policy and strategic issues, they do not have the competence to make an educated assessment of tactical performance. This means that their analysis of how counterterrorist responses are carried out can be based on outdated textbook concepts with no application to reality, as well as first impressions developed through the media.⁸

Beslan is a prime example: blame for the numerous civilian deaths was attributed to the Russian government on an almost reflexive basis, without thought to the on-ground conditions that had led to a SWAT assault. Since many non-Russian analysts viewed the Putinist state as a throwback to Soviet-style authoritarian rule, it was simply assumed that Russian policymakers did not care about collateral damage at the school. Ideological filters thus played a major role in interpreting the outcome of the attack.

A similar bias was evident with regard to Mumbai. The only difference was that such bias was motivated by high politics. Several foreign commentators focused exclusively on the chaotic response of Indian security forces, thereby downplaying the cross-border nature of the attacks. Within this denunciatory context, India's policy of using minimum force against domestic security threats was ridiculed. Much discussion focused on how the Mumbai police lacked assault weapons to confront the terrorists. Yet, when the Norwegian police turned out to be equally unprepared in responding to a massacre, no similar criticism was made. Apparently, when policemen in Norway walk around without firearms, they are practising community-friendly policing. When Indian policemen do the same, they are incompetent.

Importantly, there is a dichotomy between the guesswork and politically motivated punditry of media commentators, on the one hand, and genuine security professionals, on the other. The latter have studied all three attacks, Beslan, Mumbai and Utøya, and noted that no major errors were made at the tactical level. The Russians, Indians and Norwegians responded in the best manner possible to a new threat with which they were each unfamiliar. One American police officer has argued that for all the snide commentary on Indian counterterrorist units, no US police force would be able to handle a situation similar to the Mumbai attacks any better. This has been proven by numerous drills that American security agencies have carried out in recent

years. Thus, while non-experts continue harping on organisational shortcomings, more insightful studies have revealed that the real problem is systemic: existing counterterrorist response concepts are not optimised to deal with well-planned suicidal attacks on soft targets, where negotiation has virtually no role.

In the final analysis, as far as public perception is concerned, counterterrorist SWAT units are damned if they do and damned if they don't. If they carry out an early storming operation in a conventional hostage situation and civilians end up being killed in the crossfire, the commandos would be portrayed as incompetent. If they respond as per the established procedure of assault being a last resort and terrorists use the intervening time to massacre civilians, they would be blamed for a slow response. All that separates success from failure in counterterrorist rescue missions, therefore, is the intention of the terrorist. Does he aim to keep his victims alive while holding the government to ransom, or simply kill them before or during a CT assault? Being able to answer this question as early as possible is vital, if civilian lives are to be saved.

Yet, finding an answer is not easy, due to the confusion and lack of information which initially hampers every counterterrorist response. Usually, the most important pieces of intelligence are not readily available: the layout of the attack site, the number of attackers and the number of people already killed. While government agencies are groping for a response, the media begin counting back from the start of the crisis and passing comment on the efforts of counterterrorist units in real time. Not only does this provide valuable information to the terrorists, but it also sets an unrealistically high standard for SWAT units to achieve. They are now expected to rescue all hostages safely, in the shortest possible span of time.

'ACTIVE SHOOTER' SCENARIO

In all three cases – Beslan, Mumbai and Utøya – local police and CT-SWAT personnel acted out their assigned roles in a phased manner, as prescribed by the 'cordon and negotiate' concept. The local police, as first responders, settled into a secondary role very early in each crisis and left specialist assault units with the task of engaging the terrorists. They did so not out of cowardice but due to lack of training and equipment for a more proactive response. Unfortunately, this meant that in each case, terrorists were able to accomplish their primary objective of massacring civilians before CT units could arrive and intervene.

The problem is that 'contain and negotiate' is reactive in a double sense. Firstly, it focuses on scenarios where terrorists choose to initiate an incident and take hostages, rather than on focusing on 'hot pursuit' of terrorists into their own safe havens. Thus, terrorists are left free to decide at leisure on the nature of their target and the timing and technique of the attack. SWAT units, on the other hand, are expected to be ready throughout the year for immediate deployment. Secondly, the concept assumes that if terrorists want to kill their hostages anyway, there is nothing that can be done to stop them. A storming action, therefore, only makes sense if the terrorists enter into negotiations and then begin to kill hostages as a pressure tactic. Crucially, the concept does not make allowance for a situation where the terrorists have no interest in negotiation in the first place, but just want to kill people.

For twenty-seven years, the limitations of 'contain and negotiate' went unacknowledged even within the United States – the country that had first formulated the concept. Its supporters pointed out that according to empirical research, 79 per cent of all hostage deaths occurred as a result of botched up rescue attempts. However, views began to change in 1999, when two teenaged gunmen attacked the Columbine High School in the US state of Colorado. In fifteen minutes, they killed thirteen people before committing suicide. Local police units were unprepared to intervene, having been trained in a response model that demarcated their role as one of containment (i.e. setting up a security cordon) rather than

engagement. Faced with an 'active shooter' scenario, where continuous killings were carried out from the start of a crisis, all their training was useless.

From studies of similar incidents, as well as research on the Mumbai attacks, Western law enforcement agencies have started developing a new tactical response concept. Although it is not known to have any name as yet, it can be loosely described as an 'engage and eliminate' paradigm. The idea is to advance quickly towards the sound of gunfire and neutralise the killers through 'swarming tactics', rather than waiting for them to do even more damage. Intervention at the earliest stages of a massacre is the only way to keep the body count low. Unfortunately, this means that some deaths are simply unavoidable. All rescue personnel can do is to limit the damage, by going immediately into attack mode.

Such a conceptual shift has become necessary due to the changing nature of terrorism. The three conventional hostage incidents described at the start of this essay – the Lufthansa hijacking, the Iranian embassy siege and the seizure of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Peru – all allowed CT-SWAT units time to plan a deliberate assault. The terrorists in each case were focused on negotiating their way out of the security cordon that had been thrown around them, while also keeping their hostages alive in order to retain leverage during talks. Even when hostages were killed, they were killed one at a time, thus giving security forces early warning of the terrorists' intentions and ample time to react.

Today, when terrorists aim to kill as many people in as little time as possible, any delay in aggressively engaging them increases the risk to the hostages. This is because, as the case of Beslan proved, holding back allows the terrorists to consolidate their position. Not only does the complexity of rescue operations increase, but the chances of hostage survival are reduced since the terrorists have time to turn their anger onto their victims. Only by closing in rapidly with the terrorists can commandos ensure that civilians stand a realistic chance of survival. During Mumbai, anytime the terrorists encountered a sudden threat to their own lives, they concentrated

on either escaping from the scene or firing back at security forces. They did not have time to turn upon civilians who were in their immediate vicinity. What-

ever additional killings occurred, took place during gaps in the fighting.⁹

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 'CONTAIN AND NEGOTIATE' AND 'ENGAGE AND ELIMINATE' SITUATIONS

	Contain and negotiate	Engage and eliminate
Terrorist intention	To hold civilian lives to ransom	To carry out deliberate killings
Role of hostages	Used as bargaining chips in negotiations. Treated humanely except during periods of tension with government negotiators	Used as human shields, if taken at all. Treated brutally to create a fear psychosis and sustain media attention
Terrorist endgame	To escape if possible, once political goals are achieved	To sacrifice self, after killing as many as possible
Role of time	Benefits security forces, who stall terrorists and plan deliberate assault	Benefits terrorists, who stall security forces and consolidate their position
Lead role in rescue effort	Top-level policymakers and government negotiating team	Field-level SWAT personnel highly trained in close quarters battle

PREPARING FOR ANOTHER ATTACK

As a first step towards preparing for another mass casualty attack, situation analysis cells can be set up within CT-SWAT units. These cells would receive situation updates as soon as first reports of an incident appeared. The cells would focus on just one question: does the choice of target(s) suggest that the terrorists have limited aims and intend to negotiate over these, or are they only focused on creating a media spectacle? If the attack site is huge (such as a shopping mall or a major school) and the number of potential victims is large, this would indicate that the terrorists are suicidal. A bigger building with multiple access points is typically, less defensible than a smaller one. Since the terrorists would anyway be cut off from reinforcement, they would logically not attack a large complex unless they have no plans for a long-drawn engagement. A large number of potential victims would likewise suggest that the

terrorists are not concerned with subduing resistance and controlling their immediate environment, but only want to cause maximum casualties. Final confirmation of their intentions would arrive once reports started coming in of civilian deaths in the initial moments of a terrorist attack. Such killings would automatically rule out the possibility of negotiations, since the government would not be able to offer leniency to the perpetrators.

Once it has been determined that the attack is aimed at massacring civilians, the next step would be to deploy as many SWAT commandos as can realistically be sent, while coordinating an offensive response by local security forces. Such a response, provided it is sustained, would prevent the terrorists from being able to consolidate their position and would also provide covering fire for civilians trapped within the

area to escape. Thereafter, using many commandos would allow a building to be stormed simultaneously from multiple entry points. This would reduce the terrorists' superiority in tactical intelligence. Even if they know the building's layout better than the rescue team, they still will not know how many directions the SWAT teams are advancing from. Also, at close quarters, the intense but still surgical firepower that a large and well-trained rescue force would employ is likely to prove crucial in saving lives. It would cause the terrorists to bunch together, such that they can be segregated from any hostages that they might have gathered. It would also allow commandos to manoeuvre into position between the two.

Finally, past trends in terrorist behaviour suggest that tactical autonomy is the key to success, both for terrorists as well as for security forces. In Mumbai, the five *fidayeen* buddy pairs were at their most effective during the initial hours of the onslaught, when they instinctively took advantage of opportunities that appeared before them. No amount of intelligence analysis could have predicted their next move, for the simple reason that not even the terrorists knew what it would be. Later, upon growing psychologically dependent on the advice of their controllers in Pakistan, they switched to a defensive stance. By that time, all the killings had already taken place. Thus, although the controllers in Pakistan prolonged the crisis, their micromanagement also caused the terrorists to lose tactical initiative.

The case of Beslan demonstrates that it is the decisions of commanders in the field rather than policymakers that really determine the outcome of counterterrorist operations. This has particularly serious implications for suicidal terrorist attacks on soft targets. Waiting for high-level clearance to intervene and stop a massacre is simply not an option and the decision-making process needs to accommodate this reality. In cases of suicidal attack, the most effective response is the nineteenth-century Prussian philosophy of *auftragstaktik*, or literally, mission-specific tactics. Rather than a centralised process where orders are transmitted down a chain of command, operational directives need to be issued as close to the level at which they are meant to be implemented. This means that SWAT officers should engage targets upon their own discretion, once the need for immediate action has become clear.

In conclusion, the role of SWAT in counterterrorism is set to become more important than ever before. During the 1970s and '80s, such units operated in a supportive role to negotiation teams. Even if the popular media remained fixated on commandos rather than negotiators, the success of a hostage rescue mission would be decided by whether continuous dialogue could tire out the terrorists, or else distract them at a crucial moment. Today however, negotiators have next to no role in preventing a massacre of hostages, once terrorists have decided to carry one out. It is only SWAT that can save the lives of innocents. Governments, therefore, need to recognise the changing nature of terrorism and suitably upgrade the reaction capabilities of their own counterterrorist units.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A brief note on nomenclature: readers are advised that the term 'CT-SWAT', as used in this essay, refers both to police SWAT units deployed on CT missions and to military CT units trained in SWAT methods. The term signifies a fusion of police and military tactical concepts, for use in rare situations precipitated by armed terrorist assaults.
- 2 The Israeli intelligence service had not anticipated that the Palestinians would adopt airline hijacking as a tactic in their war against Israel. It was thus forced to play catch-up with the terrorists (Thomas 2000, 147-148).
- 3 The concept was outlined in great detail in a book written by some of its formulators. The hostage rescue section of the book is well worth reading, primarily to appreciate how dated its precepts are in the context of suicidal terrorism today. At one point, the authors suggest that people killed during hostage incidents bring about their own demise by provoking the terrorists needlessly (Bolz Jr, Dudonis and Schulz 1996, 57-61).
- 4 British commentators liked to peddle the notion that the SAS contribution to the German rescue operation was crucial. It was, but only in a technical sense. The two British advisors did not, contrary to leaked reports in the British press, actually lead the operation. All they were permitted to do was observe its implementation from the sidelines, as per existing counterterrorist cooperation arrangements between NATO countries.
- 5 The 9/11 attacks were preceded by other attempts at suicidal hijacking. In 1994, Algerian jihadists hijacked an Air France aircraft with the aim of crashing it into the Eiffel Tower. Upon learning of their plans, the pilot landed in Marseilles, ostensibly to refuel. There, French commandos terminated the hijacking. From this incident, jihadist militants understood that an airborne suicidal assault would need trained pilots in order to overcome resistance from the airline crew (Miller, Stone and Mitchell 2002, 263-264).
- 6 Some might argue that the situation at the Jewish cultural centre was a hostage crisis, which was badly handled by Indian security forces. This would be a misleading argument: NSG commandos had deliberately held back from attacking the building out of concern for the safety of civilians trapped inside. Based on post-incident investigations, however, it is now known that Lashkar-e-Toiba had planned all along to kill the occupants, in order to vitiate relations between India and Israel. The commandos had only stormed the building after intercepted telephone conversations between the terrorists and their leaders in Karachi confirmed that the hostages had in fact, already been killed much earlier in the attack.
- 7 Other sources give the time as 1522 hrs. This is the only discrepancy in the timeline of the Oslo-Utøya attacks.
- 8 In some cases, even government officials, who should know better, fall into the trap of being politically correct and thereby distort their analysis of how hostage crises can be resolved. For instance, in the autumn of 1985, four Soviet diplomats were abducted in Lebanon by an Islamist group. Since the crisis was speedily resolved, after the killing of one hostage, it is just assumed by some commentators that the Soviet government must have made concessions to the terrorists (Pachnanda 2002, 199-200). In fact, Spetsnaz commandos had kidnapped a relative of the hostage-takers (who had been previously identified by intelligence agents), killed him by slow mutilation and issued a warning that more such actions would follow if the Soviet diplomats were not immediately released. They were.
- 9 Interestingly, the same behaviour was observed of the Palestinian terrorists who carried out the Munich Olympics Massacre. They did not kill their hostages until quite late in the battle at the airfield. Whether this was because of moral inhibitions (highly unlikely, since they had already killed two Israelis) or because they were too focused on retaliating to police firing, is not important. The fact remains that their attention was focused on saving themselves. Only when it became clear that they had no chance of escape did they turn on the hostages, having been given several opportunities by the police to assess and re-assess their tactical position, in the vain hope that they would surrender (Jonas 2006, 6).

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