

Crisis Management Teams: ready to respond?

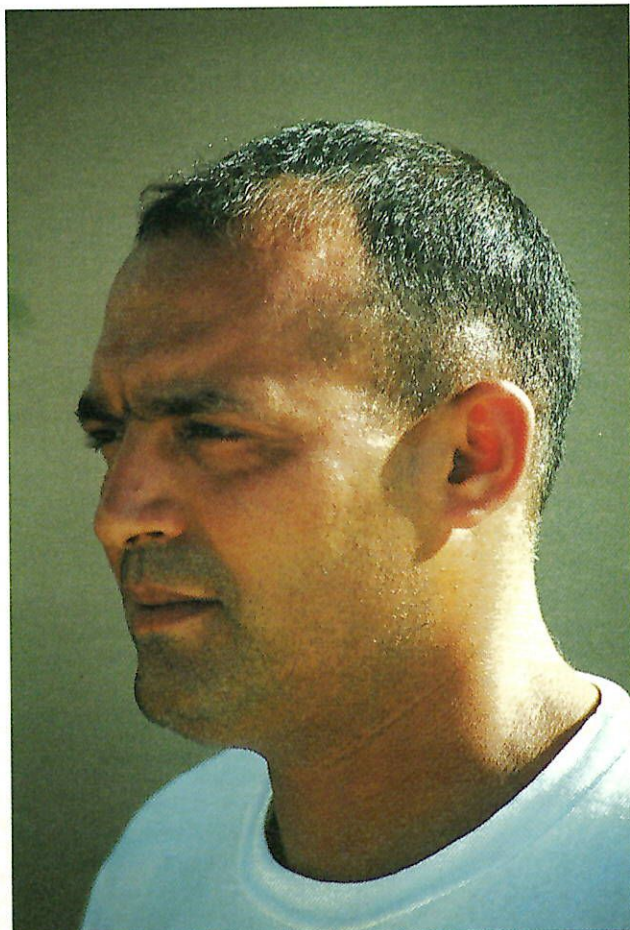
On May 24th, in Agadir, Morocco, a hijack took place. You may not have read about it in the press or seen it on CNN, despite the presence of senior representatives of a wide number of African and European civil aviation authorities. Two security guards were killed at the gate and a hostage was killed in the midst of negotiations. Despite the brevity of the incident, **Philip Baum** managed to get to the scene and to file this report, an exclusive for **Aviation Security International**.

Full-scale security exercises are notoriously difficult to stage. Hijack exercises, using real airports and incorporating all the different agencies involved, take the complexity of staging an exercise to unfathomable heights. That said, an untested emergency plan has little value, and many states could learn a lesson from the Moroccan authorities who co-ordinated the ROCO 2 exercise in Agadir.

ROCO 1 was staged in Casablanca two years ago. The name ROCO reflects the organisational involvement of Royal Air Maroc (R), Office National Des Aeroports – ONDA, being the Moroccan airport authority (O), the European Civil Aviation Conference – ECAC (C for CEAC – the French way round!) and ICAO (O for OACI – also the French version!). ROCO 1 was a success but, like all exercises, many lessons were learned and improvements promulgated. Two years on and it was time to evaluate whether the emergency procedures now in place were effective.

The two primary objectives of ROCO 2 were:-

- To test the responsiveness of the crisis management team
- To test the adaptation of the procedures and means, particularly with



"The Terrorist"

respect to relatives of persons taken hostage, the press, care provided to victims, logistical support, as well as traffic management in areas not affected by the event.

The whole scenario was put together by co-ordination between the different agencies involved under the excellent and purposeful stewardship of the Exercise Manager, Mr Mohamed Akesbi, ONDA's Director of Operations.

The actions and reactions were conducted by two sets of participants implementing acting exercises according to the provisions previously agreed upon during the planning phases.

Actors generating events included the "terrorists", passengers' relatives and friends, and the Press. Those reacting included representatives of the executive and judiciary powers, the negotiators, the crisis management team, airline personnel, medical and psychological services, air navigation services, media relations officers and logistical support teams.

The entire exercise was supervised by controllers who had the responsibility for monitoring a particular aspect of the exercise without participating themselves, unless they felt it important to reorient the series of actions according to the developed scenario. They also evaluated the performance of those they were supervising.



Mr. Mohamed Akesbi, Director of Operations, ONDA; the Exercise Manager

So the scene was set...

THE SCENARIO

We find ourselves in Gadari, in the Kingdom of Mocra. It's May 2000.

Colombo, a South American state, is planning to purchase second-hand fighter planes and helicopters from the Kingdom of Mocra. The Royal Mocra Aerospace company is one of the major players in the military aircraft construction sector.

The Minister of Defence of Colombo, Ignacio Ramirez, is currently on an offi-

cial visit to Tabar, the capital of the Kingdom of Mocra, to meet his counterpart and finalise details of the sale.

The insurrectionist group 'MPO 20 de Julio' ('MPO-20 J'), which wages a constant guerrilla war against the government of Colombo, wants to oppose this purchase, as it knows that this equipment is suitable for use in counter-guerrilla warfare.

As one of their agents has succeeded in infiltrating the staff of the Colombo Ministry of Defence, the MPO leaders know that the Minister's wife, Guadalupe Ramirez, is accompanying her husband during the week during which he will be conducting the commercial negotiations.

The wife of the Colombo Minister of Defence has not stayed in the capital of the Kingdom of Mocra all the time,

but has gone on an extensive tourist trip to visit the country's most beautiful and interesting sites.

Mrs Ramirez is expected at Gadari airport on flight ROC 002 from Karramech, scheduled to arrive at 9.20 a.m.

The MPO is to strike the airport in this city, launching a surprise attack when the flight, carrying the Minister of Defence's wife, arrives in order to abduct her.

INITIAL PHASE

The terrorists of the MPO have just kidnapped the wife of the Minister of Defence of Colombo, Mrs Guadalupe Ramirez, following a series of bloody attacks. Along with her, they have taken all the other passengers on the ATR 42 used for flight ROC 002. They accessed the apron by force through one of the security check-points, killing two guards.

As Mrs Ramirez, her bodyguard and her companion were the first passengers to disembark, the terrorists stormed the shuttle on the apron and killed her bodyguard. The shots alerted three gendarmes on patrol, whose vehicle was 150 meters from the point where the aeroplane came to a stop. Fearful of interception, the commando leader ordered shots to be fired at the vehicle, seriously injuring the three gendarmes.

As he was afraid he would not be able to leave the restricted area, he then



The Crisis Management Team in session

decided, instead of trying to sneak out with the Minister's wife, to take all the passengers of the aeroplane hostage. All the passengers on flight ROC 002 were forced to get onto the bus. The commando group took refuge in the aeroclub hangar with the hostages who were used as a human shield.

The commando leader noticed the presence of the police near the hangar and, fearing an immediate reaction, he instructed that mortar shots be fired at the buildings containing the mobile intervention force (including the airport dog unit) and at the compounds of families of the security forces.

HIJACKERS' DEMANDS

The terrorists of the MPO contacted the control tower to announce their demands.

- 1) A cameraman from one of the national television channels must come and record a political declaration by the commando leader,
- 2) The Kingdom of Morocco must cancel the sale of military air equipment to Colombo and the Government must formally announce this before midday, and
- 3) Two powerful cars with full petrol tanks must be provided to enable the commando team to reach neighbouring Géalie without being prevented.



One relative collapses and the medical team swings into action



Families and friends of the hostages plead for information

And, if these demands were not met:

- 1) Hostages would be killed every hour, in groups, beginning with the foreigners, and
- 2) Mortar shells would be fired regularly at the air terminal, the runway and the fuel farm.

...and the exercise took place

For the following seven hours, all the players in the exercise took their roles very seriously. For sure, there were lighthearted moments, but the crisis management team swung into action and all appreciated the serious nature of the play-acting.

The terrorist commando, in reality an avsec instructor at the Casablanca-based training centre, managed to keep the negotiators on their toes and to instil terror into those he held hostage, whilst still managing to create a sense of Stockholm Syndrome.

The hostages' families and friends in their grief managed to portray the hysteria which could be expected in a real situation and the trauma team responded to their needs.

And, most importantly the crisis management team met in the Emergency Operations Centre and effectively controlled everything from the negotiations

to press liaison and from medical support to armed intervention.

In the evaluation that followed, the organisers were able to confirm that significant improvements had been made since the previous exercise and that, as a whole, the plan had been effectively implemented. More lessons had been learned and a two-week evaluation period was inaugurated.

As an observer, I was duly impressed at the comprehensive nature of the exercise itself. I would not wish to make any public criticism of methods implemented, nor is there a need to do so. The Moroccan authorities certainly proved that a full-scale exercise can be enacted and others should take heed. Devising an effective emergency plan is an arduous task, but testing it requires courage and commitment. Courage to recognise one's own failings and the commitment to see it through to its conclusion. The end of the exercise was not the point at which the actors went home; it is only after the evaluation and programme revision process has been completed. Perhaps not even then, as that would only necessitate a further exercise. A point the Moroccan authorities have accepted in full, as they begin scheduling ROCO 3 for 2002 in Marrakech.

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