

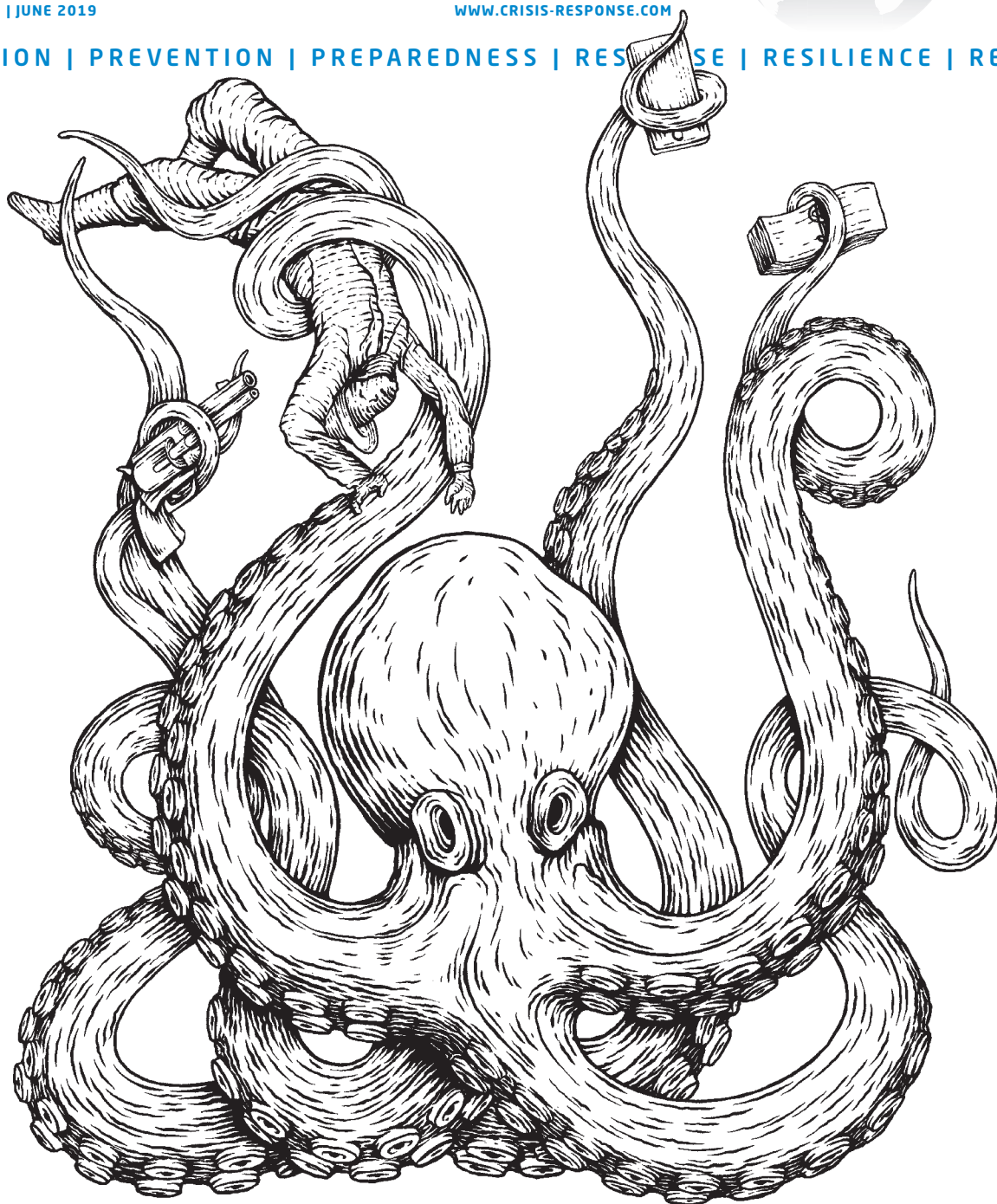
CRISIS▶RESPONSE

VOL:14 | ISSUE:3 | JUNE 2019

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JOURNAL

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KIDNAP AND RANSOM

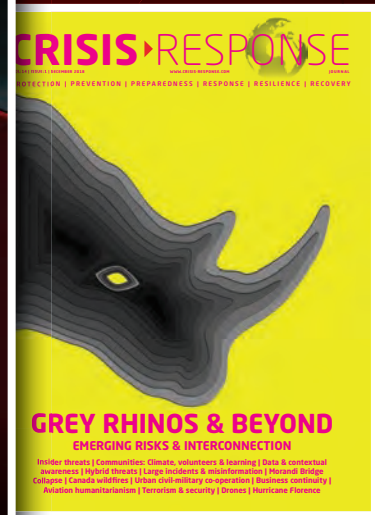
THE MANY TENTACLES OF EXTORTION & CRIME

Interviews | Volcanic exercise in Iceland | Attacks on places of worship |
Deradicalisation | Biases in security | Planning for major events | Leadership & Human
factors | Stratcom and security | Psycholinguistic profiling | Supply chains | Climate

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contents

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Crisis Response Journal is published quarterly; it is available by subscription in hard copy, digital and online
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Published by Crisis Management Limited, Sondes Place Farm, Westcott Road, Dorking RH4 3EB, UK
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Printed in England by The Manson Group, UK
ISSN 1745-8633

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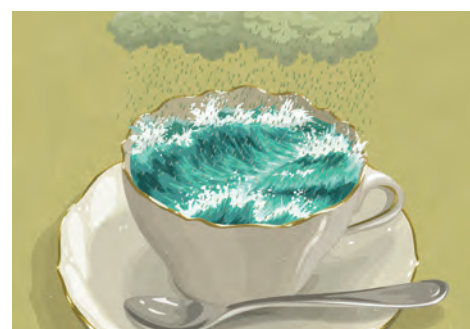
News	4	Radicalisation detection	34
Comment	8	The sooner radicalisation is identified, the easier it is to eradicate and the better for society, says Olivier Cauberghs	
Weaponising strategic communication	11		
Sometimes actions speak louder than words, according to Ørjan Karlsson			
Natural hazards		Countering violent extremism	36
Climate: More than a storm in a teacup	12	Emily Hough interviews Nicolas Hénin, who spent ten months as a hostage in Syria, to gain an insight into the minds of foreign fighters	
Emily Hough speaks to Alice Hill, former Special Assistant to President Barack Obama and Senior Director for Resilience, US National Security Council			
Climate change and education	16	Community & public Empowering laypeople	40
What is the role of higher education institutes in climate change? CRJ Key Network Partner Emma-Jane Beattie investigates		Rob Fagan contends that the average citizen or layperson has lost their impetus to act in a crisis, but this is changing, thanks to national training programmes	
Looking on the bright side	18	Social media for emergency risk	42
Speaking to Rohini Swaminathan, Emily Hough discovers that amid all the pessimism, sometimes we need to put everything into perspective		Monika Al-Mufti Nadig and Joanne Maddams look at how communicating disaster risk reduction by making it into a game that anyone can take part in, share and talk about, bridges online social media and offline reality	
Governance and informal settlements	22	Evacuating disabled children	44
It is estimated that around 70 per cent of today's urban growth occurs without formal planning, turning informality into the most common, and risky, form of urbanisation on the planet, says Vicente Sandoval		What needs to be taken into account when planning large-scale evacuations for children with disabilities? Jay Levinson looks at how Israel is addressing the challenge	
Preparing for volcanic eruption	24	Contingency planning for hospitals	46
Dóra Hjálmsdóttir describes a large emergency exercise recently undertaken in Iceland		What if a hospital is at the centre of a crisis, emergency or disaster and is unable to function? CRJ Key Network Partner Ruth Wozencroft discusses	
Extremism		Critical care on land or in the air	48
Christchurch mosque tragedy	28	Several non-profit organisations operate specialised air ambulances across Canada to provide critical care and patient transportation, writes Casey Brunelle	
The mass murders at two mosques in New Zealand provided lessons for intelligence and police services, crisis managers and emergency responders, says Neil Fergus		A risk mitigation in crisis response	52
Protecting places of worship	32	Chris Kemp explores a generative risk management platform using the Roskilde Festival in Denmark as an example	
By their very nature, religious sites are soft and attractive targets for those who wish to cause harm and spread fear. Lina Kolesnikova explores the challenge of protecting them			

Strategic communication p11



Lightwise | 123rf

Climate: No storm in a teacup p12



Ikon Images | Alamy

Cover story: *The Kraken of kidnap*

Cover image: Artkrieg

A resilient approach to major events 56

Major events are potentially highly volatile scenarios that reap accolades when carried out successfully, or damage to reputations when they are not, according to CRJ Key Network Partner, MASS

Human factors & leadership

Everyone is biased 58

Paul Martin explores the psychological predispositions and cognitive biases that affect how we perceive and respond to risks to security

The unexpected crisis leader 62

Leaders suddenly faced with responding to a true crisis can react in a number of ways, explain Eric J McNulty and colleagues

What could possibly go wrong? 64

Phil Gilling looks at how to build a team that can make rapid, yet effective, critical decisions during high risk situations

Kidnap, ransom & negotiation

Blackmail, extortion and witchcraft 68

Andrew B Brown provides a sobering case study of a crime that aimed to maximise shame and reputational damage to an INGO worker

Inside the ransom business 70

Does insurance promote kidnap for ransom by ordering the market for hostages? Or does it just mitigate existing risks? Anja Shortland investigates

Corporate travel procedures 72

It's important to have stringent travel procedures in place so that employees are aware of any risks that occur in their destination in order to keep them safe, writes CRJ Key Network Partner Giles Greenfield

A behavioural-based approach 74

Psycholinguistic profiling and behavioural analysis can be extremely powerful tools when negotiating cases of extortion, blackmail and virtual or physical kidnapping, as Stephen Grossman explains

Psychological consultants 78

Andy Young describes how mental health professionals serve with hostage negotiating teams

Traumatic incidents in hostile areas 80

How best to address the psychological wellbeing of affected personnel? Nicola Lester and Jo Anthoine say that a trauma-informed approach can be the answer

Why do we need CISM? 84

Angela Lewis describes how CISM is a toolbox of items that can be used to support emergency services

Corporate resilience

Victims and villains 87

CRJ Key Network Partner Alison Burrell advises on how to avoid becoming the villain in a crisis

Corporate security technology 88

CRJ Key Network Partner Tim Willis analyses technological advancements that tap into open source information to track fast-moving, high-impact events

Supply chains: Global trends 90

Globalisation, outsourcing, enhanced connectivity and higher reliance on suppliers mean supply chain disruptions have become more prevalent in recent years, according to Kelsey Rose

R&D

Addressing the world's water crisis? 92

David Binns presents a solar desalinators

Next Generation 112 94

It's surprising that most emergency services in Europe can only be reached by traditional phone call. But this is changing, says Rose Michael

Regulars

Event previews and diary dates 96

Frontline 98

Claire Sanders interviews Nick Grono, CEO of Freedom Fund, an organisation working to fight modern slavery and extreme exploitation around the world

The CRJ team has been travelling far and wide these past few months, attending events and helping with conference input, always listening and learning.



Because this is the best way to find out the trends to watch, what is keeping people awake at night and what our readers need. And what we have learnt is all reflected in our content – this edition covers natural hazards, governance, extremism, community and public issues, human factors and leadership, corporate resilience, technology and kidnap, extortion and ransom.

Our cover might raise a few eyebrows (we hope that it does!) and we tussled with the concept. How best to conceptualise visually the facets of organised crime, extortion, kidnap and ransom – from cyber extortion to blackmail using witchcraft or hostage taking?

All these subjects are covered from p68 onwards, as well as views on the multi-layered aspects of negotiation and investigation.

Ultimately, as outlined on p76, such crimes are human in their nature. They are committed by humans against humans and are responded to by humans. Thus, human understanding is vital to safe resolution and this applies equally to other risks.

As with all crises, prevention and preparedness are by far the best option. So why do we so often fail to understand and appreciate the scale of some hazards and threats? Turn to p58 to learn more about psychological predispositions that affect how we perceive and respond to security risks.

This issue also features interviews with genuinely inspirational experts; and we have more up our collective (and rather voluminous) editorial sleeves. On p12 read Alice Hill's views on climate, security, communities and business. Page 18 discusses how we should put humanity's progress into perspective. And on p36, I talk to Nicolas Hénin, whose ten months in captivity in Syria qualify him to provide a unique first-hand insight into the issue of foreign fighters.

Whether discussing environmental impacts on society or businesses, duty of care, or helping staff who have experienced trauma, extortion or kidnap, supply chain resilience, reputation management or leadership – the foundations are the same.

Human factors, our inbuilt biases and the interconnected systems that we have created, mean that humans are not only the problem, they are the solution.

Humans created our multifaceted world, and only we can solve the problems.

Empowering laypeople p40



Валерий Качаев | 123rf

Supply chain disruption trends p90



Peter Hermes Furian | 123rf

The murky world of blackmail, extortion and witchcraft

While much is reported on the prevalence of abduction and kidnap, little is known of the often aligned crimes of blackmail and extortion. **Andrew B Brown** provides a case study of a crime aimed at maximising shame and reputational damage



he term 'blackmail' is more commonly defined as the action, treated as a criminal offence, of demanding money from someone in return for not revealing compromising information

that one has about them. It is also the use of threats or the manipulation of someone's feelings to force them to do something. Extortion is defined as the practice of obtaining something, especially money, through force or threats.

Despite the subtle differences in these crimes, they can have devastating impact on their victims, their families and organisations, especially where organisational reputation is a key impact factor.

Like many crimes, both blackmail and extortion have moved with the times to exploit victims' lack of awareness in good security measures while in the field. Some examples are:

- **Sextortion:** Extorting money or sexual favours from someone by threatening to reveal evidence of their sexual activity;
- **Product contamination:** To contaminate or threaten to contaminate goods, with the aim of causing public injury, alarm, anxiety or economic loss and;
- **Cyber extortion:** Cyber-criminals demand payment by threatening some form of malicious activity, such as data compromise or denial of service attack.

Often referred to as crimes in action, these rely upon a victim's ability to make rapid decisions on the basis of very limited initial information. As the events unfold, the escalation of information – with a constant threat throughout – adds significant pressure upon intended victims and is designed to coerce them into submission and compliance with the criminal's demands.

The use of social media, combined with poor online security, has led to an increase in extortion and blackmail as criminals harvest key facts about individuals and then use this information to influence the victim into meeting their criminal

demands, often for money.

In a recent case from Africa, a Congolese refugee used his close relationship with an expatriate INGO worker to invent a fictitious 'Mr X' who was able to hack into encrypted communications and mysteriously read and capture all dialogue and shared photographs between the refugee and the INGO worker.

Classic honey trap

In exploiting the relationship, Mr X relied on the tactic of threatening to expose the INGO worker's alleged sexual preferences to local and national media in order to maximise shame and reputational damage, not only to the individual, but also the INGO. The refugee had forwarded naked selfies of himself to the intended victim in classic honey trap style, as he uncovered the sexual preferences of his victim.

When responding and providing assistance, it is essential to gather as much information as possible and keep the victim calm in what can be an emotionally charged crime that threatens to destroy his or her reputation. Intelligence and investigative approaches will help to contain the extortion attempt. In this case, Congolese witchcraft (Kindoki) was used to threaten the victim. Kindoki is thought by its believers to be a kind of witchcraft or possession by evil spirits. In the Democratic Republic of Congo and its diaspora in the UK, this belief is responsible for acts of child abandonment and ritual abuse of adults and children who are thought to have fallen victim to Kindoki.

For the Christian INGO worker, the use of witchcraft threw a different and challenging dynamic into the equation. It was not just his reputation that was at risk, but also the foundation of his faith, as he perceived this use of witchcraft as an orchestrated attack by demons on his soul. The challenge was to

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Martine Oger | 123rf

navigate the victim through this phase, by empathising with him and understanding the demonic phenomenon of invoking ancestral spirits. Mr X was sending him WhatsApp messages during the night, purporting to relay conversations with one of the victim's deceased relatives. Keeping the victim calm and providing stability during the heat of the intense dialogue that terrified the victim was a challenge, but was achieved through reassurance and de-escalating tensions to allow for logical thought. Importantly, not underestimating the emotional impact of the use of witchcraft and how it heavily affected the victim's central belief system and values was essential to carefully guide him through this crisis.

Logical reasoning and a chronology of the dialogue only went some way in the investigation, so securing the perpetrator's iPhone was vital for further investigation. Despite all files being deleted and the SIM card being removed from the iPhone, computer forensics uncovered some 1,600 files, providing all the evidence to prove that the refugee was guilty. He had befriended the INGO worker with the sole intention of obtaining money.

An investigation concluded the matter without reputational damage to either the victim or the INGO and acted as a timely reminder to staff to improve their online security. Some basic principles are as follows.

With regard to your personal profile, never identify what organisation you work for, nor should you discuss work related topics on open forums or social network sites or say anything that undermines the work of your employer. You should not share your work email address or telephone number on your social media profile.

By not disclosing information about your work and work contact details, you are protected from becoming a target of people or groups looking to influence or infiltrate your employer. Check your social media accounts' privacy settings and it is best not to post images of your home, car, or children wearing easily identifiable school uniforms.

Be mindful that there's a risk you could become a target, be primed for information, blackmailed or even leave yourself, family and friends vulnerable to personal threats.

It's important that you make your friends and family aware that they should not be disclosing any information about your job or operational role.

While incidents of extortion involving witchcraft are relatively rare, it is important to recognise that, like the crime of kidnapping for ransom, they are largely unreported, so we never really know the true extent of these crimes.

What is true, is that it requires a highly skilled professional response to be able to contain the crime, keep the victim calm and reassured, mitigate any risks and investigate the matter. Taking out appropriate insurance for such risks while operating in the field is a worthwhile investment in staff wellbeing and to meet duty of care requirements.

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For the Christian INGO worker, the use of witchcraft threw a different and challenging dynamic into the equation. Not only was his reputation at risk, but also the foundation of his faith, as he saw this use of witchcraft as an orchestrated attack by demons on his soul

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