

# The Strategic Communication of hijackings: some lessons from how the Spanish government managed the crisis of the Alakrana

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## ABSTRACT

In early October 2009, the "Alakrana", a Basque tuna trawler was hijacked by an obscure group of Somali pirates near the Indian Ocean, with 36 member crew, 16 of them were Spanish. During the 47 days of the Alakrana hijacking, all the social and political actors had an evident presence on mass media in order to frame this crisis. The main political actor, the Spanish government of Rodriguez Zapatero, showed from the beginning a weak position in the public information flows related the negotiation process with the hijackers and implicates. The political discourse related the Alakrana hijacking was disseminated quite slow among mass media and event families, with contradictory or even no contrasted information, and a lack of message coordination among different Ministers affected. The Alakrana crisis resolution came when the Basque tuna trawler was liberated, after a suspicious pay –no recognized by the Spanish government- and with the failed in the capture of the Somali pirates when they tried to escape.

This paper seeks to shed light on some of the communication management mistakes related to how the Spanish government managed this crisis. For that purpose, strategic communication in crisis approach serves as a base of analysis to demonstrate the governmental failure in the definition of the message and the resolution of this crisis. The final reflection deserves to be considered on the part of the political actors working on how managing future kidnappings as a public matter that occupies more and more evidence in the political agenda and also in the media agenda.

## **A crisis as a point that breaks the normal political activity**

A crisis is considered a significant and unexpected threat to operations that can have negative consequences for any organization if not handled properly. The crisis situation is decisive for the organization survival, because it can affect their publics, taking into account that media will turn the organization as the center of attention by compromising his public image, credibility, loyalty...

During last years, and probably as a necessary ingredient in the political management, governments face internal and external crises quite often. Some of these common situations coming from different origins (financial aspects of campaigning, sexual scandals, financial scandals, terrorist attacks, etc.) pointing to the idea that crisis are at the heart of the political activity and belong to the daily life. In fact, bad things happen to good organizations all the time. It isn't the severity of the negative event that determines whether the organization suffers reputational, operational, or financial harm, but rather the nature and timeliness of the response.

There exist some common elements among all type of crisis. First, the surprise factor. Any crisis has a more or less high degree of surprise. In fact, a crisis is always produced "in a bad moment" or "in a moment with no reaction capacity". Because a crisis can happen in any moment, the best method to solve a crisis situation is to prepare it. Second, the urgency factor. Any crisis demands a fast response. The problem will start modifying the organization actions, also in communicative terms: "if we don't speak, someone will do it for us". Third, the instability factor. The delicate situation will provoke the organization instability that, on one hand, must solve the arisen conflict and, on the other hand, must try to continue with the normal activity in order to avoid the damage as much as possible.

Crisis communication can play a significant role by transforming the unexpected into the anticipated and responding accordingly. A good communication management can face the three related threats of any crisis: (1) public safety, (2) financial loss, and (3) reputation loss. As Coombs suggest, the primary concern in a crisis has to be public safety. A failure to address public safety intensifies the damage from a crisis. Reputation and financial concerns, secondly, are considered after public safety has been remedied (Coombs, 2007).

During a crisis, there is more pressure than ever before on leaders. So that political leaders should be prepared in order to prevent, if possible, or face these situations that are linked to their own political responsibility, as quick as possible, so that his credibility and reputation was not damage, or even his own existence as such. For that purpose, it is indispensable a succeeded orientation of his communicative strategy, in order to achieve a confidence internal climate with implicates and a positive external projection of the institution public image.

At last, political institutions already understand first, that they are exposed constantly to situations of crisis, and that these are going to come before or later and, secondly, that in spite of his unpredictable nature, these situations must not be considered as a permanent threat, but by contrast, like real opportunities for each governments to show his honesty and transparency from

his commitments, his way of acting, and his efficiency as natural part of his own identity. For this aim, a good communication management is indispensable.

### **Some lessons from Crises Communication Management**

Once the crisis phenomenon has been characterized, it is necessary to gather now the main contributions from the scientific literature and also from the professional experience related how recently crises have been managed, from the political point view but also from the communicative point of view. We should address that contributions related crisis management as a research topic has grown enormously in the last decade. This fact has helped to create a trustworthy and effective working method not only for the crisis preparation but also for how political leaders should face these situations when they start.

There are good sample of academics and also professionals whose research has focused on the role of communication for crisis management (Pauchant y Mitroff, 1992; Hurd, 1992; Marra, 1992; Heath,1988; Lukaszewski, 1997; Sturges, Carrel Newsom y Barrera, 1991; González Herrero, 1998) In general, all these models share a common conscience about the opportunities that an strategic use of communication can serve for the crisis management. As a basic premise, the crisis process is designed to prevent or lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders, by considering that failure can result in serious harm to stakeholders, losses for an organization, or end its very existence.

Among all models, crisis management is not just one thing. Crisis management can be divided into three phases: (1) pre-crisis, (2) crisis response, and (3) post-crisis. The pre-crisis phase is concerned with prevention and preparation. The crisis response phase is when management must actually respond to a crisis. The post-crisis phase looks for ways to better prepare for the next crisis and fulfilled commitments made during the crisis phase including follow-up information (Coombs, 2007).

#### **a) Pre-crisis**

Most of the crisis studies suggest that, the most important moment for the crisis management places before it explodes, that is to say, in the phase of preparation and prevention, also called pre-crisis. Prevention involves seeking to reduce known risks that could lead to a crisis. This is part of an organization's risk management program. Preparation involves creating the crisis management plan, selecting and training the crisis management team, and conducting exercises to test the crisis management plan and crisis management team.

Barton (2001) identifies the common members of the crisis team as public relations, legal, security, operations, finance, and human resources. However, the composition will vary based on the nature of the crisis. Coombs (2007) summarizes the research and shows how practice improves a crisis team's decision making and related task performance. A key component of crisis team training is spokesperson training. Organizational members must be prepared to talk to the news media during a crisis. Lerbinger (1997), Feran-Banks (2001), and Coombs (2007) devote considerable attention to media relations in a crisis.

Besides, the preparation must include the establishment of stable, solid, reciprocal and positive relations with the organization's publics, especially with stakeholders. This will allow to possess an initially positive predisposition on the part of the publics who, at last, will have an important part of responsibility in the crisis resolution. It will not be possible to establish this type of relations when the crisis has already exploded. In such a case, a transparency and quick communicative response will be indispensable.

#### b) Crisis response

When the crisis has clearly exploded and it's externally known by the mass media, activities and resources must go in the line of closing definitively the crisis causes and to establish the necessary communication strategies towards the priority publics or stakeholders. It's time for choosing the best communicative strategies. As Piñuel (2004) suggests, any communication strategy for a crisis solution should be based on four principles: anticipation, agility, information quality and veracity. With the anticipation, we reach the opportunity to be the first ones in speaking, and to avoid our information goes always "on the back". Any delay will leave us without initiative in the future. With the agility, we can react faster, without wasting time. The time, in the middle of a crisis, is quite important. With quality information we can generate credibility in our messages. Finally, with veracity, we avoid to lie, something not recommended in any crisis.

#### c) Post-crisis

In this phase, the crisis is no longer the focal point of management's attention but still requires some attention because, at last, a crisis is a threat to an organization's reputation. As noted earlier, reputation repair may be continued or initiated during this phase. In fact, crisis managers recommend not close the crisis too early, and when that moment starts, to initiate an internal and external phase of organizational recovery and image analysis among stakeholders looking for the initial point we were before the crisis. For that purpose, follow-up communication is also required. The amount of follow-up communication required depends on the amount of information promised during the crisis and the length of time it takes to complete the recovery process. At last, a crisis

should be a learning experience (Coombs, 2006). The crisis management effort needs to be evaluated to see what is working and what needs to be improved

### **Hijackings Management**

During decades, the kidnapping has been an often used tactic for terrorist and criminal groups around the world. The characteristics of this extortion method turn it into an attractive resource to gain economic incomes and advertising by having raised complex challenges to victims and governments. Although every kidnapping suggests particularities for special consideration, the empirical analysis demonstrates certain consistencies in the hijacker behaviours.

Mass media relevancy must be underlined during a kidnapping because, in many stories of kidnapping mass media have facilitated a useful loudspeaker for terrorists through which they have exercised directly his constraint on families, public opinion and governments. In some of these cases the hostage, while is suffering a tremendous distress, reproduces in the media speech the hijacker requirements. The aim of this action is to determine public opinion with a horrifying story with a terrible psychological impact coming from the testimony of a human being terrified and deprived of freedom. This mechanism allows criminals to transfer unfairly to the government responsibility of the hostage liberation. For that reason, a disproportionate media coverage that ignores hijacker intentions will amplify the understandable emotional reaction of relatives and society.

During the hijacking management, the hijacker deliberately establishes a relation with different actors - hostages, relatives, public opinion, security forces and government - so that anyone response affects on the rest. This intricate relation conjuncture claims a skilful and smart governmental management.

Kidnappings and Hijackings raise moral, legal and political dilemmas. In order to find the best solution many governments have chosen the negotiation solution by interpreting that this option is less risked for hostages and authorities. In fact, sometimes special force interventions have been succeed, liked the assaults to the Japan embassy in Peru in 1997 and to the Iran embassy in London in 1980. Unfortunately, there have been other examples where negotiation ended with the hostage death like the Moscow theatre in 2002 and the case of Beslán's school in 2004. Nevertheless, if a Government decides to negotiate, he must be conscious of that decision costs and of the need for a sensitive and limited balance in his actions.

Usually, politicians that face a hijacking management have showed a certainly prudent attitude. In this sense, the attitude of the British government after the couple Paul and Rachel Chandler

kidnapping by Somali pirates in October 2009 can be used as an example. In that case, the Foreign affairs spokesperson just demanded hostage liberation without transfers, including the payment of rescues. The argument against negotiating with terrorists, as any other similar situations, was simple: democracies must never give in to violence, and terrorists must never be rewarded for using it. Negotiations give legitimacy to terrorists and their methods and undermine actors who have pursued political change through peaceful means.

### **The “Alakrana crisis” Communications management**

The Spanish fishing ship ‘Alakrana’, carrying 36 crewmen (16 of them were Spanish) and built in 2006 at the cost of €30 million was impressed by 13 heavily armed pirates nearly 415 miles off the coast of Somalia on October 2.

Since the ‘Alakarana’ was taken hostage, a popular, media and governmental reaction arise, by considering the enormous potential danger situation for the crewmen so that the Spanish government considered two options during the first 48 hours. The first option’s premise was based on the idea that the frigate Canarias from the Spanish Navy could run to the ‘Alakrana’s’ aid; then specially trained military would force a breakdown in the ship’s mechanics in order to compel a negotiated solution upon the pirates. This option was soon discarded as impracticable due to time constraints, as the ‘Canarias’ was 800 miles away from the ‘Alakrana,’ and its 22 knots at peak speed were not enough. At the same time, the pirates commanding the ‘Alakrana’ had liberated the ship from a small boat it carried, which allowed the ship to cruise at 14 knots back to the Somali coast. Yet the Navy found an odd prize to its attempted aid when it apprehended two pirates in command of the small boat that was fleeced off the ‘Alakrana’. And here is where the government’s chaotic crisis-management really begins.

Besides to the negotiations developed by the different actors involved, a communicative strategy on the part of the Spanish government also arise for the crisis management. In order to analyse how the Spanish government managed this crisis, the tri-part view of crisis management theory serves as the organizing framework for this analysis.

Related the **preparation** phase, we should point out that the Spanish government must be sufficiently anticipated for facts similar to these one. In fact, there was two main reasons to be prepared: first, because the maritime coast of Somalia makes you think about the possibility for similar facts would happened at any time, and second, there were recent precedents of Spanish fishing ships and other nationalities fishing ships that were also hijacked in the same Indic ocean. In fact, it was the second such hi-profile piracy case since another Spanish fishing ship, the ‘Playa de Bakio’, carrying 26 crewmen, suffered a similar experience on April 2008. However there were

notable differences in the manner in which the government handled the crisis to recover both crewmen and ship. While the Spanish government paid a ransom in the range of €700.000 in the Playa de Bakio case to end the hostage situation, the 'Alakrana' case was riddled not only with poor decision-making, but also with spectacular poor judgment and coordination, compounded by an inability or unwillingness to assume political responsibilities.

To be prepared in this case mean to have a defined action protocol, not only used for the rescue aspects but also for the possible payment and, of course, for the crewmen safety, as well as their communicative dimension. Considering that every organization has crises derived from its own nature and sector, a Government must prevent certain situations or facts that can probably face. A good foresight would allow an agile and effective communication management before any fact.

On the other hand, related the second the communicative management phase, the Reaction, it is clear that the Spanish Government was forced to **react communicatively** to the irruption of the facts by an exact communication policy with regard both to the hostages and his relatives, but also to the public opinion who needed some information about what's going on. Nevertheless, the Spanish Government did not prepare and neither developed a real communication strategy, if we consider the many mistakes committed and the apparent improvisation on his decisions.

We can observe this idea in several fronts:

a) Crisis committee

A basic measure at the starting point of any crisis is to constitute a Crisis committee as the cabinet that will manage the measures, solutions and messages to solve the situation<sup>1</sup>. Soon after the situation unfolded, a crisis management ministerial cabinet team was created. This Crisis committee was coordinated by María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, Deputy Prime Minister, but it was a big mistake not to point to any identified a spokesperson. By contrast, different personalities like the Minister of the Spanish Foreign Office, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, or the Minister of Defence, Carme Chacón, or even the Minister of Agriculture, Elena Espinosa, or the Minister of Justice, Francisco Caamaño, and even the Prime Minister of Spain, Rodríguez Zapatero., acted as official spokesperson at different times in order to inform about the Crisis committee decisions. Surprisingly, the Interior Ministry, with all its known terrorism and hostage expertise and technical resources, was not included. However, a big confusion arose because a clear spokesperson representing the Government voice was lacked, so this was, in appearance, a shared responsibility, depending on each circumstance.

#### b) Slowness and silence in response

Sobre todo en los primeros momentos (horas y días) -cuando es más decisivo activar una política estratégica de comunicación ante la situación de crisis (más aún cuando existe un peligro real para seres humanos)- el Gobierno se manifiesta con excesiva lentitud y parsimonia, obviando las necesidades reales de información de los diferentes colectivos. Entre el día 2 y el 3 de octubre se manifiestan contra el Gobierno y su ministra de Defensa, Carme Chacón, todas las fuerzas políticas del Congreso (PP, CiU, PNV y BNG), y con especial virulencia el PNV, que llevaba dos años encabezando una reclamación permanente para que los pesqueros españoles en el Índico pudieran llevar protección militar. El Gobierno se manifiesta en todo momento a favor de Seguridad Privada en los barcos.

During the earlier moments, when it is more decisive to activate a strategic communication policy to face the crisis situation of crisis (even more when a threat exists for human beings), the Spanish Government showed an excessive slowness and parsimony, avoiding the real need of information coming from different implicates. Between the 2nd and the 3rd of October, all the political parties in the Congress (PP, CiU, PNV and BNG) demonstrated against the Government, and specially against the Defense Secretary, Carme Chacón. Indeed, since two years before that time, they supported a permanent claim for the Spanish fishing boats to include military protection in the Indic ocean. Nevertheless, the Spanish Government almost supported the private security for those shipping boats.

In fact, as another sample of this slowness, the Prime Minister spoke in public about the issue for the first time on 5th of November to assure that "the situation was channelled" and to request the mass media and the political officers to extreme prudence and discretion. It is a relevant fact that the Prime Minister acted as the visible face in front of public opinion just on the moment close to the end, more than one month after the hijacking took place. That was the first words in public from the Spanish Prime Minister to public opinion and to hostage relatives. Some days after, on November 17th, he was, paradoxically, the person who informed about the Alakrana freedom with these words: "The Alakrana sails freely towards safety waters. The crewmen are healthy and safe". It had happened 47 days since the hijacking.

#### c) Transfer of responsibility communication strategy

In the earlier moments, the Spanish Government chose a transfer of responsibility strategy, which means to avoid any responsibility in the fact management that caused the Alakrana hijacking on the 2nd of October. Instead, they try to transfer that responsibility to any other persons or institutions. In fact, the Ministry of Defence states that the Alakrana and three other fishing ships from France and Spain had been warned 24 hours earlier of the danger they were in because several suspicious



ships had been sighted, and the area where they were fishing made it difficult to protect them.

The Ministry of Defence said that she really wasn't sure if the Alakrana shipping boat had received that message because they didn't answer. Again, the Ministry of Defence assured that it wasn't the first time for the Alakrana to sail too far away the protection zone, but they didn't notice. "Every one is free and responsible for their actions", said Jaime Domínguez Buj, Chief of the Defence General Staff Operations.

Since October 4<sup>th</sup>, the Spanish newspapers began to show data related the abductors or hijackers (number, armament, contacts done...) but the governmental source is not included in the information. Instead, others "knowledgeable" sources are mentioned. Even, on the same October 5<sup>th</sup> it is said: "The Spanish Government reported yesterday that the Foreign Office Ministry, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, has foreseen to initiate conversations in the "following hours" with the Somali authorities to exchange impressions and information concerning the hijacking and his authors, looking for the ship freedom".

#### d) Lack of correspondence between discourse and facts

At the moment of constructing messages in crisis situations, it is necessary to consider the type of information that our publics need to know, which point to three concrete questions: What is happening? What has caused the crisis? What are we doing to solve it? How can we guarantee that this will never happen again?

These three fundamental directions should be crucial for the Government messages during the crisis. The communication management in this triple direction would help to calm the situation and generates confidence on the institution in the whole process and the successful end. However, in the Alakrana case, firstly, to the first question, what caused this situation, the answer is quite short in time, so that the Government should focus on the next to questions, related the facts solutions and how can they avoid similar situations in the future. However, communicative efforts coming from the Spanish Government pointed to the diffusion of messages against the opposition party (PP). They lost too much time with this communication line that was quite often in the official public speeches, trying to show the lack of loyalty that characterized opposition parties in such critical situations.

A decisive moment was represented in the hijacker threat of killing the hostages if the Spanish Government did not return back his two mates arrested in Spain.<sup>2</sup> In fact, some members of the

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<sup>2</sup> The cabinet decided the two pirates should be transferred to Spain, a decision that contradicted an opinion by the Armed Forces' Intelligence Center (CIFAS) suggesting this may endanger the Alakrana and its crewmen and undercut the government's bargaining power. Simultaneously, this action could violate plain national and international law; the bases for these contradictions result from a detention without having received prior hijacking notice. Secondly, Vice-

Spanish Government flew to Galicia to meet personally the hostage families. The result was even more pernicious: "they have not told us anything at all, it was a wasting time visit" said a hostage family member. After a meeting of more than three hours, that was the way for the crew members of the Alakrana families to evaluate the Government visit. Even more, they generated some more doubts in the Spanish government competence to solve the situation: "They are, even, more lost than we thought at first".

The set of messages must be characterized for sufficient uniformity presents, that is to say, uniqueness. They all must go in the same direction not to fall down in evident contradictions between different members, in this case, of the Government of the nation. The Executive must speak with an alone voice and in the same line (that before must be agreed for the organs on decision). For it the coordination of the messages is indispensable, independently of the persons who personalize to the institution in every moment.

Besides, as theoretical background suggests, messages coming from the governmental sources must be characterized for having enough uniformity, that is to say, uniqueness. They all must follow the same strategic direction, in order to avoid contradictions. For this purpose, the Spanish Government should speak with an alone voice and in the same previous agreed line. A high level of message coordination is, in this sense, indispensable. However, without a single and authorized spokesperson, and with the presence of different points of view coming from each Ministry, the task of placing message in a strategic position among public opinion was nearly impossible.

Another suggestion from crisis management theorist is the need of a closed relation between known facts and political discourses. Related to this idea, on the morning of 5<sup>th</sup> of November, hijackers had removed to land three men in order to demand that the Spanish Government was liberating their two arrested mate. Distressed, the relatives demonstrated his indignation with the Spanish Government. So reassuring messages on the Government's part, while the captain called his family and assured: "We have been told that if there is no movement within the next three days, they will start killing us in threes".

A presumable incoherence, at least denounced on the part of the relatives, was the hostage exchange. "The release of the two people under arrest was never a condition at any point of the negotiations", officials said on November 5<sup>th</sup>, only admitting this factor might have raised the

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President Maria Teresa Fernandez De la Vega advised the Public Prosecution Office to denounce the case. Seeing no solid ground to build a case against the pirates in Spanish territory, the Public Prosecution Office refused to handle the case, after which Vice-President De la Vega had the State's Attorneys Office, through Justice Minister Caamano, denounce the case before the Special Court. Finally, judge Garzon had the pirates moved to Spain.

ransom. That was not what the sailors expressed to their families. "This issue is on the table from the first minute and it is the hardest obstacle", the crewmen' relatives assured.

New refused facts took place when law institutions were implicated. In fact, on November 12<sup>th</sup>, the High Court publicized an unusual note that supported that the decision of moving to Spain both pirates involved in the hijacking was an exclusive Governmental responsibility. In their own words, "no judge from the High Court has required this case". Again, the Spanish Government reliability and credibility is questioned.

#### e) Relatives: Neglected as priority public

The main priorities of the Spanish Government communication efforts were clear: mainstream media, the Somalia Government and the hijackers. Nevertheless, they did a big mistake when they neglected the regular and direct communication with the priority public: the relatives. The hostage families were, definitively, the crucial public because, firstly, they were suffering the hijacking consequences on their own lives, but also because they were often interviewed by mass media looking for updated information to replace the Government silence.

Some of these relatives asked for new governmental actions to solve the crewmen lives. They thought that the governmental inaction or passivity would bring to a tragic end. While the hijacker threat was on the table, the Spanish Government should have paid a special attention to relatives and start a private diplomacy pointing to recovery confidence among relatives. However, the lack of this governmental credibility derived from his action (or inaction) forced the families to public denounce the Spanish Government management.

For several times, families asked for explanations from the Spanish Government related the negotiation process. To face this situation the Spanish executive decided to name Juan Carlos Martín Fragueiro, in charge of the Spanish General Secretariat of the Sea, to deal with the task of reporting the families on the crewmen's conditions, although on November 5, 33-year-old Silvia Albés, Pablo Costas' wife, complained: "I called Fragueiro in the morning, after my husband had phoned me to let me know that the pirates had taken three sailors to solid ground. He told me he was in a crisis cabinet, and that he'd call me later. I am still waiting."

An interesting data pointing to the idea that priority publics were margined was the fact that until the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, even more than a month since the hijacking started, they couldn't meet the Spanish President, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.

f) Leaks resource

Leaks were a usual resource in the information process related the Alakrana case. The irruption of non official information coming from no identified information sources was permanent during those weeks. They showed, first, the Spanish Government incompetence to stop other information sources that could danger the negotiation process and, second, his incompetence to provide quality information that could keep the message initiative.

There are some good examples in this sense:

-October 3<sup>rd</sup>: the crewmen are known to be safe because of an e-mail that the captain sent to his daughter.

-October 8<sup>th</sup>: Andrew Mwangura's (head of the Sailors Help Department) confirmation as mediator person wasn't a Governmental decision but was accepted among implicates.

-October 15<sup>th</sup>: the price of ransom in 4 million dollars is leaked among press agencies and mass media, besides the two pirates under arrest freedom.

-October 28: one of the hijackers (Hussein Badmax) threatens to hand hostages over to the families of the two pirates under arrest in Spain, who remain imprisoned in Madrid.

-November 6<sup>th</sup> : breaking-off of negotiations.

-November 11<sup>th</sup>: media reported that the same Government that tried to take those arrested pirates off, had also encouraged the hurried up process for judges and fiscales to judge those pirates in Spain, as soon as they were arrested.

Finally, related the last communicative management phase, the post crisis, after the wrong practices already mention, it is logic to think that the Spanish Government's reputation was damaged. Indeed, the way in which the crisis was solved already showed the weakness of the Spanish Government. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, after 45 days, the pirates free Basque fishing boat Alakrana, after the Spanish Government paid around 2.7 million euros that were thrown from a light aircraft. Even there were some efforts to capture the pirates and to shout them from the Spanish Army helicopters, the pirates could come to Somali coast very fast and definitively fled. The Spanish Government stumbled with incompetence once more in another piracy case, and that was the main argument for the opposition to attack the governmental crisis management.

From the experience of both Playa de Bakio hijacking first, and then the Alakrana, the Government decided to activate a protocol to manage this kind of accidents. The goal of this protocol, according to De la Vega vice- president, "will be at tool to institutionalise and safeguard practices whose effectiveness has already been proven". At least, one of the main lesson of the crisis management had been learnt.

#### **4. Some lessons learnt about hijacking management**

While crises begin as a negative/threat, effective crisis management can minimize the damage and, in some case, allow an organization to emerge stronger than before the crisis. However, crises are not the ideal way to improve an organization. But no organization is immune from a crisis so all must do their best to prepare for one. The Alakrana case study provides a number of ideas that can be incorporated into an effective crisis management program.

The Alakrana case management showed the need for Governments and Public Administration to have a preventive communicative policy in order to face critical situations, as it was. The Alakrana fishing boat crisis in the coast of Somalia is also a good example of how a bad communication management can contribute, not only to a worse public image perception, but also to generate an anxiety and worried general sense among population, or even to complicate future hijacking resolutions.

The first lesson learnt from this case is that any government should be prepared for these circumstances, because they can happen at anytime. As other political scenarios, hijackings are always a potential risk for the organization. Other lessons are related to the way an institution – in this case a Government- react when one of these crisis starts. When it happens, from the beginnings, a Government should know that the quick response is priority, and that he need to control any potential information leaks from other sources. An accurate crisis communication management includes an information quality delivery process, where political discourse were coherent with real facts, with an unique and coordinated message communication, looking for more affected priority publics (relatives in this case). That is, definitively, the only chance to face with communication resources such a difficult situations as hijackings, a really threat to democracy.

As the Strategic Studies Group suggests, the Spanish Government's perceived shyness to use force across missions where the Spanish Armed Forces (FAS) are involved, including piracy prevention, had encouraged new hijackings in the same zone. Yet the question that underlies the problem remains under which conditions should governments negotiate with criminals, including terrorists and pirates; and how. In this case, the government's awful management highlighted this dilemma, with the added importance of the media, whose excessive implication often endangers a hostage operation. The spectacularization of news in media outlets, its speed dissemination, as well as the emphasis today on terrorism, crime or acts of violence, complicated the government's ability to enforce its will upon criminals and apply a strategy ensuring a positive outcome.

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