

49377

THE PHENOMENON OF HOSTAGE-TAKING

THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

Antonio FARELLO

Head, Italian National Interpol
General Bureau of Public Security
Rome, Italy

The wave of violence that has exploded all over the world since 1970, with in turn, socio-political and common criminal motivations, has also reached Italy, and Police Forces in our country have been confronted from several sides, each one with specific characteristics and methods of action.

In particular, the taking of hostages has proved to be a determining weapon at the disposal of terrorists, used on various occasions, and the weakness and uncertainty of governments in facing this phenomenon of taking of hostages for political purposes, or so claimed to be, has even favoured the development of a criminal mentality, by which the common thief, too, or the robber, caught in the act of committing a crime, thinks it is convenient to abduct innocent witnesses in order to ensure his own impunity, flight or profit.

As a matter of fact, the crime of abduction was already historically known in our country, even before the '70s.

Kidnapping in Italy, in fact, once occurred and was considered a typical crime of the mountains of Sardinia; in particular in the Province of Nuoro, where bandits and people wanted for murder took shelter. Kidnapping was also a crime of some secluded areas in Sicily and in Southern Calabria.

In the years between 1965 and 1972, we have had 50 cases of abduction in Sardinia, 13 in Calabria and 8 in Sicily. The Italian Police solved 44 cases and have identified and arrested 254 suspected people.

An important result was the arrest of the bandit MESSINA which took place in March, 1969. He was responsible for many cases of abduction. His accomplice, Miguel ATIENZA, a Spanish deserter of the Foreign Legion in Corsica, was killed a few days before MESSINA's arrest in a shoot-out between police members and bandits.

It is surprising to see, at this point, that the rapid increase in cases of abduction in Sardinia, from 1965 onwards, (between 1960 and 1965, there had been only 3 cases of abduction) was, socially and from a criminologicistic point of view, ascribed to police action when their preventive and repressive measures were better and the living conditions in Italy had changed to a better standard. In villages of Sardinia, the classical type of economical, agricultural and pastoral crimes of the island, such as cattle-stealing and robbery became less fruitful and more difficult to carry out.

Although every case of kidnapping has its own story, there were some constant, typical characteristics of techniques used in Sardinia which were followed. For example:

- 1) the individualization of the victim to be kidnapped and his possibility to pay the ransom price;
- 2) the study of his habits, in order to better choose the time and place of his kidnapping;
- 3) the arrangements made beforehand to find places (grottoes, ravines, huts, tents, or dwelling places) to hide, at different moments, the kidnapped person, until his ransom has been handed over.
- 4) the choice of itineraries specifying where to pass through and means of transportation to meet middlemen or negotiators.

The most dramatic aspect of this matter, in all cases, was formed by the fact that, after a victim had been captured, his relatives became the bandits' accomplices and the bandits were therefore given a remarkable advantage.

Among the many enquiries carried out by our police services, one, in particular, is worth mentioning, as it was possible, thanks also to the cooperation given by the victim's relatives, who were not from Sardinia, to prepare a good operational plan, making use of all modern techniques which our Services had at their disposal.

On September 1st, 1969, in the area of Silius, in the Province of Cagliari, Sardinia, one Mr. Enzo BOSCHETTI, an engineer, was kidnapped. He came from Padua, which is situated in the northern part of Italy, and was employed in Sardinia in a mining company. The technique used by the kidnapers to capture him was the usual one. The car which he was driving was brought to a halt by placing heavy stones in the middle of the road. He was caught and taken to the mountains through woods which exist in the area, and subsequently to the place of hiding of the bandits.

The reaction of the Police, at the beginning, was the classic one. Enquiries were started in the usual manner and every possible witness was seen and questioned. Police patrols were sent up to the mountains with police dogs. Road blocks were set up all around the district in the hope of intercepting the kidnapers and following their movements. And, this, in order to cause them difficulties.

The bandits turned up some days later and sent to the family of the kidnapped person a letter asking to pay a ransom of 60 million lire for his release. This time, however, the family and the managing staff of the Mining Company decided they were ready to cooperate with the police force.

It was therefore agreed that one Mr. CARABELLO, another engineer of the Mining Company, in charge of carrying out negotiations with the bandits, be accompanied by a driver, who was in this case a police officer, of Sardinian origin.

The engineer was given a radio-microphone, which he hid under his suit. The device was connected by radio to a taperecorder placed in the car operated by the driver, that is, the police officer. The latter was in possession also of a camera. The car was also equipped with a modulation oscillator, monitored to a receiver in another vehicle.

The meeting with the bandits was arranged some days later along a road in a deserted place. The engineer, on his arrival, had to get out of his car and walk into the woods. He could not see the faces of the bandits as they were wearing masks. He was not even able to understand from their speech and dialect accent from where they were coming from. But the radio-microphone worked properly and the police officer who was in the car could follow all the speech and tape-record it in full.

It was therefore possible to establish the district from where the bandits originated and other important factors. In fact, Mr. CARABELLO gave the bandits only part of the ransom, 10 million lire, pleading he had difficulties collecting the whole sum in so short a time. He asked to meet the bandits again and he promised that next time he would give them the remaining sum of ransom, which they agreed would be 25 million lire. The bandits, at this stage, obviously felt sure of themselves and gave him all the indications of the place to meet the second time. It was a determining factor for the final stage of the police enquiries. The police officer in the car was not able to take any pictures of the bandits and the power of the oscillator was too weak to be picked up by the other police vehicles. The Chief of the Provincial Police Headquarters in Cagliari, Dr. LI DONNI, therefore decided to use another device, a radio-goniometre (direction finder) when the bandits were met the second time. The

impulses of the radio-goniometre, could be easily picked up by an helicopter flying around the place of meeting.

Mr. CARABELLO's car was then equipped with this radio device which could be put in operation by simply closing a circuit and would send out a pre-fixed radio signal, to indicate the place where the meeting was taking place. This "signal" would be received by another apparatus on board a helicopter and put automatically into operation a device called "Homing", another radio finder, which would allow police to trace the car, even if it was covered by trees in the woods and out of sight.

On October 11, 1969, the operation took place according to the plan agreed upon. The car of Mr. CARABELLO left Cagliari, following an itinerary arranged in advance and which was about 50 kilometres long. At 11:20 in the morning, one of the helicopters caught the signal and found out that the place of meeting was at the 30th kilometre of a secondary provincial road. Guided by the first helicopter, the other helicopters, which were also equipped with the "Homing" device, surrounded the area and landed our policemen. At the same time the roads of the district were blocked.

Hidden inside the vegetation, two men were immediately found and arrested. Not far from them the money paid for the ransom was also found. As the money and the plastic envelopes containing the bank-notes were sprinkled with fluorescent powder, the two men were put through an ultra-violet test. Their suits and hands were found containing plenty of this powder. The criminals could but confess their crime. They even indicated where another accomplice of theirs, not very far from where they were caught, was holding the engineer in custody. The third criminal was not seen, however, because he took flight in time, but the engineer could free himself and run away safe and sound.

In all these cases which I have mentioned above, the abductors were typical as to their social-criminal characteristics. In fact, as far Sardinia is concerned, it was usually a question of shepherds, people accustomed to the hard life in the mountains, most of whom were in flight because they were wanted for some criminal case of violence which they had previously committed. Therefore, by committing the abduction they not only expected to obtain an economic advantage, more or less important, but they also found themselves compelled by the necessity of finding their means of support and the means of obtaining help and complicity in order to avoid being caught by the police.

In Sicily and in Calabria, the outstanding criminals involved in cases of abduction were, on the contrary, people connected with the organized crime world, particularly the "Mafia" type, and the

economic advantage was the principal motivation which brought about the criminal plan.

Then, in the years 1972-1973, some criminal cases of political terrorism occurred in various Italian cities, which caused the Police services to take special measures of surveillance in airports, aircrafts, embassies, railways, highways and prisons, as well as to protect Italian and foreign V.I.P.'s who --as was experienced either in Italy or in other countries --might have been at any time victims of attempts or taken as hostages.

It was just at that time that public opinion realized with fear and consternation that taking of hostages with the purpose of extortion might occur also in large Italian cities, where it proved to be even more suitable to carry out such crimes.

The cases we had in Piedmont, in Calabria and Latium, proved to follow a common line and some were very like the kidnapping case which took place in Sicily and in the Calabrian region.

1. The "technique" followed by the kidnappers was based on ambushes and on celerity when the kidnapping took place.
2. Before getting in touch with the families of the victims, the abductors deliberately allowed a long time to elapse, in order to increase the anguish of the families.
3. The negotiations for the release of the prisoners were handled, although seemingly in a patient manner, in a relentless and merciless manner because of the constant threats made of killing the victim.
4. The conditions under which the victims were held, according to what was narrated by the hostages freed, provided no respect for any of their physical needs and moral requirements.
5. The huge sum of money demanded for the ransom and the release of the prisoners, amounted nearly always to several thousands of millions of lire.

(Some papers wrote with a tragic sense of irony, that the bandits were better informed of the financial conditions of the persons kidnapped than the Revenue Office of the Government).

The technique used by the kidnappers was typical of that of the Mafia and the investigations were carried out in this direction.

Then, in the summer of 1973, we had the case of the kidnapping of Paul Getty III, a young American boy, nephew of the big petrol

company owner, which I am sure you have already heard about.

Following long and complex investigations, our investigators soon found out that they had to do with the Mafia group coming from the Calabrian region. When they found out that they would not get the 5 million dollars they asked for the ransom of the boy, they cut off his ear and sent it to his family. The family was therefore forced to pay the ransom. The conditions dictated by the bandits were that a car, with those in charge of paying the ransom on board, was to leave Rome for Naples and proceed to Salerno. Then along the autoroute in Calabria, go to a certain point and come back. After a 1,500 km drive, the car was to arrive at a point "x" where the bandits would have made signals for it to stop. The request was so made to make any action of the police impossible. The bandits were very clear in dictating their conditions: at the slightest doubt, they would kill the boy.

It was not an easy task for our Flying Squad men, that is to say, the Investigating Squad in Rome; in fact, the investigators, even though well aware of the extreme necessity of safeguarding above all the life of the boy, could not leave the field completely to the abductors and let the negotiators fall into a trap prepared by the bandits. It was therefore decided that three police officers, each riding a different car, would go to places where they could observe the movements of the bandits and report all information they could acquire for their identification. The cars were not to be equipped with any radio sets and the officers could not carry any camera or field glasses, so as not to make the bandits suspect anything.

The serial numbers of the bank-notes which were used to pay the ransom price were all introduced into the computer. The plan succeeded in full. Along the route, a car, (plate number CZ 103770) was occasionally seen, following the car of those in charge of paying the ransom. By telephone, this plate number was reported to the Police Headquarters in Rome and it was found out that it was owned by a well-known Mafia boss in Calabria.

Meanwhile, the car of Mr. Chase, the man in charge of paying the ransom by Getty's family, was ordered to stop at a linking road along the highway, by a shot of a hunting gun. Two individuals with masked faces told him to deposit the money on the ground and to go away. Luckily enough, one of our police officers who passed by soon after could see the bandits' faces well -- as in that moment, they were no longer wearing masks. He fixed their features in his mind as he could not arrest them or take pictures for fear of compromising the life of the kidnapped boy.

Later that night, in Rome, Mr. Chase and the officer could recognize by the pictures shown to them that the persons driving the car following Mr. Chase's car and one of the individuals seen carrying the sacks of bank-notes were Bros. MAMMOLITI Saverio and MAMMOLITI Vincenzo.

No action, however, was taken until Paul Getty was released, and this happened two days later. They were arrested in Calabria not far from the place where they collected the money for the ransom. All the members of the gang, consisting of 7 individuals, were arrested. Only one escaped being arrested. Part of the ransom money paid was also found and recovered. At the time of this writing, the trial of Paul Getty's case is taking place and he has arrived from the United States to attend the hearings.

The efforts of our Police Forces in cases of abduction were certainly important and we had successful results. Nevertheless, cases of abduction have progressively increased. From 8 cases we had in 1972, we passed to 17 cases in 1973, to 38 cases in 1974 and to 62 cases in 1975, despite the fact that, in November, 1974, a law was approved, increasing the punishment, as laid down in our Penal Code, up to 24 years of imprisonment.

The action of our Police services were adequate and out of 125 cases, 84 were resolved positively. 440 individuals were arrested or accused of this crime, of which 85 were arrested and 85 are still wanted.

It has been discovered that the authors of cases of abduction should have a different classification, according to whether they were members of the Mafia family, or Mafia members who moved to northern Italy and joined the local underworld organizations, or just criminals originating from the world of smugglers or free-lance abductors.

Drug smugglers, cigarette smugglers and professional bank robbers often prefer to leave their activities, where risks are much more and the profits limited, and dedicate themselves to cases of abduction where prospects were brighter and more interesting. In fact, they are free to choose their victim, the day and place of crime and ambush, sure that their booty will be more consistent and the intervention of the police hampered for fear of the life of the victim.

One of the more spectacular cases in this field took place recently in Rome. Our Flying Squad, in liaison with Interpol, was able to identify and arrest the members of an Italo-French gang of criminals which was involved in cases of robberies and murder and passed on to abduction and to taking of hostages. This gang was responsible for 5 sensational cases of abduction committed in 1974

and in 1975, in Rome and in other Italian cities.

The technique used by the police is now adequate to the circumstances and they have reacted adequately, both investigatively and technically, particularly whenever they got the indispensable cooperation of the relatives and friends of the victim.

Cases of hostage-taking involving armed kidnapers in Postal offices, banks and shops, with the purpose of assuring their flight when surrounded by Police forces, number -- from 1966 to today -- 30 cases in total. The hostages held were 58, four of which were killed.

An interesting study, based on either the experiences and the suggestions of the police service in this field, has been recently prepared by the General Direction of Public Security and has been put at the disposal of investigators and of all those who want to get acquainted with the measures to be taken in order to prevent an abduction.

As a matter of fact, abduction is to be regarded as a crime which can be carried out very easily and which is difficult to deal with for the police services because preventive and repressive action meets up with a number of difficulties due to the very nature of the crime itself.

The remarkable increase in the number of cases of abduction occurring in 1975 has revealed that harsher penalties are not sufficient to efficiently control this kind of crime and public opinion, increasingly alarmed, has demanded legislative measures to be taken which are capable of making it possible to overcome the difficulties met by the investigators, in their inquiries to find out the persons responsible for such crimes.

For instance, it has been proposed that:

- it would be advisable that the jurisdiction of a single case of abduction be given to the tribunal of the place where the crime has been committed and not to the court of the place where the victim has been released;
- among the other main issues that have been discussed with regard to this criminal phenomenon, there are some of particular interest, i.e.;
- the request to suspend the investigations often put forward by the relatives of the victim;
- the divulgence of information on the development of the case;

- the intervention of insurance companies concerning the risks connected with abduction;
- the seizure, ordered by the magistrate, of the victim's funds and other problems concerning the technology of the police services and their rapidity of intervention in such cases.

In a recent case of abduction, a magistrate in Milan ordered the police to take measures so that the extortion could not be brought to conclusion, by prohibiting the payment of the ransom price.

The decision to block the payment of the ransom price when the negotiators had already contacted the criminals, made it possible to seize big sums of money and this has brought, as a consequence, a decrease in crimes in that region.



END