

# Researchers Examine Terrorist Psychology

By ROCHELLE SEMMEL ALBIN

SOMETIMES when terrorists or bank robbers hold hostages for a long time, a bond grows between the captors and the captives. In some instances the attachment has been so intense that hostages have threatened rescuers with assault, later visited their captors in jail, set up legal defense funds for them and even agreed to marriage. In other cases, the captors' attachment for their hostages is all that saves the captives' lives.

Psychologists call such behavior the Stockholm syndrome. It was first noted six years ago when a robber held Stockholm bank employees captive for five and a half days. One hostage telephoned the Swedish prime minister from the bank and said she felt that the robbers were protecting the hostages from the police; later the hostages told of wondering why they didn't hate their captors.

Study of this syndrome is part of new and growing research effort here and abroad to understand what motivates terrorists and how best to resolve situations in which hostages are held. And this research is part of the arsenal of the sophisticated hostage-taker.

Psychologists and psychiatrists familiar with the treatment being accorded the Americans held captive in the United States embassy in Teheran say that the militant Iranian students holding them apparently are aware of the Stockholm syndrome and have

taken measures to prevent it from interfering with their aims.

Dr. Frank Ochberg, a psychiatrist, director of mental health for the State of Michigan and a member of the Justice Department's 1975 National Task Force on Terror and Disorder, said the syndrome could make it difficult for captors to kill their hostages, and sophisticated terrorists have been observed to separate those in control of the attack from those guarding the hostages so that someone will be capable of killing if necessary.

Dr. Ochberg suggested that the Iranians might be using this technique when "they rotate guards and force bandages on the heads of captives, which dehumanize them further and make killing easier." However, he said he was uncertain about whether the Stockholm syndrome would apply to Iran, which he called a "special tactical case."

On the surface, at least, the syndrome appears to be affecting the hostages. Three who were allowed to be interviewed Sunday said that they had made good friends among their captors, and seemed intrigued if not persuaded by their captors' political views.

Dr. Ochberg said that this response must be at least partly due to the Stockholm syndrome. "I wouldn't be surprised if these feelings lasted for as long as a couple of years and that the hostages would have a longing to maintain contact with their guards. This could be disruptive when they get back to their families, who are angry about what happened."

What is happening in Iran is not terrorism, Dr. Ochberg said, because the

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# Terrorist Psychology Studied

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Iranian government sanctions the attack. "In terrorist situations," he said, "hostages are surrounded by armed hostage-takers who are themselves surrounded by armed police. In contrast, in Iran, hostages are surrounded by armed hostage-takers who are surrounded by a sympathetic government. As a result the hostage-takers come and go if they like, sleep regularly and endure less tension than they would in a conventional terrorist attack."

Dr. Ochberg said that lessons learned from studying terrorism could help explain what goes on between hostage and hostage-taker in Iran. "Strategies of resolution, however, differ from those used in terrorist situations," he said. "We are not dealing with a criminal group which has through threat of violence rendered their government powerless but rather with a government supporting and abetting hostage extortion."

He said that when captors kill a hostage, it is usually due to an "initial ex-

ertion of power, to terrorists' desire to show that they have force and are willing to use it."

"Probably as a result of the increasing attachment that typically occurs between hostage and hostage-taker, hostages are rarely killed after the third day of captivity," Dr. Ochberg said.

## Rescues Pose Biggest Threat

Seventy to 80 percent of all hostage deaths occur at the end of a siege, in rescue attempts. "The best strategy in most cases is to sit and wait until hostage-takers tire and the Stockholm syndrome takes over," he said.

There is little systematic research on terrorism to guide strategy in the Iranian situation. "Whatever we know," said Patrick Mullaney, chief of the F.B.I.'s terrorism section, "comes from analysis of particular incidents as they happen, the Hanafi confrontation in Washington and the Moluccan train attacks in The Netherlands, for instance."

To learn more about terrorist deci-

sion-making and thinking, academics, scientists and government officials have in the last year conducted terrorist games in Berlin, Washington and Tel Aviv. Dr. Jeanne Knutson, founder and executive director of the International Society for Political Psychology, said the simulated terrorist events differed from traditional military games. "In our games," Dr. Knutson said, "we are more interested in factors such as how decisions are made, how teams organize themselves and in the impact of decision-makers' personalities on the outcome."

## Prisoners Are Interviewed

Brian Jenkins, director of research on political violence and terrorism at the Rand Corporation, a think tank in Santa Monica, Calif., said that the games are useful "but only for illuminating what happens once a terrorist situation occurs and then only to the extent that the game players are representative of terrorism. The games tell us nothing about why people become terrorists nor about what goes on in

their group once they have committed themselves to this life."

Dr. Knutson, a psychologist and political scientist at the University of California at Los Angeles, is interviewing prisoners here and abroad in an attempt to understand their motives. In a recent paper, she described Zvonko Basic, a Croatian nationalist serving a life sentence for air piracy and a policeman's death.

In 1976, Mr. Basic placed a bomb, along with dismantling instructions, in a locker at Grand Central Terminal, then hijacked a Chicago-bound TWA airliner. Officials met one of his six demands, publication of his anti-Yugoslavian manifesto in five leading newspapers. But the bomb exploded, killing a policeman and injuring three others.

While growing up, the adults that Mr. Basic admired most included Stephan Radic, an early Croatian nationalist, and a cousin, a dissident, whom he described as the "ideal of Croatian nationalism and patriotism." An excellent student, Mr. Basic made several serious attempts to become the "educated man" his parents wanted him to be. He attended universities in Yugoslavia, Austria and the United States, leaving each time because of financial pressures or because of the tension that

surrounded his increasingly strong Croatian nationalism.

Mr. Basic abhorred violence, Dr. Knutson insists, and wanted desperately for his hostages to respect him. He is particularly upset that he could not explain the Croatian cause at his trial so that the jury "would at least look at me as a human being, not as an animal."

## Three Factors in Terrorism

Dr. Knutson views Mr. Basic's story as illustrative of the three life experiences she considers necessary for terrorist behavior: socialization to shared cultural beliefs such as Mr. Basic's childhood exposure to villagers' stories about the horrors of Yugoslavian oppression and about heroes such as Radic; intensely pressing psychological needs such as Mr. Basic's drive to establish his identity as a valuable person, and major life disappointments such as Mr. Basic's inability to become an "educated man."

From 49 in-depth interviews collected from United States prisoners convicted of political crimes, Dr. Knutson has become convinced that "two very different types of people psychologically" take hostages. "Some terrorists," she said, "plan from the start to take hostages in order to achieve political ends. These deliberate captors

are perfectly willing to execute hostages whom they see as mere pawns, chips to be used as barter or to be discarded, depending on their goals."

But more common in the United States, she said, is what she calls the reluctant captor, for whom hostages are an incidental part of the scheme. "To the reluctant captor such as Mr. Basic," Dr. Knutson said, "hostages are people. Instead of attempting to dehumanize them as the deliberate captors often do, the reluctant hostage-takers depend on the urgency of their cause to win over hostages. They want their hostages to respect and like them and feel convinced that this will happen once political injustices are dramatized."

## Governmental Attitude Cited

Dr. Knutson emphasizes that terrorists consider themselves freedom fighters rather than criminals. And, she argues, it is a rigid governmental view of them as criminals that often drives them to violence.

Reluctant hostage-takers, in particular, she says, want to talk about their mission and their cause. They derive great psychological benefit from public acknowledgement of their political concerns and are usually able to accept a nonviolent and face-saving resolution once they attain this.