

CHAPTER IV

Security Management



Section 0

HOSTAGE RISK MANAGEMENT

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A. Introduction

1. United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) personnel and their family member(s) have been targets or victims of hostage incidents globally. The majority of the incidents have been successfully resolved, with the application of consistent and uniformed policy principles and procedure. This policy provides an overview of how the UNSMS prevents and mitigates hostage situations.
2. This policy is complemented by UNSMS Security Management Operations Manual (SMOM) Chapter IV, “Guidelines on Hostage Risk Management”.

B. Purpose

3. The purpose of this policy is to outline the UNSMS strategy and approach to managing the risk from hostage-taking.

C. Application/Scope

4. The policy is applicable to all individuals covered by the UNSMS, as defined in Chapter III of the *Security Policy Manual* (SPM) (“Applicability of United Nations Security Management System”).
5. The UNSMS hostage incident management processes may be applied to secure the release of individuals not covered by paragraph 4 above, *in extremis* situations and only with the approval of the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security and with the express and willful written consent of the employer or government of citizenship of that hostage. Before the UN can assume the lead in managing an incident where the hostage is an individual not covered by the UNSMS, the employer or government of citizenship of the hostage must first make a written request to the UN for assistance, outlining the following: (a) a clear acknowledgement that the UN will manage the incident in accordance with the UN Hostage Incident Management (HIM) policy of no ransom and no substantial concessions to the hostage takers; (b) a waiver¹ of third party liability and indemnity of the UN and its officials involved in the management of this incident.

D. Conceptual Framework

6. The UNSMS policy regarding hostage-taking is based on the existing norms of international law as reflected in the 1979 International Convention against the Taking of Hostages which, *inter alia*, provides that the taking of hostages is an offence of grave concern to the international community, that any person committing an offence of taking hostages shall either be prosecuted or extradited, and that States shall make such offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account the grave nature of these offences.
7. The UNSMS policy is also based on the relevant decisions of its principal organs adopted in furtherance to the aforementioned norms of international law and, in particular, on Security Council resolution 579 (1985) by which the Council unequivocally condemned hostage-taking, called for the immediate release of all hostages wherever and by whomever

¹ Drafted in consultation with the Office of Legal Affairs.

they were being held, and affirmed the obligation of all States in whose territory hostages were held to urgently take all appropriate measures to secure their safe release and to prevent the commission of acts of hostage-taking in the future.

8. For the purposes of this policy, hostage-taking is defined as the seizure or detention with a threat to kill, injure or to continue to detain individuals (hostages) in order to compel a third party, namely a State, an organization of the UNSMS, a natural or juridical person or group of persons, to do or to abstain from doing any act as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of the hostages.

E. Hostage Risk Management Principles

9. **Planning and Prevention:** In locations where a hostage taking threat exists, the UNSMS Security Risk Management (SRM) process requires UNSMS organizations to implement certain measures and procedures (as detailed in the area SRM) meant to lower the likelihood of a hostage incident occurring. In areas where there is a risk of a hostage incident occurring, HIM response should also be a part of the UNSMS Area Security Plan, contained within an annex on “specific response plans”.
10. Despite all efforts to prevent it, should individuals covered by the UNSMS be taken hostage, the organization shall make every effort to secure their speedy and safe release (herein, “UNSMS Hostage Incident Management/HIM response”). To achieve this goal, the UNSMS HIM response may establish contact or start a dialogue with the hostage-takers to promote the speedy and safe release of the hostages. Such contacts should be aimed at trying to convince the hostage-takers of the inhumanity, illegality and futility of their actions as a means of attaining their objectives, and can be done directly or indirectly, through third-party intermediaries.
11. No UNSMS organization shall pay ransom or make any substantial concessions to hostage-takers to secure the release of hostages, nor shall it intervene with the Member State concerned to make concessions in exchange for hostages. This policy provision is meant to lower the incentives for hostage takers to target the UN and its personnel, and thus, decrease the likelihood of hostage-taking.
12. Every hostage situation is different. There are no strict rules of behavior; however, there are techniques which can be used by hostages to minimize the effects of their captivity. Advice on how to survive as a hostage is contained in the Guidelines. This information must be made available to all UNSMS personnel in the context of a security training programme or communicated regularly at those duty stations where there is a threat of hostage-taking.

F. Responsibilities of UNSMS Organizations

13. In compliance with the above, to manage the risk from hostage taking, UNSMS organizations will:
 - a) Effectively implement all required SRM measures and procedures meant to lower the likelihood of hostage incidents involving their personnel and applicable eligible family members in all applicable locations.

- b) Ensure that all their personnel implement measures and follow procedures that the DO put in place to prevent hostage-taking, and that these personnel also advise and encourage their eligible family members to do the same.
- c) Not engage in, or be directly connected with, any arrangements that involve, or could involve, the payment of ransom or the making of substantial concessions for the release of any hostage(s).
- d) Not implement the UNSMS HIM policy, procedures or processes for a case where the hostage is not covered by the UNSMS, without the approval of the USG UNDSS and the express and willful written request of the employer or government of citizenship of that hostage.
- e) Provide all necessary administrative and financial support to the families of hostage.
- f) Take all necessary actions in support of the UN HIM response, as requested.

G. Responsibilities of Member States

14. The UNSMS shall seek for Member States to take all practicable measures to prevent hostage incidents affecting UNSMS organizations in their respective territories, including, but not limited to, sharing information that might help the UNSMS make decisions regarding the potential risk of hostage taking for the individuals covered by this policy.
15. Notwithstanding the provisions of the present policy, the Government of the State in which the hostage-taking has occurred, or, if applicable, the Government of the State where the hostages are held by the offenders, has the primary responsibility under international law to take all measures it considers appropriate to ease the situation of the hostages, in particular to secure their release and, after their release, to facilitate, when relevant, their departure. In accordance with paragraph 5 above, any request for UN assistance in mediating an agreement to secure the release of hostages, made either by a Member State or an organization involved in the hostage incident, must be forwarded to the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security for approval.
16. The safety and well-being of the hostage(s) is of paramount importance to the Organization. It is therefore essential that the Designated Official urge the host Government to exercise restraint, to seek a peaceful resolution and not to resort to any action which might unnecessarily endanger the lives of the hostages (including an armed response or intervention unless such action is essential in order to save life.) Any action taken by the host Government should be in full consideration for the safety and well-being of the hostage(s).

H. Decision-Making Authority

17. The Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security is directly accountable and reports to the Secretary-General. In the event of a hostage-taking, the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security will take the necessary policy decisions and ensure a coherent response by the Organization, which may include the deployment of a HIM Team.

18. Should UNSMS personnel, be taken hostage, it is the responsibility of the DO, to support all necessary actions on behalf of the USG UNDSS to secure the speedy and safe release of the hostage(s). The DO should not proceed with any decisions which might have significant implications for the UNSMS organization and its personnel without obtaining the concurrence of the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security. Except for the UNSMS Organization affected by a hostage incident, the Security Management Team (SMT) does not have a direct involvement in the management of such cases. However, the SMT will be involved if such an incident requires a review of the SRM and related SRM measures. In addition, the SMT will be informed of lessons learned following the completion of such a review of a hostage incident.

I. Hostage Incident Management

19. The UNSMS will manage the risk posed by hostage-taking, as well as hostage incidents themselves, in accordance with the UNSMS SMOM “Guidelines on Hostage Risk Management”.
20. Coordinated planning and a unified response by the UNSMS, host Governments and any other national representatives of the hostages is critical to prevent negotiations being compromised by differing interests and is crucial to securing the release of the hostage(s).
21. The HIM Response will consult with and advise each UNSMS organization which has personnel being held hostage.

J. Support to Families

22. The family of a hostage is also victimized by the incident, deserves consideration and will be supported as such.
23. The UN will designate a family support team that will provide technical and/or administrative advice and support to the family, even in cases where the family have requested the UN not to be involved operationally.
24. When a family is managing a hostage incident, the UNSMS may discreetly and confidentially support the family through a “proportionate response”. The objective of the proportionate response is to provide any necessary advice upon the family’s request, including on how to prevent an unnecessary prolongation of the incident and/or an inflated ransom demand. In such case, the UNSMS will continue to monitor the case, but cannot be in any contact with the hostage taker(s).

K. Reviews

25. No later than 30 days after the resolution of the incident, UNDSS will coordinate a review and evaluation of the incident. The Guidelines provide methods for conducting this review. Any lessons identified in this review should be shared as appropriate for the better management of hostage risks.

L. Disclosure of Information

26. UNSMS personnel are prohibited from discussing or disclosing information related to a hostage incident with anyone not involved in the management of the incident, including family members, friends, coworkers or associates, including to media channels or social media accounts.

M. Enforcement

27. Compliance with this policy is mandatory for all UNSMS personnel. In the event of an investigation into a hostage incident, findings that any UNSMS personnel failed to abide by the terms of UNSMS policies and procedures in place may lead to administrative or disciplinary proceedings.

N. Final Provisions

28. This policy is meant to be distributed to all UNSMS personnel.
29. This policy enters into force on 25 January 2023.
30. The May 2017 version of this policy is hereby superseded.