



Basic intelligence

By Bob Ragsdale

The last time you considered buying a new vehicle, did you go online to find out the true price of the vehicle you liked? This information allowed you to negotiate from a position of power. In all areas of negotiations — from business to government to hostage/crisis incidents — knowing and understanding the other side will pay dividends and increase your chances for a successful outcome. I like to tell people that a tactical team should be armed with the best equipment possible and negotiators should be armed with the best intelligence possible. This article covers some of the basics of intelligence gathering.

The modern crisis negotiations team should consist of at least four negotiators: the primary, the secondary/coach, the intelligence officer (intel) and a coordinator (boss). Usually when the negotiations team arrives at a hostage/barricade incident, it has been somewhat stabilized by the first responders and there even may be a dialogue (contain, isolate, communicate). While some members of the team are setting up the negotiations equipment, others can start gathering intelligence.

Sometimes there is an immediate need for the primary negotiator to speak with the subject/suspect, and I have been to a few of those where “verbal containment” was the immediate priority to prevent or stop an injurious course of behavior. Most situations, however, allow for the gathering of intelligence prior to the crisis negotiations team making contact. Even if the primary needs to speak with the subject right away, other team members can start the intelligence gathering.

Why is intelligence gathering so important? Because the most important things the team must figure out is what is motivating the subject’s behavior and what the person is trying to achieve with this behavior. Understanding the subject’s motivation may help us develop possible strategies and approaches that will help bring about a successful resolution.

Possible sources

Possible sources of intelligence are numerous, and limited only by time and access. Start off talking to family and friends. They know the subject better than anyone else. They can provide insights into the life and personality of the subject and past and recent developments that may have led to the current situation. Neighbors can also be helpful, especially if no family or friends have been located.

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While interviewing these people, be on the lookout for potential third party intermediaries (TPIs). Remember, just because they say or indicate they have influence in the subject/suspect’s life, that information must be confirmed with your own intelligence, including intelligence from the subject/suspect. If the person does turn out to be a potential TPI, you can have a first responder stand by him or her. If the TPI must leave, a

recorded message can be made for later use. Obtain contact information should the person need to be brought back to the scene. Find a safe place for TPIs to wait — not in the command post, nor in the negotiations operations center. You may also want to keep the TPI away from the media.

Witnesses and victims may still be on scene, and negotiators should conduct their own interviews with them. Sometimes the activity during the initial patrol response is not conducive to in-depth interviews. Negotiators will want to know additional information relevant to the negotiations and tactical operations as well as other info that may not have been solicited earlier. One of the most important things to do is establish if a crime occurred and the nature of the crime. Not only will this figure into our possible strategies but more importantly, command will base their response and tactics on what is learned. Sometimes it is discovered that no crime was committed and no one is in danger.

A records check is a must if the subject’s name is obtained. That name can come from an interview, a vehicle records check, a utilities check at a residence, or incident history at the location. Past incidents or dispositions can be discovered in records checks. Is there a history of impulsive and assaultive behavior in times of stress? If the incident appears to be domestic violence-related, are there prior incidents? Are there any prior barricades or suicide attempts? It is always important to remember that the best indicator of future behavior is past behavior.

Sometimes the subject will call 9-1-1. At my department, dispatchers and 9-1-1 operators receive a mandatory class, taught by our negotiators, on crisis communications. This is important because these operators are the first point of contact for people who are experiencing some kind of crisis. I have heard very good work from these dispatchers and operators

in some high-profile incidents. They still may be speaking with the subject when your team arrives. If there is a lull in communications with the subject, they can be debriefed right away. If the subject is handed off to the primary, then someone should debrief the dispatcher or operator at that point. (A side note: If the dispatcher or 9-1-1 operator was involved in the initial negotiations, it is a nice idea to call them back when the incident is concluded to let them know the outcome.)

Our negotiators have instructed all of our personnel in first responder tactics and communications. We have asked them to keep notes if they communicate with the subject. These notes can be used to brief the negotiations team. Prior to taking over negotiations, we might be able to learn about the subject's issues and what to talk about and what not to talk about. Even if the first responders have not established communication, they may provide insights into prior calls and contacts related to the subject. I think the beat officer is often the most overlooked in terms of intelligence gathering, whether it is for an investigation or a hostage/barricade incident.

The incident may be part of a larger investigation or the result of an attempt to arrest someone in an ongoing investigation. A good detective or investigator will have already done quite a bit of research on the subject/suspect. Don't forget to contact them because they may have information that will help bring the incident to a successful resolution.

Rounding out my basic list of possible intelligence sources are employers and/or schools, mental health providers, doctors and facilities, and parole and probation officers. Each situation will dictate possible intelligence sources you will need to contact. Knowing how to contact these potential sources is also important, so I urge you and your team to make up contact lists with telephone numbers and any other relevant information.

Information gathering

Knowing what information is needed is equally important as knowing where to look. From my intelligence gathering, I

try to determine the type of incident. Is it a true hostage incident with substantive demands that will require a negotiations strategy, or is it a non-hostage incident where crisis intervention would be the appropriate course of action? Sometimes these are hard to pigeonhole because aspects of both instrumental and expressive behavior may be present, but at least it can be a start to understanding the subject's behavior and formulating pos-

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sible strategies and approaches. Are factors present that might make this a high-risk incident? We also want to know if there are any existing demands, threats, deadlines or concessions.

As intelligence gathering progresses, remember the importance of determining the nature of the crime. This information will dictate the response and tactics, and is always important from a liability standpoint. Hostage/barricade incidents do not occur in a vacuum. They may be one part of a larger criminal investigation or the incident itself may result in an investigation, or at least a report. Because of this, commanders also need information related to search and seizure. Does the subject/suspect have standing at the location? Will a search warrant be part of the operation? If the location belongs to someone else, is there third party consent to enter? If the incident deals with mental health issues, is there an order in place or in process to have the subject picked up and taken for an evaluation? Is there information that supports exigent circumstances? Our commanders rely on our negotiators for this information, so if victims or witnesses are available, interview them as part of your intelligence gathering. Don't forget investigators may also have information that is relevant and important.

Obviously our focus of the intelligence gathering is the subject or suspect. We

want to gather the following:

- Name, personal information, a detailed physical description including the clothing last seen wearing and a photo.
- What is his physical condition, and is he injured as a result of the incident?
- Does he have a criminal history?
- Mental health history is also important, to include diagnoses, doctors and current medications. Is there a history of

suicide attempts or are there any current threats of suicide? If there is a potential for suicide, can intelligence gathering identify a "hook" that may help in a suicide intervention? What is his current mental state and attitude?

- Are weapons involved? It is good to know the number, type, caliber, location and the subject/suspect's access to the weapons.
- It is also important to know any special proficiencies. Is he a hunter or target shooter? Military experience may also factor into the subject's proficiency and knowledge.
- If he was in the military, what was his job?
- What are his likes, dislikes and hobbies?
- What are the current positives and negatives in his life?
- Since the goal is to communicate with this person, obtain all phone numbers to the residence and any cell phones. If the subject/suspect is using or has access to a cell phone, get the cell phone provider information in case the need arises to have the company shut down the cell phone.

If there are other people inside with the subject, find out the following:

- What is their relationship to the subject and the incident?

- Are they hostages, victims or potential victims, or family members? Perhaps a third party who just happens to be there? Sometimes family or friends are hesitant to leave the location because they do not know what the police will do to them or they do not want to leave the subject alone for fear that something will happen to him.
- If there are others inside with the subject, are there any injuries?
- What are there ages and are there any medical issues?

All of this information will factor into the decision-making process for the negotiations and tactical teams and command. If there are others inside the location, no matter what their status, the same intelligence should be gathered about these people, including name, personal information and clothing description.

Other intel to gather

The negotiations team is part of a bigger team and a lot of the information we obtain is important to other components of our team, the tactical operators and command.

Information about the physical structure is important. If possible, a floor plan should be obtained. If formal floor plans are not available, someone in the know can draw them freehand. Windows and doors should be included, along with furniture.

If this is the subjects/suspect's residence, where is he likely to be or where is he likely to hide? The location of the utilities may turn out to be important if it becomes necessary to shut off the water or power. Attic accesses are important, because even in the heat of summer, suspects still head to the attic. Any hazards should be noted, including dogs, alarms and booby traps.

If the incident is occurring during hours of darkness it is nice to warn the tactical operators about pools, holes, obstacles, low-hanging clotheslines and sensor-activated outdoor lights.

During the intelligence gathering, can any of the interviewees hand over a key for the location? It will facilitate

a stealth entry if necessary, and it will also expedite any entry and cut down on property damage.

Finally, does the subject/suspect have access to any vehicles? If there is access to vehicles, have they been disabled or blocked, or does that need to be done?

Conclusion

In concluding this article, here are some important points to remember. This is the minimum information we try to obtain at an incident. Because every incident is different and requires its own intelligence, don't be limited in your search for information. Because even this minimum is a lot of information, and you can see everything can be important, my team created an intelligence form to facilitate the collection of information. This form includes the incident or report number, search warrant information (if necessary) and important times.

Intelligence gathering does not stop when the primary begins his communication. It is ongoing throughout the entire incident as new information is revealed during the negotiations or interviews. Intelligence is important, but it must be used wisely. Be careful about "springing" intelligence on the subject/suspect. You will be trying to build rapport and trust and the person may not like the idea that you are spying on him or checking his affairs. ◀

About the author

Detective Bob Ragsdale recently retired from the Phoenix Police Department after more than 28 years of service. During his career he spent 15 years with the department's tactical team, the Special Assignments Unit, as both a tactical operator and a crisis negotiator. He is the managing editor of the *Crisis Negotiator* and an NTOA instructor in crisis negotiations.

Basic Intelligence Checklist

Possible information sources:

- Family/Friends (TPIs?)
- Witnesses/Victims
- Records Check
- Dispatchers and 9-1-1 Operators
- First Responding Officers/Beat Officers
- Detectives/Investigators
- Employers/Schools
- Mental Health Providers/Doctors/Facilities
- Parole and Probation Officers

Important information:

- Type of Incident
- Nature of the crime (if any)
- Search and Seizure
 - Subject/Suspect's standing at the location
 - Search Warrant
 - Third Party Consent
 - Mental Health Order
 - Exigent Circumstances
- Subject/Suspect
 - Name
 - Physical Description
 - Clothing

- Physical Condition /Injuries
- Criminal History
- Mental Health
 - ▶ Diagnoses
 - ▶ Medications (taking them?)
 - ▶ Doctors
- Suicide
 - ▶ Threats
 - ▶ Prior Attempts
 - ▶ "Hooks"
- Mental State/Attitude
- Weapons
 - ▶ Number
 - ▶ Type/Caliber
 - ▶ Location
 - ▶ Access
 - ▶ Proficiency
- Military Experience
- Hobbies
- Likes/Dislikes
- Positives/Negatives in subject's life
- Phone Numbers (location and cell phones)

Hostages/Victims/Third Parties

- Relationship
- Injuries
- Complete intelligence package on each person

Location

- Floor Plan
 - Rooms
 - Doors/Windows (external and internal)
 - Furniture
- Subject/Suspect's Room
- Potential hiding places
- Utility boxes/Water shut-off
- Attic access
- Hazards (any time)
 - Dogs, Alarms, Booby Traps
- Hazards (hours of darkness)
 - Sensor Lights, Pool, Holes, Ditches, Clotheslines
- Key
- Vehicles
 - Location
 - Access
 - Disabled/Blocked?