

A Case Study on Crisis Management with a Specific Reference to Operation Thunderbolt Executed by Israeli Defense Forces

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Abstract

Terrorist attacks, high profile kidnappings, extortion, political insurgency or employee litigation are some of the growing risks that companies face. They could affect your organization's workforce, property and contracts and have a significant impact on business operations and shareholder value. How rapidly and effectively you react in a crisis is critical. It can make the difference between recovering well, or not at all. Due to changed threat situations in the whole world e.g. international terrorism, catastrophe etc. efficient preparation for crises has meanwhile become a must everywhere in the world. This applies, above all, to top management levels in the state administrations and in the boardrooms of enterprises. Examples of recent crises that resulted in lost lives, displaced families and communities, shutdown businesses and damaged economy which leads to substantial damage and loss. In this case we try to explore how organizations can be better prepared to handle unforeseen events that may cause serious or irreparable damage by means of crisis management and also shows how strategic planning and effective leadership initiatives are vital in crisis management.

Keywords: Crisis Management, Effective Leadership, Strategic Planning, Terrorism

1. Introduction

Crisis is sudden and almost always unexpected, events that are very difficult to predict as to when they will occur or what their likely effect might be. However normally they have lasting effects. Crisis management is a term which conveys the way in which endeavor to mitigate the damage and deal with the fallout¹. Good training and instinctive response will allow team to be ready and primed for whatever is thrown at them. As we know that rising threat of Terrorism does not recognize borders and may affect states and peoples irrespective of their geographical location. Individuals and groups who believe that they can advance their political aims by using terror pose a serious threat to the democratic values of our societies and to the rights and freedoms of our citizens, especially by indiscriminately targeting innocent people. Acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, and must be treated as such under all circumstances. In

this case we will be studying systematic approach towards crisis management and fight against terrorism carried out by commandos of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) with the help of Mossad, the Israeli defense intelligence agency at Entebbe Airport in Uganda on 4 July 1976².

2. Overview on Operation Thunderbolt: Most Daring Raid on Entebbe Airport

The Israeli Special Forces' operation at Entebbe goes down in history as one of the most audacious counter-terrorist assaults ever conducted.

2.1 Prelude

On 27 June 1976, Air France Flight 139, departed from Tel Aviv, Israel, carrying 246 mainly Jewish and Israeli passengers and a crew of 12³. Soon after takeoff, the flight

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was hijacked by two Palestinians from PFLP-EO, and by two Germans, The hijackers landed the plane at Benghazi, Libya and flew it from there to Entebbe in Uganda.

2.2 Making Strategic Decision

Israel had tried to develop a dialogue with Ugandan President *Idi Amin*, who collaborated with the terrorists. Simultaneously, preparations began for a military operation, based on intelligence regarding the situation in the *Entebbe* Airport. As the crisis unfolded, attempts were made to negotiate the release of the hostages. According to declassified diplomatic documents, the Egyptian government under *Sadat* tried to negotiate with both the PLO and the Ugandan government. But when *Idi Amin's* assistance to the terrorists became increasingly clear, the Israeli government began preparations for a military assault.

2.3 Getting Ready

When Israeli authorities failed to negotiate a political solution, they decided the only option was an surprise attack to rescue the hostages. The element of surprise was crucial; never before had such a large-scale raid at such a long distance been successfully undertaken. This is the incredible case of how the Israeli Special Forces defied radar for over 2,000 miles, masqueraded as a tyrant in a Mercedes and captured uniforms, and defeated an army in brutal combat, culminating in a triumph of sheer audacity and nerve.

2.4 Lighting Raid

On 4 July, Israeli defense forces landed in Entebbe. Under the cover of darkness. Landing, 29 Israeli commandos unloaded a Mercedes and two Land Rovers hoping to convince the terrorists that they were Amin or another high ranking Ugandan. Lt Col Jonathan Benjamin took a spontaneous decision to assault the terminal building on foot after dis-embarking from the vehicles near the control tower of the airport after the element of surprise was lost. Rigorous training and mental robustness of all members of the assault team is essential in such commando operations. Soon after their landing the Israelis stormed the Airport building, freeing the hostages and killing the hijackers. As they withdrew with the hostages, the Israelis destroyed 11 Ugandan MiG-17 fighters to prevent pursuit. Taking off, the Israelis flew to Kenya where the freed hostages were transferred to other aircraft.

2.5 Aftermath

The Israeli rescue operation lasted all of 90 minutes from the moment of landing in Entebbe until take-off. In all, the Entebbe Raid freed 100 hostages. In the fighting, three hostages were killed, as well as 45 Ugandan soldiers and six terrorists. The only Israeli commando killed was Col. Netanyahu, who was hit by a Ugandan sniper. He was the older brother of future Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This operation is considered as a brilliant example of crisis management and the premier hostage rescue operation in military history⁴.

3. Concept of Crisis Management

3.1 Definition of Crisis

Crisis is the process by which an organization deals with a major event that threatens to harm the organization, its stakeholders, or the general public. Here we are using following definition-“The process of responding to an event, or a series of events, whose effect might threaten the national security, national integrity or very existence of nation or its immediate allies”⁵. The aim is to minimize damage and preserve national interest. Crisis management is a term that covers a way in which we endeavor to mitigate the damage and deal with fallout.

3.2 Phases of Crisis Management

Crisis management has distinct phases. Key five phases of crisis management are listed in below-

3.2.1 Early Warning/Trigger

These are the initial warnings of potential threats. This phase could require days to only recognize potential vulnerability. Intelligence agencies play very important role in this phase.

In this case the hijackers had the stated objective to free 40 Palestinian and pro-Palestinian militants imprisoned in Israel and 13 prisoners in four other countries in exchange for the hostages and the local government of Uganda supported the hijackers. Dictator *Idi Amin* also personally welcomed them. These were certainly early warnings to IDF regarding future crisis.

3.2.2 Escalation

During this phase tempo of the event speeds up. In this

phase stakeholders start to believe that they are prone to crisis. Readiness of state and local government and well established communication network are proven very important during this phase. Mossad had provided intelligence to IDF and Government on various point of time. The Israeli government appointed a special ministerial team to handle the crisis, which included then-prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, foreign minister Yigal Allon and then-defense minister, President Shimon Peres.

3.2.3 The Crisis

	Speed of Development	
	Fast : Instant	Slow: Creeping
Speed of Termination	Fast : Abrupt	Fast Burning Crisis
	Slow : Gradual	Long Shadow Crisis
		Slow Burning Crisis

Figure 1. A typography of crisis development and termination pattern.

This is the phase where actual undesirable events are occurring in relative short duration of time. The principal objective during this phase is to minimize overall impact of the crisis-especially loss of lives. Only effective training will enable a cadre to continue to functioning with a series of predetermined measures design for minimizing risk and disaster recovery. This phase described in the case on such crises also throws light on the crisis situation in Entebbe. This crisis is considered as fast moving burning crisis. A crisis can be classified based on its speed of development and speed of termination combined. The key characteristic of fast burning crisis is that the termination of operational efforts also makes the political end of the crisis. This crisis is intense and short even though it will be certainly been remembered. Operation Entebbe is pragmatic example of fast burring crisis⁶.

The Entebbe operation, which took 72 hours of planning and an imperfect Sinai desert exercise for night

landing, which was a limited success, left four dead and one seriously injured. The commander of the Israel Defense Force raiders, Lt. Col. Yonatan Netanyahu, and three hostages were killed. Nevertheless, the Israelis and the world accept the operation as a total and exemplary success, and these sacrifices were perceived as necessary for the objectives achieved. In other words, the operation reduced a near total damage scenario to fewer than 3 per cent casualties, a proportion entirely acceptable and politically saleable domestically, when balanced with the huge strategic and political success at Entebbe. Collateral damage was overwhelmingly balanced out by the doctrinal and political gains. The real criterion of success is the strategic and political balance secured through the end game.

3.2.4 Recovery

Recovery is very important phase of crisis management. Recovery Task Team is formed to implement contingency plans, to meet specific condition on ground. Task teams should have comprehensive training and should be capable to make their own initiatives whenever is required. In this raid the Israelis finished evacuating the hostages, loaded Netanyahu’s body into one of the planes, and left Entebbe Airport. Also Israeli Government was manage to get support from western European countries like Germany, France with their strong and strategic political relationships.

3.2.5 Post-incident Analysis

This phase is about to understand to face future crisis, how to get early warnings, ways of minimizing response time, improve trainings and recovery systems. The mission was an astounding tactical success, with all hostages held at the airport rescued and only one IDF casualty. This dramatic raid became the most successful hostage rescue operation in history. These events deeply affected post-incident national attitudes: this incident marked by dynamic optimism and progressive though prolonged negotiations towards a political solution for the underlying problem.

4. Core Principles of Crisis Management

Israeli government and defense forces have followed core principles of crisis management and certainly they have helped them in carrying successful operation. The

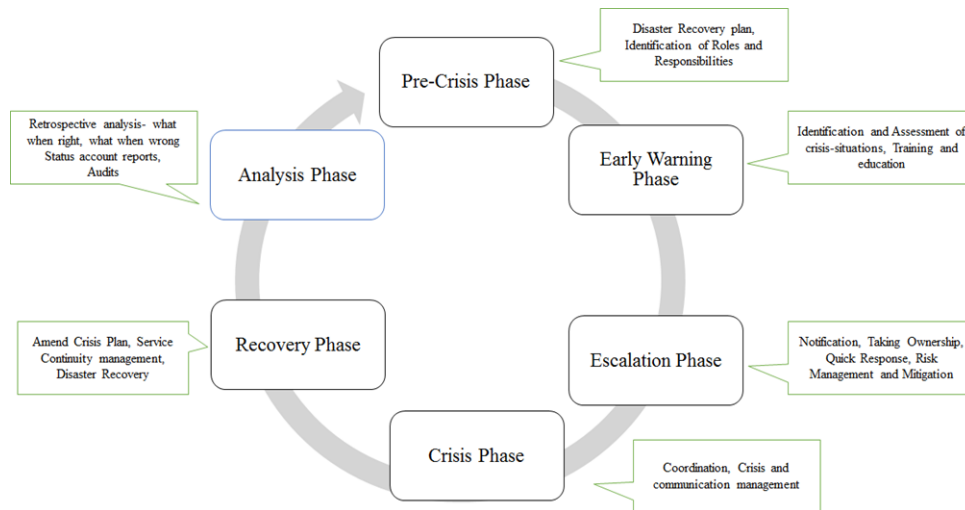


Figure 2. Process of crisis management.

purpose of these principles is to provide the framework that will enable a organization to cope efficiently and effectively in times of crisis.

4.1 Organizational Commitment

Israeli government and defense forces demonstrated hardcore commitment to crisis situation. They did not feared in decision making and did not got caught in pressure situations.

4.2 Develop Crisis Management Plan

Crisis management plan includes developing strategy and framework against crisis. In terms of developing crisis management plan, role of *Mossad* an Israeli intelligence agency was proved very vital during this operation. It provided accurate strategic inputs and built an accurate picture of the whereabouts of the hostages, the number of hijackers, and the involvement of Ugandan troops from the released hostages in Paris. While preparing the raid the Israeli army also consulted *SolelBoneh*, a large Israeli construction company that had built the terminal where the hostages were held. While planning the military operation the IDF erected a partial replica of the airport terminal with the help of civilians who had helped build the original⁷.

4.3 Have Clear and Firm Objective

IDF has clear objective as rescue of abductees from flight 139 at Entebbe. IDF has very strict and clear instruction regarding safety of people, protection of asset including reputation, & timely termination of threat.

4.4 Ensure Timely Involvement of the Appropriate Authorities and Stakeholders

Operation thunderbolt was successfully carried out with coordinated efforts of Government of Israel, Israel Defense Forces and Mossad. During the negotiations with hijackers, Israeli Government also approached the US government to deliver a message to Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, asking him to request *Amin* to release the hostages and other world leaders⁸.

4.5 Ensure Timely and Accurate Information Flow Processes that Support Good Decision Making

All credit goes to Mossad for provided timely and exact information about overall situation. *Yitzhak Hofi*, a former Israeli general and Mossad chief who played a key role in this rescue operation.

4.6 Coordination

IDF displayed a brilliant example of a coordination and communication. Overall operation thunderbolt was tightly coupled. It lasted for only 90 min. In this Operation Israel used 100 commandos out of which only 1 casualty has happened. IDF manage to kill all 7 hijackers, 45 Ugandans soldiers and destroyed more than 25 aircrafts just because of their coordination during the operation.

4.7 Quick Response

IDF reacted quickly to the crisis situation. They availed

all possible tactical and moral support from Israeli Government. IDF took a decision of raiding the Entebbe on very day plane has landed in Entebbe. IDF quickly formed the task force under the command, *Brig. Gen Shomron*, and the air force representative *Col. Ami Ayalon* and conducted *Operation thunderbolt* lasts only for 2 days. Quick response to any crisis is considered as crucial and could turn out to be decisive point in better crisis recovery⁹.

5. Lessons Learnt from Entebbe

- Any organization need to have a dedicated task force structure, including and expeditionary one, to tackle such threat so carry out a quick response, effective launch to faraway lands and across seas, mindful of greater organizational interests and economic participation across the globe¹⁰.
- Organizations need to nurture and evolve a will of the people, to take a bold and decisive call to intervene on behalf of and in the interest of our people in such emerging situations.
- Intelligence gathering is critical in conceiving the rescue mission. This case highlights the need for specialized intelligence gathering and interrogation skills and resources when the crisis is still developing. Also Intelligence needs to be updated at all times.
- Despite the best of plans and rehearsals, one needs to be prepared for all eventualities and quick re-appraisal of the plan at the execution stage of the operation.
- Relevant and effective strategic and tactical leadership factor could become much more crucial in the foreseeable future. It is imperative that the leadership factor is addressed by intense capacity building across services and calling in the security apparatus for responding well to emergent situations¹¹.
- Quick response or the time factor is most important in crisis management. The time factor refers to the duration of the crisis, from its recognition through its termination, and includes an analysis of the effect terrorist deadlines had on planners. The time factor proved critical in the Entebbe counterterrorist raid and affected, if not determined, the nature of the rescue attempt.

6. Conclusion

“It marked one of the best times in Israel’s history in terms of international recognition and respect,”

Lt. Col. (res.) Mor. Israel Defense Force

The whole credit of Operation Entebbe marked a dramatic victory over international terrorism goes to their very effective crisis management. This rescue at Entebbe serves as a reminder that any critical crisis could be handled with proper planning, quickly responding, capacity building and effective strategic leadership.

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