# Impact of Historical Incidents on Hostage Crisis Negotiation

The 1972 terrorist attack on the Israeli Olympic camp in Munich had a great effect on the manner in which countries handle hostage-takers. The incident happened on 5th September 1972, ten days after the start of the games. Eight Palestinian terrorists arrived at the Olympic village and took down the fence using hand grenades with the help of athletes who were coming back into the village after sneaking out the previous night. They immediately took out two Israeli athletes and held nine others hostage. The Israeli government turned down efforts to have them take part in the negotiations to have the hostages freed due to their policy against holding any negotiations with terrorists. Therefore, the unprepared Germany government was left on its own (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008). It had the task to solely engage the terrorists and free the hostages. The mission initially seemed to be moving on well, especially when the negotiation team had appeared to have agreed to the demand of the terrorists to have them transported to the Fürstenfeldbruck NATO air base, where a plane would airlift them to Cairo. Poorly trained snipers attempted to take them out, leading to the death of four of the terrorists, all the nine hostages and one German police officer (Diaz, 2016).

Several changes have since been effected by several countries since the occurrence of this hostage crisis. The most notable ones was the formation of GSG 9, a unit of the German police tasked with countering terrorism and negotiating with hostage-takers (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008). This was done after realizing that the country was ill-prepared to deal with such incidents. In fact, the German government had admitted immediately after the attack that their police force was only prepared for minor offences and engaging unarmed attacks. The GSG9 demonstrated the country’s preparedness to handle hostage crises five years later by successfully freeing hostages aboard Lufthansa 181 in Somalia (Diaz, 2016). Similarly, Israel’s policy on terrorism was slightly affected. Though they claim to be still adhering to their policy of not negotiating with terrorists, they have secretly engaged terrorists in negotiations on several occasions. The best examples include their decision to secretly negotiate the Oslo accord with the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1993. This was done despite Palestine stubbornly not recognizing the existence of Israel as a nation. They also engaged Hamas before the release of Gilat Shilat in exchange with 1,027 prisoners whom they had held in their prisons.

The Attica prison riot was also a turning point in the handling of hostage negotiation crises. In this particular crisis, the police refused to negotiate with the prisoners and instead brandished their weapons in readiness to attack and kill the prisoners. This was in retaliation after the prisoners had murdered a prison guard named Quinn (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008). They used gas, which floored anyone who came in contact with it, and sprayed bullets on the inmates and hit others with their gun butts. Rockefeller refused to take part in the negotiations. Instead, he made the inmates believe that the helicopter they had seen landing had brought him to negotiate with them. This trick allowed the police to ambush the prisoners. The officers on board exploded a combination of CS and CN gases, which covered all the areas of the prison. All the people that came in contact with this gas, fell on the ground, and the police officers had enough time to torture them (Diaz, 2016).

This incident has, however, helped curtail the use of excessive power by the police. They have since learnt to engage negotiation and force only as a last resort. Apart from this, there was a lot of pressure for reforms in prison system and the government yielded to it. Prison managers have since then been made to know that prisoners can throw away their differences and unite against mistreatments by the prison authorities (Diaz, 2016). As a result, American prisons have adopted negotiation as the first option in solving standoffs in between the authorities and the inmates or even among the inmates themselves.

One example of violent incidents that could be resolved by negotiation is suicidal attacks like the Columbine High School massacre. If the two students had been engaged early enough, especially when they started showing signs of violence and readiness to kill, the situation could have been salvaged. Psychologists, parents and teachers could have come together and helped counsel the two boys and make them see the need to respect their own life and that of other people. This could as well have been possible when the killing of fellow students was ongoing-they could have been asked to state what they want changed in society in return for the lives of innocent students (Dolnik & Fitzgerald, 2008).

The violent kidnapping of people by terrorist groups such as the Boko Haram can also be solved by negotiation. A particular example is the arrest of Chibok girls. This can be solved by sitting down with the terrorists and asking them to make their demands known to the Nigerian authorities. Once this is done, the government can promise and even give them what is possible and come up with a tactic to act on what cannot be given to the terrorists. They can also make their position on the issue known to the terrorist. For example, they can explain to them why they cannot stop offering western education and why they cannot allow a fully Islamic-sharia-compliant government (Diaz, 2016).

## References

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