

## Preparing for Terrorism: Exercise Oslo 2006 and Crisis Communication

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Exercise Oslo 2006 is Norway's civilian-led crisis simulation. The exercise, a response to the events of 9/11 and terrorist attacks in Madrid and London in 2004-2005, is analyzed here using the frameworks of crisis communication. Based on participant observation and interviews, the author evaluates the experience and recommends applications for future media game exercises.



Figure 1. Photo of bombed-out bus (Courtesy of DSB)

On the 17-18<sup>th</sup> of October 2006, Norway's largest, civilian-led crisis exercise ever was staged in the capital, Oslo. "Exercise Oslo 2006" involved more than 4,000 participants and was organized by The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB) on the instructions of The Ministry of Justice and the Police. The main objective was to prepare Norwegian society to handle terrorist strikes. The exercise also involved a "media game": An electronic newspaper *Oslo News* was set up by DSB, and staffed by voluntary participants, both professional journalists from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) and students and teachers in journalism and media and communication studies from Oslo University College (OUC). 108 articles on many aspects of the exercise, written mostly by students, were published. The terror scenario envisaged a fictional group (MADI) controlled from an imaginary country (Tagistan) striking against civilian infrastructure targets in Norway, echoing the attacks in Madrid and London in 2004-2005. The bombs were supposedly unleashed by unwelcome Norwegian involvement in oil and gas exploration in Tagistan.

Drawing theoretically on an analytical paradigm of crisis communication developed by The Swedish National Board for Psychological Defence (SPF) and combining the methodologies of documentary analysis and participatory observation, the paper assesses aspects of Exercise Oslo 2006, especially its intercultural dimensions. The findings and

practical applications of the findings suggest that tertiary education institutions in journalism, media, and communication studies may gain valuable experience from taking part in this type of exercise but only at the cost of alienating minorities who identify or sympathize with the stereotyped culprits.

### Crisis Communication: A Brief Review of the Literature

Crisis communication is a multidisciplinary field of study, embracing a number of issues, disciplines, theories and methodologies. Often linked with crisis management and organizational behavior studies, the field has few comprehensive overall research paradigms and perspectives, leading e.g. Coombs (2007) to deplore the fragmented nature of crisis communication studies. This state of affairs can have many causes. One cause is often the imprecise definition of “crisis.” A “crisis” can be seen as an isolated event or a continuing process, in many cases triggered by natural disasters, human errors and/or technological failures. Depending on the particular analysis, crisis communication can range between psychological studies of individual risk and threat perceptions, organizational or corporate communication, and issues of national security. In journalism and media and communication studies, the mediation of a crisis is a key concern, giving old and new media central roles (Baker, 2007; Coombs, 2007; Croucher, 2004; Fearn-Banks, 2001; Lidskog, Nohrstedt, & Warg, 2000; Manovich, 2001; Smith & Elliott, 2006). Today, globalization, “information age journalism”, “embedded journalism”, new media including “citizen journalism” and blogs bring all kinds of crises constantly to our attention, to the extent that we may be living in a “crisis society” or in a “risk civilization” (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007, p. 35, 56; Campbell, 2004; Taylor, 2003; Tumber, 2005). Would-be terrorists can now supplement physical training camps by downloading do-it-yourself bomb recipes from the net. If our lives really can be equated with continuous exposure to all kinds of crises and risks, these are no longer seen as single, isolated events. True or not, we may posit that crisis communication and crisis management are becoming increasingly relevant as fields of study and practice.

Looking ahead, our risk and threat perceptions – which heavily influence how we define crisis communication and crisis management - appear to be particularly attuned to the issues of terrorism and the environment. The “clash of civilizations” perspective of Huntington (1996) suggested that Islam was replacing Communism in Western risk and threat perceptions. Justified or not (Esposito, 1992; Said, 1997) these views gained credence in many Occidental eyes with the September 11, 2001 Twin Tower attacks in New York followed by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the terror strikes in Madrid and London in 2004-2005. A recent Danish study of corporate and organizational crisis communication, for example, includes material on the Mohammed cartoon crisis in 2005-2006, attacks on Danish (and Norwegian) embassies, and the Moslem boycott against the Danish dairy firm Arla (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007, p. 304). As for environmental issues, I will only note in passing that these have come to the fore with the publication by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report “Climate Change 2007”.

If we accept that terrorism and environmental issues in particular have affected our risk and threat perceptions, we will probably also agree that our trust and confidence in our governments and surroundings have been influenced, for better or worse. In this view, perhaps one of the most important aspects of Exercise Oslo 2006 for the average Norwegian

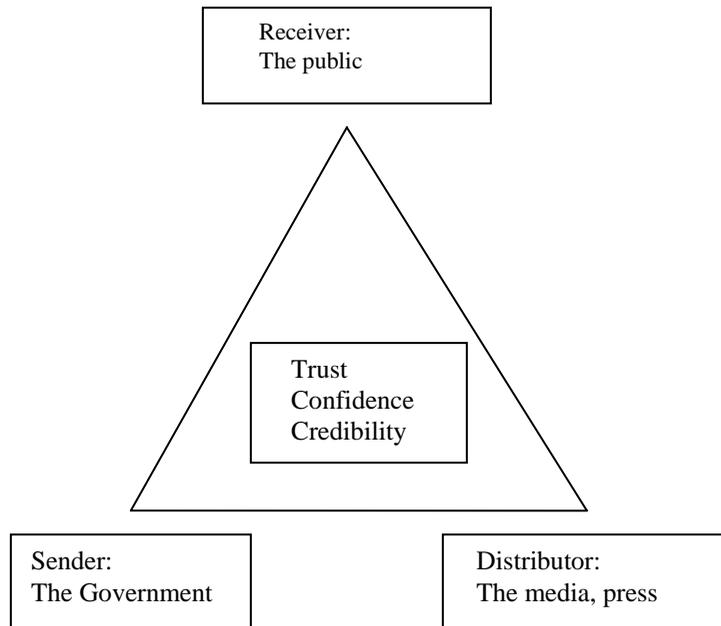


Figure 2. The SPF triangle (Adapted from Nordlund 2000:125)

citizen was that it took place, thus signalling to all and sundry that Norwegian authorities are taking the threat of terrorism seriously.

Nordlund (2000) argues that in Sweden, an analytical paradigm often used by the National Board of Psychological Defence (SPF) involves a simple triangular communication model of society (hereafter referred to as the SPF triangle) where three main stakeholders each occupy a corner: a sender (e.g. the government), a distributor (primarily the press, radio and TV) and a receiver (the public). Democratic systems like Sweden (or Norway) depend on the level, quality and balance of mediated, communicated mutual trust, confidence and credibility in this equilateral triangle, both in peacetime and especially during crises and disasters. The planning, realization and evaluation process all suggest that the SPF triangle to some extent was used by DSB in Exercise Oslo 2006.

Yet in terms of communication theory (e.g. Holmes, 2005; Windahl, et al., 2006), the reductive SPF triangle omits crucial complexities, not least the composite nature of all three corners as well as communication flows within and between the corners. Little is said about symmetric and dialogic communication. This suggests an underlying top-down hierarchical and military-inspired information (rather than communication) model where the government is the only sender during a crisis. The same SPF triangle came under a cloud during the Tsunami crisis in Asia in December 2005, when many Swedish and Norwegian tourists died. The Swedish and Norwegian governments were then blamed for faulty crisis communication and management. By staging Exercise Oslo 2006, Norwegian authorities also wanted to demonstrate their determination and capacity to handle a major terror-induced crisis.

### Exercise Oslo 2006

Exercise Oslo 2006 was conceived as the single most comprehensive civilian-led exercise of its kind in Norwegian history. It was prompted by international events triggered by 9/11, particularly terrorist attacks in Madrid and London in 2004-2005. In Madrid, a series of co-ordinated terrorist bombings took place in March 2004 directed at the commuter train system. Within the course of a few minutes, 10 bombs went off in four different places with 192 casualties and 1,500 injured. Later, in the summer of 2005 in London, several bombs were detonated in the transport system, killing 52 commuters and four suicide bombers, injuring 700 people and causing a severe day-long disruption of the city's transport and mobile telecommunications infrastructure. In Norway in late 2004, The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning had already concluded that the emergency preparedness capacity in Oslo was not satisfactory.

In this climate, The Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police commissioned The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB) to arrange Exercise Oslo 2006. Other members of the exercise leadership included The Norwegian Police Directorate, the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs, the City of Oslo, and the County Governor of Oslo and Akershus as well as many sub-units esp. in health and transport. An inter-ministerial crisis group also took part, reporting to the Prime Minister's Office. In addition, the British, Danish, Finnish, Icelandic and Pakistani embassies in Oslo also took part, reflecting the increasingly heterogeneous demography of Oslo. Basic information for the public was also made available in English, Somali, Urdu and Arabic. The exercise was "significant and comprehensive" and aimed at "training and developing society's ability to tackle extensive terror scenarios and catastrophes" (DSB, 2007). It unfolded over a 30-hour period on the 17-18 of October 2006, involving more than 4,000 individuals from 50 organizations and covering all functions, from operative personnel to strategic decision-makers at ministerial level. Among the many challenges facing the organizers were how to combine a realistic large-scale exercise extending over a 30-hour period in the centre of Oslo without disrupting ordinary daily life too much for private citizens, the police, health services, the media, etc. In addition, there were financial restrictions limiting optimal participation by several stakeholders.

The overall purpose of Exercise Oslo 2006 was to "train and improve society's ability and capacity at all levels in dealing with the consequences of an extreme terrorist attack and other extensive catastrophes" (DSB, 2007). Specifically, the following six goals<sup>1</sup> were identified:

- Co-operation and co-ordination among local, regional and central crisis management
- Activation of information strategy at several levels (local, regional and central)
- Activation and co-ordination of society's total search and rescue
- Measure ability and capacity to deal with parallel high risk damage scenes
- Test efforts and priorities at damage scenes
- Transport and treatment of mass injuries/many patients

The comprehensive background documentation provided by the DSB to OUC participants prior to the exercise included the following:

- A 1-page background scenario/fact sheet (*Bakteppet for øvelsen*)
- A 26-page directive for everyone with leader functions (*Øvingsdirektivet*)
- A 10-page journalist instruction for everyone acting as journalists (*Journalistinstruks*)
- A 45-page booklet on key participants (*Fakta om aktørene under Øvelse Oslo 2006*)
- A 7-page security directive for everyone taking part (*Sikkerhetsdirektivet*)
- A 27-page grant diagram/masterplan for key personell (*Dreibok – Øvelse Oslo 2006*)

### The Media

Surprisingly, the media and management of the media were not specifically singled out among the six objectives listed above. This may be an indication that the organizers only partially employed the SPF triangle discussed earlier.

Nonetheless, The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, as part of objectives 2-3, during the spring of 2006 contacted The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation and Oslo University College in order to discuss a “media game” designed to exert “media pressure” on key actors throughout the exercise. As noted, the media had exerted considerable pressure on Norwegian authorities throughout the Tsunami crisis of 2004-2005. In addition, “embedded journalism” especially during Gulf War II had demonstrated the power of media to sway public opinion (Taylor, 2003; Tumber, 2005). Several meetings were arranged during the spring and summer of 2006 and a good dialogue was created between DSB and OUC. An electronic newspaper *Oslo News (Oslo-nytt)* was set up by DSB in a closed network and made available to all stakeholders. From Oslo University College, 70 first-year students of journalism as well as 120 first-, second- and third-year students in media and communication studies plus 9 teachers from both fields volunteered to act as journalists and editors and help run the newspaper. Also, four visiting students in media and information management from Hogeschool van Amsterdam joined as part of the international group handling relations with embassies and the foreign press. DSB provided OUC with the comprehensive background material outlined above. A key point concerned the 45-page booklet listing institutional participants. These were the only targets and resources journalists were supposed to exert media pressure on. This meant that students were not at liberty to contact independent sources, only those included in the booklet. Later this proved to become a major bone of contention.

In addition to this “media game,” the organizers of course needed to calculate with normal media coverage of the event. By most standards, though, this coverage was limited to a few items on national television, radio and newspapers and some more items in local media. This is understandable since an exercise, though newsworthy, is not the real thing. The media pressure on participants was therefore exerted largely through the “media game.”

### Evaluation of Exercise Oslo 2006

In early 2007, a 47-page evaluation report was published by the Directorate of Civil Protection and Emergency, based on questionnaires submitted by participants. Overall, the exercise is described as very useful, despite some of its acknowledged shortcomings. The report which is primarily concerned with co-operation among the various participants in the “sender” corner of the SPF triangle, addresses the following issues:

- Usefulness
- Alerts and warning procedures
- Co-operation and communication at the disaster sites
- Dealing with casualties, wounded, evacuees and relatives
- Leadership and co-ordination
- Resource surveying and co-ordination of resources
- Information sharing among key stakeholders
- Handling the media
- HMS
- Information security
- Learning for the future

The total cost of the exercise has not been made public. Given the scale of the exercise there is no doubt that total costs, direct and indirect, run into millions of Norwegian crowns.

In the section “Handling the media,” nothing is specified regarding the electronic newspaper *Oslo News* and the participation of students and staff from OUC. A distinction is not made between normal press coverage and the “media game.” While this certainly disappointed OUC students and staff, it has to be remembered that hardly any individual stakeholders or participants are identified. The overall conclusion is twofold: 1) a goal-oriented and reflective information strategy towards national and international media is decisive for a satisfactory crisis management and 2) an understanding of roles, responsibilities and routines among key stakeholders at all levels is essential to secure co-ordinated and correct information.

Most participating stakeholders did have an information strategy in place to handle the media (press telephones, press conferences, press releases, websites, extra staff, media surveillance, etc). The inter-ministerial emergency pool for crisis situations (“Infopool”) was used for the first time during the exercise, and apparently functioned satisfactorily. Most journalists were professionally received, and information was clear and updated. Nonetheless, some key stakeholders did not use press releases, others refused to talk to the media. Oslo Police precinct is praised by many respondents for its professional media management, including the setting up of press centres for journalists and available information in several languages. Yet it is acknowledged that working conditions could have been better for international press and correspondents through special press conferences and press contacts with language skills and more available information in English.



Figure 3. Front page of *Oslo News*

The five embassies (UK, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Pakistan ) involved themselves as far as their own citizens were concerned, but they were in many cases not able to respond optimally to the media due to lack of information from Norwegian authorities.

Regarding the media, it was noted above that no distinction is made in the evaluation report between normal press coverage of Exercise Oslo 2006 and the “media game.” Nor is any attempt made to quantify or qualify normal press coverage. Still, the evaluation credits the police at the operational level for resolving some early telephone capacity problems due to the rush of calls from the media (i.e. actors in the media game) and the public. At a higher strategic level, ministries were far more reluctant to provide the public with information, in reality contributing to “an information vacuum.” Some press conferences proved more concerned with the division of labour between operational and strategic levels, than with showing sympathy with victims and relatives. Although the hospitals in general were in control of handling casualties and wounded, several journalists (among them many OUC students) reported that some hospitals lacked figures for casualties and the wounded. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health also prioritized making available information in a variety of languages. As for public transport, the media was left in doubt as to who was in charge.

Several stakeholders, including the police, health services and the fire brigade acknowledge that there were unsatisfactory routines concerning their co-ordination of information to the media. The evaluation, on balance, is mostly concerned with internal considerations within only one corner of the SPF paradigm, viz. the sender (the government). Far less attention is accorded to the two other corners – the distributor (press, radio and TV) and the receiver (the public).

### The Electronic Newspaper *Oslo News*

*Oslo News (Oslo-nytt)* was headquartered at The Norwegian Police University College. Of course this setting made students and staff from Oslo University College apprehensive about editorial integrity and journalistic freedom. Students and teachers worked in shifts of eight hours, so some students only worked one shift while most teachers had two shifts. At any given time there were four teachers and about 40 students available. About 40 of the first-year students of journalism worked at headquarters as desk journalists keeping pressure on key stakeholders through the telephone. Most of the Media and communication students acted as journalists, visiting the sites of the bombings, hospitals, key infrastructure points, press conferences, etc. The newspaper had one managing editor from The Norwegian State Broadcasting Corporation and one from Oslo University College, working shifts. The present author worked as group leader and also stepped in as editor on one shift.

A standard 3-column structure with a simple design and functionality was used, based on off-the-shelf software (Escenic). Readers had access to other media information products through the right column, including pre-made TV and radio broadcasts on the terror strikes produced by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, mostly in Norwegian. Below I shall return to an example of this material.

All participating students and staff were given a questionnaire by DSB to fill in, and the responses formed part of the evaluation described above. Below I have summarized some observations and conclusions, gleaned from consultations with several of my colleagues who took part in the exercise <sup>2</sup> and participating students:

- It was a very useful experience in crisis communication for students and staff.
- There was a good co-operative spirit and good relations, esp. with DSB and key police personnel.
- All students and staff appreciated the diploma they later received from DSB.
- The 120 first-, second- and third-year students in media and communication studies benefited from acting as journalists (and four as desk editors). These are tasks they normally do not do.
- The 70 first-year students of journalism benefited less, since they to some extent already knew the job and judged acting as journalists less interesting. They were, for example, not encouraged to use independent sources, as they are trained to, but had to limit themselves to predefined sources. There were limitations on uploading photos and *Oslo News* had no possibilities of receiving MMS photos.
- The 9 teachers working as either group leaders or editors (the present author was both) thought the exercise provided valuable training for the students, and also an interesting experience as far as their own roles were concerned
- The 9 teachers also believed editorial work and running the newspaper in many cases were hampered by non-professionals from the police, limitations on editorial independence and journalistic freedom. Investigative journalism proved impossible. A much better solution would have been to set up and run an independent newspaper.

- Most of the 9 teachers believe that if this kind of exercise is to be repeated in the future – and many were negative about a repeat performance - more resources and attention must be given to the other two corners of the SPF triangle, especially the media and press. An independent newspaper should be set up where editorial integrity and journalistic freedom are guaranteed.

#### The 108 Articles in *Oslo News*

In all, 108 articles appeared in *Oslo News*. Many of them are in reality short news items of 50-100 words or less. Some have one author, others two, while some are anonymous press releases. Only 4 articles are written in English, and only 11 come with photos. The themes covered most aspects of the exercise, including coverage of the bomb sites, hospitals and transport, the reaction of the public and the authorities, press conferences, etc.

There are some inconsistencies: the first 33 articles appeared with a date but not the exact time of publication. When the latter was included, it was in some cases inconsistent, suggesting that the article had been updated or revised. In a few cases the same article appears twice. All articles (as well as all communication by telephone, SMS, etc.) were preceded by “Exercise Exercise.” Among the many possible ways to analyze this material (e.g. analyses of discourse, content, or rhetoric) I have included the only 4 articles which appeared in English, since these seem particularly relevant for a wider audience, plus the concluding article which appeared in Norwegian and which I have translated into English. Before turning to these, though, it could be mentioned that a noticeable shift occurs as the articles began to appear. In the early stages of the exercise (the first two 8-hour shifts) students were in general enthusiastic and positive, even when the server suffered an early 2-hour breakdown. As fatigue set in and some of the information bottlenecks became evident, the articles became more critical. In many cases the students acting in the roles of journalists providing accurate and truthful reporting complained that they were not treated seriously, especially by the police.

The following brief and unsigned news item appeared as no. 15 in *Oslo News*. It was provided by the organizers as a link to the background scenario/fact sheet (cf. appendix 2). As we see, more news was to follow, suggesting that the organizers were not averse to more coverage of MADI. In fact this did not appear in *Oslo News* but was made available by media products of The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, as I shall return to.

#### **MADI claims responsibility**

17 October. The Militant group MADI (Militia Against Discrimination and Inequality) in Tagistan has claimed responsibility for the attacks in Oslo.

More information to follow.

Figure 4. MADI claims responsibility

The next news item appeared as no. 16 and is signed by one of my third-year students of Media and communication studies working in the international group, acting as a foreign correspondent for the BBC

### **25 persons killed in Oslo attacks**

17 October. At least 25 persons are confirmed dead and 60 wounded after three explosions in the centre of Oslo earlier today. No British casualties are confirmed.

It is uncertain how many British citizens currently are in Oslo. The British Embassy is cooperating with the hospitals and the Police Department to find out if any of the people involved are British citizens. None of the dead have yet been identified. The Embassy has established a call centre for relatives of British citizens in Oslo: 23 13 27 77. The police advise people to stay away from the centre of Oslo until more information is given. They also ask people not to use their phones, due to the rescue work that is being done.

Eira Kamhaug. BBC World

Figure 5. 25 persons killed in Oslo attacks

The following brief article is signed by two visiting second-year students of Information and media management from Hogeschool van Amsterdam, also working in the international group. Their responsibilities involved liaison with the five participating embassies.

### **British embassy: Updated travel advice - Cautions British travellers to Norway**

17 October, 20.26hrs: Because of the events, the embassy changed the travel advice on their website. Although they still believe Norway to be a safe country to visit, they urge people to take the attacks of this morning in consideration when planning a trip to Oslo.

In an exclusive interview, the BBC World team talked with the British ambassador to Norway about the terrorist attacks on Oslo this morning. He began by expressing his sympathy with those concerned, and especially with the people who lost their loved ones. He stressed that the United Kingdom is always willing to help other countries, either with information or with personnel, when such an attack takes place. He went on to say that he was impressed with the response of the authorities and different agencies. Although there was some confusion in the beginning, they reacted quickly and efficiently. When the embassy called, expressing concerns about their safety, the authorities didn't hesitate to send a team of police officers to protect the premises. There wasn't a lot of information about possible British victims. Since the ambassador does not want to speculate about the fates of British citizens, all information should be confirmed by at least two other sources. With the small amount of information that was made available through the police, he could not give a lot of information to people who are concerned for their loved ones. The ambassador ended the interview by stressing the solidarity of the United Kingdom with Norway, its people and government.

Arne van Gastel, Irene Westerweel

Figure 6. British embassy: Updated travel advice – Cautions British travellers to Norway

The unsigned, short article below was provided by the organizers and was a press release from a press conference with the Minister of Justice and Police, Mr. Knut Storberget, who had commissioned DSB to arrange Exercise Oslo 2006. This, plus the participation of an inter-ministerial group reporting to the Prime Minister's office, reflected that Norwegian authorities took Exercise Oslo 2006 very seriously.

**Minister of Justice: Oslo returns to normal**

18 October, 12.06hrs: The horror of the deadly blasts in Oslo yesterday will not change our way of living, the Minister of Justice Mr Storberget, told BBC this morning. He assured everybody looking to Norway that Oslo is still a safe city. The heavy presence of armed police forces, however, indicates a city in fear. Armed police is not a daily sight in Norway.

Storberget underlined the massive resources mobilized not only to handle the rescue work, but also to hunt down the people responsible for the bombings. "This will require all our resources and experience. We have close contact with our Nordic neighbours and other partners. Today I will ask for a meeting with Schengen- partners to inform about the situation," Storberget told BBC. The disaster yesterday will almost for certain challenge the typical Norwegian way of living. The threat of terror is no longer just something that happens "out there." Even though the Minister of Justice didn't elaborate on lessons learned so far, he admitted that issues like communication among rescue workers, the system's ability to respond and public information are central. The government's ability to provide information to the public has been heavily criticized. Furthermore, even 24 hours after the bombings, reliable information on the number of foreigners affected has been almost impossible to obtain. According to the British Embassy there will be a Memorial Ceremony in the Oslo Cathedral at 15:00hrs today. The fact that the embassy has been involved in this ceremony indicates that there are British citizens involved. How many is still unknown.

Figure 7. Minister of Justice: Oslo returns to normal

At this point I can share an editorial anecdote: Stepping in as editor on the night shift, I had a telephone call from the Ministry of Justice and the Police, claiming that one of our signed articles had given an incorrect version of what the Minister had said at another press conference. The Ministry demanded that I as editor change the article. I contacted the journalist, we listened to his taped version of the press conference, whereupon it was decided that we would not alter or retract our version.

The final article I would like to comment on appeared in Norwegian, and it was also the last to be published in *Oslo News*. Below I have translated it into English.

**A train, a bus and a tram exploded in Oslo yesterday. The most recent casualty figures are 45 dead and 165 wounded. Several civilians have been affected by these events. Many are reluctant to use public transport and demand clarification regarding safety.**

18 October, 13:15hrs: More than thirty hours after the first bomb went off, there is still uncertainty who can give the public answers to their many questions. Seven persons have been apprehended, suspected of being behind the terror acts in Oslo. They are suspected of having planted bombs in the city, creating fear and causing deaths. Can we use trains and trams? Are further attacks imminent? Are there other felons at large? Can we walk the streets safely? The police have apparently been overstrained, and several who have dialled the emergency numbers have not gotten through. Both the police and key ministries have been reluctant to release information and have shown little co-operative with the press and with relatives. How many are dead? How many are wounded? The question citizens of Oslo are asking is whether it is safe to walk the streets, and there is not enough information available to answer their concerns.

Sandra Walderhaug and Marie Walsøe, journalists in *Oslo News*



Figure 8. A train, a bus and a tram exploded in Oslo yesterday.

Written by two first-year students of Media and communication studies, it reflects a far more critical tone than the others. This suggests general exercise fatigue, but also a certain level of confusion with the communicated level, quality and balance of mutual trust, confidence and credibility in the SPF triangle.

### Stereotypes Underlying Risk and Threat Perceptions

The 1-page background scenario/fact sheet provided by DSB in Norwegian (cf. translation following the references) portrays the imagined context. This is a mixture of many realistic and some fictional elements. Content analysis (e.g. discourse analysis) would doubtlessly identify that one key discourse involves the oil and gas rich Moslem Middle East/Asia in conflict with the exploitative and capitalist West of which Norway is a part. Sonwalkar (2005) would almost certainly ascribe this background scenario to what he terms “banal journalism” and the “us-them” binary in news discourse. Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) would in a similar vein probably be critical of the dysfunctional social psychological mechanisms that the “us-them” binary could trigger among affected minorities. Many, including Moslem minorities in Norway, would no doubt perceive this as Western Orientalism, a reductionist, Islamophobic stereotype, which contributes little to bridge gaps in global communication (Durham & Kellner, 2006; Kiesling & Paulston, 2005; Newsom, 2007; Said, 1997).

Representatives of Oslo University College (including the present author) in our early contacts with The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, had made it clear that OUC could not take part in any exercise that stigmatized ethnic or religious minorities. Oslo is today a multicultural city and an estimated 23% of the population belong to one or several minorities. Moreover, Oslo City Council 2004-2007 had 59 members of whom 13 (23%) belonged to a minority. Oslo University College services a multicultural community and has many minority students, including students in journalism and media and communication studies. Several of our students taking part in Exercise Oslo 2006 belonged to a minority. OUC staff therefore agreed well in advance that it would be wrong to be associated with an exercise that overtly condoned stereotypes such as “Moslem terrorists.” For the same reasons there were no articles by our students on MADI in *Oslo News*, although the news item in figure 1 stated “more information will follow.” By contrast, the pre-made information available through The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) had several articles on MADI. In addition, a news broadcast by NRK sent at the very beginning of the exercise showed footage from Tagistan where women wore *burkas*.

It should be noted, however, that the background scenario/fact sheet does show some restraint by omitting direct references to Islam or Moslems. It must be remembered that in early 2006 during the Mohammed cartoon controversy, Denmark and Norway both became targets of Moslem rage. Danish and Norwegian flags were burned and embassies were attacked in several Moslem countries (Kunelius, Eide, Hahn, & Schroeder, 2007). In February 2006 a top Taliban commander, Mullah Dadullah, promised a reward of 5 kilos of gold to anyone who killed a Norwegian, Danish or German soldier in Afghanistan (Dagbladet, 2007).

In addition, none of the suspected terrorists whom were apprehended were identified by name or religion. In this sense, DSB respected the points made by OUC. On the other hand, the use of several evocative and connotative names left little doubt that the imaginary terrorists were Moslems, as in Madrid and London. MADI (Militia Against Discrimination and Inequality) evokes the idea of the Mahdi in Shia Islam as well as the Mahdi Militia of the Shia cleric Muqtada al Sadr in Iraq. The name Tagistan and its date of independence (1949) almost parallels the creation of Pakistan (1947). The president has a Portuguese-sounding title but his name is almost identical to that of a former Saudi oil minister. Tagistan is said to be an island in the Indian Ocean with a north-south conflict similar to Sri Lanka. But the civil war situation can parallel also conditions in Iraq, where a Norwegian private oil company (DNO)

is very active in Kurdistan and where also the Norwegian state-owned oil company HydroStatoil is criticized by trade unions for planning business (Dagsavisen, 2007; Dagens Næringsliv, 2007).

Several of the pre-made media productions available through The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) showed far less restraint than *Oslo News*. In two articles (“MADI claims responsibility” and “MADI – bloodstained history,” both signed Kristian Elster and published October 17, two symbols appeared. One was the logo of MADI in Arabic script which reads “Ta’iv.” The last letter “v” is not usual in Arabic and could suggest Farsi, Urdu or a Turkmen language. The other is the flag of Tagistan with the Moslem crescent, green colour of Islam and black colour of Shia Islam. This leaves little doubt that Norwegian risk and threat perceptions involve terrorism by Moslems. In another article, “Peace brokerage may have triggered terror” by Joar Hoel Larsen in NRK which appeared October 17, Norway’s role as a peace broker in Sri Lanka and in the Sudan are cited as possible causes for the terror attacks. The same article also mentions hostility towards Norway in Somalia.

In retrospect, the international group liaising with embassies ought to have interacted also with foreign news correspondents from outside Europe. The presence of a correspondent from *Al-Jazeera* might have modified the stereotypes outlined above and given the exercise valuable intercultural training. (Miles, 2005; Zayani, 2005).

Let us now reconsider the SPF triangle, bearing in mind the main findings of the evaluation report quoted earlier: a) a goal-oriented and reflective information strategy towards national and international media is decisive for a satisfactory crisis management and b) an understanding of roles, responsibilities and routines among key stakeholders at all levels is essential to secure co-ordinated and correct information. As we see, the main findings are concerned with only two corners in the SPF triangle: the sender (government) and the distributor (press, media). The public is not mentioned. And it is perhaps here we see some of the main weaknesses of both the SPF triangle and Exercise Oslo 2006. The evaluation concludes that better government and local authority coordination and understanding of roles and responsibilities, plus better information strategies and handling of the media, will automatically take care of the public interest. While this may be true for most Norwegians, it may not be so true in terms of the Moslem minority and a wider international Moslem public. To these, Exercise Oslo 2006, with its apparently stereotyped risk and threat perceptions, probably confirms that Norwegian authorities are steeped in Western Orientalism.

### Conclusion

Issues linked with terrorism are increasingly central in crisis communication. One way of analyzing crisis communication is the SPF triangle, emphasizing that optimal communication flows among key stakeholders in democratic societies in crisis or disaster situations depend on a mutual - and vulnerable - balance of trust, confidence and credibility. Exercise Oslo 2006 proved very useful for all participants, given precedents in Madrid and London 2004-2005. In addition, Norway’s role among the NATO-led coalition troops in Afghanistan, Norway’s involvement in oil and gas activities abroad as well as the perceived Norwegian involvement in the Mohammed cartoon crisis, are seen by many as provocative, particularly by Moslems inside and outside Norway.

The media and the public were not specifically mentioned among the prioritized goals of the exercise. Internal co-ordination among the several key government and local authority participants drained resources, at the expense of optimizing communication flows with the press and the public. Therefore, although the SPF triangle in all probability was used prior to and during the exercise, it was not optimally applied and has besides proven reductive. Perhaps the most important aspect of Exercise Oslo 2006 was that it took place, demonstrating domestically and abroad the Norwegian government's preparedness in the event of terrorism on Norwegian soil.

The use of students in a media game, though useful, cannot replace the role of professional and real media coverage, including by foreign correspondents. The background scenario of Exercise Oslo 2006, albeit restrained and without direct reference to Islam or Moslems, nonetheless suggests risk and threat perceptions based on a stereotype of the Moslem terrorist in conflict with the affluent West. This stereotype was muted in *Oslo News* but clearly present in text and footage provided by the organizers and The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. From an intercultural communication perspective, Norwegian Moslem minorities and the Moslem community in general, probably see this as a form of Western Orientalism.

### Practical Applications

The findings of this paper may have several implications for future media game exercises focussing on terrorism and involving, on the one hand, tertiary education institutions in journalism, media and communication studies and, on the other hand, government authorities.

From the viewpoint of teaching journalism, media and communication studies, the advantages gleaned from taking part in real-life exercises with a defined culprit (here: Moslem terrorists) must be weighed up against, first, the cost of potentially alienating those of the students and general public that identify with the Moslem segment; and secondly, the cost of playing along with and placating the authorities into believing that a minimalist and orchestrated "media game" is a sufficient dress rehearsal for a real terror strike. In real life, one must prepare for media pressure from the combined forces of the tabloid press, investigative journalists, citizen journalists and bloggers, from Norway and other countries.

As for Norwegian authorities, one must hope for increased awareness regarding first, the complexities of crisis communication and management and the dangers of relying on reductive paradigms such as the SPF triangle. Secondly, any serious evaluation of this type of exercise and planning for future repetitions must go beyond intra-governmental considerations to include relevant input from all participants.

### Epilogue

The joint CAC-IAICS conference held in Harbin 22-24 June 2007, "Harmony, Diversity and Intercultural Communication," attracted many papers addressing the three overall themes. This paper relates to all three themes, though in different ways, and touches on the very communicative essence of IAICS and ICS. As noted in the introduction to the present paper, terrorism and environmental issues are likely to become two predominant issues in crisis communication and crisis management. It is essential that co-operative efforts such as

exercises described in this paper and involving tertiary education institutions and national authorities, avoid the pitfalls of stereotypes and stigmatization that alienate and victimize minorities and only serve to obstruct intercultural communication. Instead, it is essential to find co-operative forms that enhance intercultural communication for the benefit of key stakeholders and ordinary citizens alike.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Management by objectives (MBO) has since 1989 been implemented in the public sector in Norway at all three administrative levels: the state, the county and local authority levels.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to my colleagues Yngve Hågvar, Andreas Ytterstad, Roy Krøvel and Thore A. Roksvold for their comments to an early draft of the manuscript. I am also appreciative of comments from several colleagues when an early draft version was presented at the International Association of Intercultural Studies Conference in Harbin, China 22-24 June 2007, and at the 18th Nordic Conference for Media and Communication Research, in Helsinki, Finland 16-19 August 2007.

DSB - The Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning - has no objections to the use of photos from Exercise Oslo 2006 that DSB has copyright to, in the scientific article by Dr. Robert Vaagan.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to Exercise Oslo 2006, this text was provided by DSB in Norwegian (author's translation).

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### Background to the exercise <sup>3</sup>

The following describes the political context of the exercise. This is information that will be known to society through media coverage prior to the exercise. It is important that participants in the exercise are knowledgeable about this backdrop.

#### **Tagistan**

Located in the ocean area between India and Oman

Government system: Independent republic since 1949

President: Presideo Yamania

Area: 176,215 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: 3,199,000 inhabitants

Capital: Jemar. Port in northern Tagistan with 1,580,000 inhabitants

#### **Rulers**

Majority party rule by the party Democratic Tagistan

#### **Opposition**

The opposition is dominated by the party Equality which has considerable support in South Tagistan. The party has since its being established in 1974 worked for southern independence from the rest of the country. The party has close connections with the militant group Militia Against Discrimination and Inequality (MADI) but publicly distanced itself from MADI terrorist actions in Jemar in April 2001. Both MADI and Equality have repeatedly criticized Western countries and enterprises for supporting what they consider as the government's robbing of assets from southern Tagistan.

#### **History**

Tagistan gained independence in 1949. The inhabitants of the island work mostly in agriculture and fishing. Following several years during the 1970s with bad crops and high inflation, many immigrated to Europe. The poor rural area in the south was particularly affected. In the years 1985-1990 Norway received 2,000 refugees from Tagistan. In 2004, the UN rated the country among the ten poorest countries in the world.

#### **MADI**

On two occasions Norway has been threatened by MADI. As late as 25 January 2006, Norway, Spain, England and the US received threats of terror strikes due to their presence in South Tagistan. The threats have not been specific regarding type of action or timing. In April 2001 MADI claimed responsibility for two terror strikes involving explosives in the capital

Jemar. One target was the reception of the state TV broadcaster KTK where 8 people were killed. The second target two days later was in the terminal building of the state railway where 20 people were wounded. MADI was one of several organizations to claim responsibility for the strike against a tram station in Barcelona in March 2002 with 150 casualties. and the strike against the media enterprise “Info” in Washington DC in July 2005 where 110 people were killed. Today we have no reason to believe that MADI took part in these strikes.

### **Norwegian interests in Tagistan**

The partly state-owned Norwegian enterprise Norwegian Power Group (NorPow) is represented in Tagistan. Since 2002 NorPow has operated in South Tagistan with the support of local authorities. In the spring of 2005, following land-based test drilling about 150 kilometres south of Hasar which is the largest town in South Tagistan, the enterprise found considerable petroleum and gas reserves. There was for some time with regard to which enterprises would be contracted to exploit the resources. In addition to NorPow, a British and American enterprise were potential contractors. On 24 August 2006 NorPow was awarded the concession. The Norwegian State Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) has a team of three people stationed in Hasar.

### **NorPow**

Until 1999 NorPow was state-owned. The Norwegian state today owns 54% of the enterprise, which among other operations is extensively involved on the Norwegian continental shelf and also in several African countries.