

# Research paper on the effectiveness of swat in a hostage situation

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



SWAT, which stands for Special Weapons and Tactics is a specially designated law enforcement team that provides certain departments with the capability to safety during high-risk situations such as hostage situations, suicidal subjects, and VIP protection details among others. To effectively carry out these risky tasks, SWAT undergoes optimum and special training similar to that of the secret service. It is a special team that is operationally deployed on approximately 210 times annually to assist federal, state, and law enforcement agencies. Its members are selected, well trained and equipped, and thereafter assigned critical tasks to counter attacks. The unit is comprised of forty officers, four sergeants, and one lieutenant who is the commander. Its primary characteristics ' focus of effort' distinguishes it from the rest. Seemingly, SWAT does not investigate crime or attacks; instead, it is entirely focused on tactical solutions. Its sole purpose is to safely resolve dangerous incidences using advanced techniques such as; aviation operation skills, advanced tactics, and nautical operation skills.

SWAT's main concept is to provide well organized, well structured, and coordinated response to high risk and critical situations that other departmental units cannot resolve. For instance, when terrorists or gangs hold people hostage, SWAT is called to resolve every situation with minimum force so as to manage the situation safely with less or no casualties. It responds after the Incident Commander requests it to counter threats and attacks. SWAT has been very effective in many hostage situations. Through protocol and skillful tactics, it is able to effectively respond to requests from its commander in hostage or barricade incident (McMains, 2010, p. 116).

During hostage situations, psychological strategies are used instead of force

to resolve crises. In these situations, lives are at imminent risk of brutal death at the hands of a desperate, delusional, and murderous hostage taker. During this time, resolutions take hours of extreme and focused negotiation and it is only through skilled communication that the situation is calm. Subsequently, less than 22 % of critical incidents of law enforcement are trained to deal with hostage taking as it has 3 dangerous periods that could easily end lives. These periods cause panic, confusion, lack of coordination, and ambivalence. Therefore, only well trained units like the SWAT are capable of resolving such intense situations.

As a tactical team, the SWAT unit has various professionals and specialized skilled marksmen who make a forced entry during hostage situations after being commanded by the on-scene commander. However, it is only after the hostages are in real danger and negotiations have failed that SWAT makes a forced entry. Its moves are calculated so are their actions. In hostage crises, the fatality rate is very high. The fatality rate increases when decisions to counter the attack are ordered, and also during the tactical incursion. In these events, SWAT responds in a tactful manner to save lives. There are cases when no forced entry occurs, tactical measures such as sending in flash-bangs, or immobilize the Hostage Takers. Again, all these measures are used as a last resort with extreme action (Mullins, 2002, p. 90).

As a negotiator, SWAT possesses the ability to empathize and listen to all kinds of people. It is able to diffuse the crisis through a combination of effective listening and oral communication skills. Additionally, it relays in a persuasive manner to calm the situation. The negotiators must be streetwise, easily establish credibility with others, possess exceptional interview skills, and most

importantly, be able to possess common sense, practical intelligence, be able to converse with people at all levels whether in the highest or lowest socioeconomic class. With these qualities, SWAT has shown its competence after saving lives during hostage situations. Hostage situations are very unpredictable, anything can happen. SWAT has a huge role of coping with uncertainty because lives are in imminent danger during hostage situations. In recent times, SWAT has proven to be exceedingly helpful members of the response team. It has represented a thick line that separates tactical option from peaceful resolution, which is certainly the best intervention in hostage situations.

Hostage negotiators who are members of the SWAT are dedicated professionals who put the lives of innocent individuals first. To handle these critical situations, they take oaths to serve, and resolve incidents without any loss of life or injury. Arguably, the level at which the SWAT unit can attain for responding to an incident is varied. The SWAT team factually becomes a judgment call for the head of the defense team in a hostage situation. In different instances, SWAT team has succeeded and failed in countering hostages. In the successful instances, hostages are rescued without injury. In desperate times, force is considered by senior cops and negotiation becomes a sign of weakness. During these times, SWAT is made to take the orders and this way too strenuous and risky (Daniels, 2010, p. 82).

The SWART unit trains thrice monthly and it is not limited to the timetable. Additional training is available when needed by a member. Optimum training categorizes the unit into seven specialties; entry specialists, snipers, tactical

medics, explosive breaching, and tactical robot operators. Each of these units is assigned tasks in hostage situations. The sniper protects the other SWAT members and the public from criminals in its vantage point. The explosive breaching unit uses small amounts of explosives in a precise and concise manner to achieve its goal. In hostage situations, surprise, disorientation, and speed of the occupants in a residence are significantly increased when the explosive breachers utilize the breaching option. Entry specialists on the other hand play a critical role in rescuing hostages. Their sole objective is to enter a location, secure suspects, and rescue victims (Greenstone, 2013, p. 45).

In the US, for instance, SWAT has effectively provided a good response to dreadful situations that normal department personnel could not handle. Since 1967 when SWAT was established, the unit has saved many lives in numerous hostages. They have earned hundreds of citations and commendations, and arrested scores of violent suspects using tactical measures. SWAT has specialized tactical equipment including a mobile command vehicle, chemical agents, an armored car, a variety of firearms, and other tactical equipment. The equipment including a team of paramedics provides committed emergency medical support during hostage situations. It is therefore a complete unit that is capable of saving lives by administering sophisticated life support care in the tactical environment. The SWAT medics allow quick access of specialized emergency medical care to the injured and the sick in antagonistic situations.

Basic protocol is paramount in hostage situations. It is the basic guideline for emergency medical procedures that should be used to meet the needs of

every individual in hostage negotiations. To achieve the critical objective, SWAT's first priority is to secure the perimeter, and contain the HT. Among its capabilities is being able to deploy within four hours with resources and its personnel. Secondly, it is capable of operating in various environments (extreme cold, chemical, rural, and low-light and night environments). SWAT has the ability to use a fast-rope which is a special skill where the unit descends a rope from either side of a helicopter to deploy troops.

A recent incident where SWAT showed its effectiveness was when it killed a hostage-taker and rescued a 13-year old boy in Denver. In February 4th, 2014, a member of the SWAT brought out a hostage from a house in Denver. Apparently, the unit stormed the house, rescued the young boy who was held hostage, and fatally shot a parolee. Initially the federal police was informed at about 6. 00 p. m. of a domestic disturbance between the hostage-taker ' Pooley' and his fiancé. By the time the cops arrived, Pooley had fled, and broken into a nearby home and threatened to shoot the thirteen-year old boy. A short time later, the boy's brother and mother returned home but were not taken hostage. Pooley cried occasionally, talked to family members, and made frequent threats. Pooley was in a desperate situation and didn't want to die neither did he want to be locked behind bars for the rest of his life. During this time, the SWAT unit was surrounding the house holding a battering ram and shields. They initiated talks with Pooley and asked him to turn lights on and off to show that the boy was okay. Pooley did not respond, as a result, SWAT began strategizing ways of countering the hostage-taker and saving the boy.

One officer put an explosive breaching device that blew off the door. After it

exploded, three members of the unit rushed in and took the boy to a safer place. From the time the door was blown, the boy had been taken, while the rest of the unit had countered Pooley, snatched away his gun, and cuffed him. All these activities took place in a split of a second. This incidence is proof that SWAT is very competent in carrying out its activities of countering attacks and threats during hostage situations. Arguably, SWAT is the fastest unit in saving lives in hostage situations. Regardless of the situation, SWAT's sole objective in hostage situations is to save hostage's lives, and counter hostage-takers (Schwartz, 2008, p. 662).

Despite the good job done by SWAT, the unit has been reported to do brutal stuff when carrying out search warrants. Engaging in violence during execution of search warrants is a negative action of the SWAT. There are instances when the unit has violated its tactics by mishandling everyone including hostages. Arguably, in all these situations, SWAT is not all to blame because desperate times call for desperate measures. In essence, they are trying to save lives with the shortest time using all the resources at their disposal. In general, when dealing with criminals in trying to rescue hostages, SWAT always tries to minimize any background distractions including, road noise, and background radio chatter. Clarity of the communication channel is enhanced if there is noise in the area. After clarity is enhanced, the commandant opens dialog with a statement of purpose and an introduction. The commandant conveys his confidence by keeping his voice firm. It is an engagement that builds rapport between both parties to resolve the crises.

Markedly, SWAT crisis negotiators are among the most competent and

skillful practical psychologists. At the hands of homicidal, suicidal, and drug-fueled hostage takers, lives are at imminent risk of brutal death in most hostage scenarios. Most hostage crises resolutions take many hours or even days of intense and focused negotiation. Virtually, the use of every type of skilled communication strategy is required during the intervention. From the records, SWAT is the only unit that deals with real hostage taking.

Amazingly, the majority of these crises are successfully resolved without losing lives. Through negotiations and containment techniques, 95% of all hostage crises are successful without fatalities to hostage-takers or hostages. It is a remarkable statistic for the SWAT unit which is committed to saving innocent lives and apprehending hostage-takers.

In a hostage negotiation, SWAT strives to customize its communication approach based on its understanding. Its understanding is based on HT's personality and motives which can be assessed using general recommendations for dealing with crisis and hostage situations. In most cases, SWAT succeeding in countering criminals after building rapport that initiate negotiations. The negotiator determines the tone of the conversation by providing a model of clear, calm, and slow communication by avoiding excessive or high pitch rise. In most circumstances, the team focuses on the hostage-taker, not the hostage. It is therefore able to determine which side the hostages are as it is crucial. A hostage represents control and power to the hostage taker; therefore SWAT must not try to act in a manner that reminds the hostage of the position it holds at that moment. The negotiator enquires about the welfare of both parties. Essentially, it focuses first on the hostage taker because he/she is the person in question in this situation.



SWAT does not solicit demands. Instead, it resolutely establishes its concerns for both sides. In addition, in instances where a hostage requires emergency medical attention, it does not assume that opportunity. No matter the situation, SWAT is always encouraging and supportive about the outcome. When chances of saving lives come up, it interprets that situation in an optimistic way. For instance, when shots are fired, it always points out that nobody is hurt. Subsequently, when injuries occur, it is keen to emphasize the lack of fatalities. However, in desperate events when a hostage dies, it focuses more on saving the rest. Predominantly, its emphasis is based on what the hostage taker is capable of doing to save his/her life. At times, the negotiator complements the hostage taker for undertaking positive actions such as allowing the hostages to keep the phone line open, or even releasing one or many hostages. These actions are aimed at establishing constructive action patterns that enable the hostage taker to release the hostages and surrender without injuring anyone. Using these tactful actions, SWAT is able to save hostages with minimal or no injuries and make the hostage taker to surrender.

Deadlines and demands are common in hostage situations. Through these demands and deadlines, SWAT maintains its bargaining position without triggering a violent confrontation or unduly agitating the hostage taker. During these instances, SWAT is careful not to give anything without getting something in return. During the release of many hostages, the negotiator starts with the least desirable to the most vulnerable. SWAT is always wise to let the hostage taker make the first offer so as not to feel manipulated or pressured. In these events, it uses the passage time to disburse adrenaline.

Unlike other federal units, SWAT does not use terms such as 'give up' or 'surrender'. Instead, it uses more suitable words like 'come out' as it implies a proactive decision.

In almost all hostage situations, SWAT follows standard procedures for restraining and controlling the hostage taker. It is a coherent strategy that enables them to execute their missions effectively with minimal or no casualties. SWAT is the ideal faceless masses that show up as the State Sec to save hostages. In fiction, SWAT members are time and again portrayed as being trigger happy, or shooting at suspects. The SWAT unit has particular procedures they must follow in a hostage situation. For instance, they can only open fire if the hostage taker presents a threat to the safety or the life of a hostage. In any hostage situation, SWAT identifies itself to a suspect and starts negotiating to calm the situation. As one of the most tactful and competent defense units, SWAT is trusted with optimum and effective executions in hostage situations.

Man is to error, this saying also applies in SWAT's hostage missions. There was an incidence involving Alan Gomez, a hostage taker who held 10 hostages in a locked room. During this incidence, 28 SWAT officers responded to the hostage situation. The unlikely happened, unlike their usual coordination during such incidences, its command did not establish scene control. In setting up on the scene, a SWAT officer decided to act independently and as a result, patrol officers did not coordinate with the rest of the SWAT unit. The mission, failed. The SWAT negotiator failed to participate in negotiations and a serious confrontation erupted. A SWAT sniper unilaterally took a shooting position in the nest house and fired shots

at Gomez. Literally, SWAT lacked deployment oversight in this incidence although the hostages were rescued. On the other hand, it also failed to record and deploy deployments. It was a huge disappointment to the trusted unit. SWAT's mission is to rescue hostages and apprehend the hostage taker alive. On the face of it, this incidence represents many other situations where SWAT's conduct has contributed to a pattern of irrational use of force. Brains are the ultimate key to effective SWAT response. SWAT is clad in black and heavy armor, has sophisticated firearms and is ready to fire. In action, SWAT is an icon of control and force. It uses an effective special operations response involving mental wit and not so much the muscle. Training is a paramount aspect of SWAT units, as it is the determinant to their effectiveness in operations such as hostage situations. Their regular training sets them apart from regular police officers. In addition to optimum training, SWAT units follow their policy of assuring the safety of hostages by preventing hostage takers from moving the hostages and keeping the hostages in the presence of officers (Miller, 2007, p. 51).

Conclusively, to back up the unit, SWAT commander ensures adequate equipment is assembled at a designated location, and adequate personnel deployed to beef up security. Inner and outer perimeters are established to secure the area to stop the hostage taker from escaping. It then responds after the Incident Commander requests it to counter threats and attacks. SWAT has been very effective in many hostage situations. Through protocol and skillful tactics, it is able to effectively respond to requests from its commander in hostage or barricade incident. To achieve the critical objective, SWAT's first priority is to secure the perimeter, and contain the

HT. Among its capabilities is being able to deploy within four hours with resources and its personnel. Secondly, it is capable of operating in various environments (extreme cold, chemical, rural, and low-light and night environments) (Klinger, 2008, p. 17).

At this point, it is worth noting that SWAT is designed to resolve and contain all hostage incidences that are considered high risks. It follows standard procedures for restraining and controlling the hostage taker. It is a coherent strategy that enables them to execute their missions effectively with minimal or no casualties. It responds after the Incident Commander requests it to counter threats and attacks. SWAT has been very effective in many hostage situations. No matter the situation, SWAT is always encouraging and supportive about the outcome. When chances of saving lives come up, it interprets those situations in an optimistic way. For instance, when shots are fired, it always points out that nobody is hurt. Subsequently, when injuries occur, it is keen to emphasize the lack of fatalities. Through protocol and skillful tactics, it is able to effectively respond to requests from its commander in hostage or barricade incidents. SWAT does not solicit demands. Instead, it resolutely establishes its concerns for both sides. It uses an effective special operations response involving mental wit and not so much the muscle. Through protocol and skillful tactics, it is able to effectively respond to requests from its commander in hostage or barricade incidents.

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