

**WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH!!! ---**

**THE TACTICAL DECISION**

**By Sgt James Fuda (retired)**

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This past week, I had the opportunity to telephone Sergeant Randy Taylor at the Richland, Washington Police Department. After discussing a variety of topics, Sgt. Taylor relayed a situation that his Hostage Negotiation Team and SWAT responded to the previous weekend. If I remember the incident correctly, a lone gunman had fired several shots and then barricaded himself inside a residence for 18+ hours. The stand-off ended with no additional shots fired and no injury to citizens, Police, or the suspect.

After hearing the story, I told Sgt. Taylor that it sounded like all went well and he should be pleased to receive his next paycheck with the 18 hour overtime check attached! However, I recalled the frustration in Sgt. Taylor's voice when he said countless attempts were made to contact the suspect, but, during the entire ordeal, no verbal communication was ever established with the barricaded gunman. In other words, the "Bad Guy" refused to talk.

After talking about the incident, Negotiator Taylor---I guess thinking out loud, actually---posed a question....."**at what point should a tactical resolution be initiated when the suspect simply refuses to communicate with the negotiators?**" We were all taught that if the situation has been stabilized, a perimeter has been set, SWAT Team snipers are in place, and HNT on scene, we have nothing but time on our side. **However, is this necessarily true if no dialogue is transpiring between the suspect and negotiators?** After all, negotiations are an intelligence gathering process, but what are we actually gaining "intel-wise" if no one is talking to us?

OK, so you've now had the hostage-phone thrown inside the residence, but your monitoring device isn't picking up any movement, conversation, or sounds. Judging from my experience, one of several revelations can strike at this point:

- 1. The suspect has killed himself**
- 2. He passed out**
- 3. He wasn't in the residence in the first place**
- 4. He escaped the structure prior to the perimeter being adequately set by responding Patrol Officers**
- 5. Or, most likely, you forgot to charge the batteries on your hostage-phone and the damn thing wasn't working properly in the first place!!!**

All kidding aside, I pose the question....."**What is an appropriate time period a Police Department should let pass before entry into a structure is made where you have had no contact with the suspect?**" Before answering this question, several factors should be considered:

- 1. Intelligence! What do you know about the past history and the events at hand about this person?**
- 2. Are there any high-risk factors present? Did this person deliberately commit this act to force a confrontation with Police? Is there a hostage with him, and, if so, was this hostage specifically selected by the suspect? Were there any threats made prior to the barricaded incident?**

3. **Does your SWAT Team have a risk effective plan, and has that plan been rehearsed?**
4. **Is the plan of action both legally and morally acceptable for the specific circumstances of your crisis incident?**

What I have just given you are questions, when answered, will help justify a tactical resolution to an incident where intelligence gathering through communication with the suspect and/or hostage is not an option and out of your control. **Always remember, if for no other reason, you can enter a premises to “Check the Welfare” of a citizen if intelligence points to the fact that harm has crossed his/her path and medical assistance might be necessary.**

The bottom line is that no time period can be placed on HNT situations. Circumstances of HNT call-outs are **“INCIDENT SPECIFIC”**, and I would be remiss to put blanket waiting periods or deadlines on these types of situations. I would suggest that you take your time, answer the aforementioned questions as best you can, and proceed with the best, well-rehearsed tactical resolution that you have available.

James Fuda retired as a 33+ year veteran Officer with the King County Sheriff’s Office in Seattle. He had been a member of his agency’s Hostage Negotiations Team since 1982 and Team leader since 1990, and remained in that capacity until his retirement in March of 2006. Jim has been involved in more than 250 negotiations incidents, mostly as the primary negotiator and Team Leader.