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# YOUR VOTE MATTERS



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### **Resistance to Elicitation and Interrogation** **Philip A. Mullenix**

In order to maintain their cover, particularly during deployment, Intelligence Officers and Special Operations Forces must always be alert to seemingly innocent contacts with people who, in fact, are hostile intelligence agents. Casual inquiries initiated by such individuals are defined within section 9-20 of U.S. Army Field Manual 2-22.3 as “elicitation”, i.e., interaction with a human source where the source is not aware of the specific purpose for the conversation. Unsuspecting Intel-officers and Operators can be vulnerable to compromise of their identities, their teammates’ identities, mission objectives, and operational security.

Elicitation oftentimes occurs in public places such as airports, commercial flights, or locations deemed safe for Intel-officers and Operators to socialize or relax with teammates. The local US embassy may recommend restaurants or establishments which are frequented by embassy staff where the food is good and

the environment popular among westerners. These are target-rich environments for hostile intelligence agents who may present themselves as a naïve visitor to the area, a sympathetic indigenous civilian, or even a fellow American thrilled to find someone from the United States sitting next to them at a bar.

The approach taken during elicitation is discreet, usually started through innocuous conversation with little self-disclosure being volunteered by the elicitor who’s focused more upon being an intense and sympathetic listener. Non-pertinent questions are asked of a target source in order to conceal the elicitor’s objectives, strengthen rapport, and break the source’s concentration.

This process could occur over a span of minutes. Depending upon opportunity and availability of time, however, the elicitor may groom a source for days, weeks, or months through multiple “chance” en-



counters that build trust and weaken a target source's defenses. Gradually the hostile elicitor introduces their topic of interest, interspersed among non-pertinent topics, and solicits the source's opinions. The elicitor sustains the conversation through a variety of strategic approaches including simple compliments, polite requests for clarification or expansion upon whatever the target source may say, or even provocative challenges to the source's credibility.

Recognition of elicitation is the first challenge. Telltale signs of elicitation, some of which have been published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, include the following.

a) Assumed Knowledge, wherein the elicitor pretends to have knowledge or associations in common with the target.

b) Confidential Bait, wherein the elicitor pretends to disclose confidential information in the hopes that the target will reciprocate.

c) Criticism, wherein the elicitor complains about or criticizes an individual or circumstance that the target similarly suffers (or alternatively, to which the target might offer a defense), hoping that the target will make an unguarded disclosure of information.

d) Deliberate False Statements, wherein the elicitor inaccurately states a "fact" in the hopes that the target will correct the error with true information.

e) Feigned Ignorance, wherein the elicitor pretends to be ignorant of a topic in the hopes that the target will be willing to "educate" the elicitor.

f) Being a Good Listener, wherein the elicitor listens patiently and reinforces the target's emotions, (e.g., being taken for granted, overlooked, not appreciated) to gain the target's confidence as someone in whom the target can freely confide.

g) Leading Questions, wherein an elicitor frames questions around a presumption which itself is the sought-after disclosure of information.

h) Macro to Micro, wherein the elicitor begins the conversation on a topic in broad terms and then slowly narrows the focus towards the sought-after detailed information.

i) Mutual Interests, wherein the elicitor shares with a target similar interests or experiences in the hopes of building rapport before soliciting information.

j) Oblique Reference, wherein an elicitor speaks about one topic that might progressively lead to a corollary topic which involves the sought-after information.

k) Opposition or Feigned Incredibility, wherein an elicitor declares disbelief in the legitimacy of a target's statement, hoping that while subsequently defending their position the target discloses the sought-after confidential information.



l) Quoting Reported Facts, wherein the elicitor “quotes” real or fictitious “facts” as though they were already in the public domain, hoping to obtain actual data through confirmation or denial from an unsuspecting target.

m) Pretext Interview, wherein the elicitor initiates a conversation with the target based upon a false, and seemingly legitimate, premise.

Further, section 8-89 of U.S. Army Field Manual 2-22.3 describes “Mild Flattery” and “Provocation” as strategic approaches employed by elicitors when extracting intelligence from an unwary source. Mild flattery capitalizes on the human instinct to confide in someone who values one’s opinion or compliments one’s personal traits. Conversely, after establishing shared interests with a source, an elicitor might challenge a source’s statements in order to provoke anger or defensiveness that trigger unintended disclosures.

Once a suspected elicitation incident is *recognized*, **resistance** includes avoidance and reporting to superiors. This requires a clear understanding of operational and personal information which must never be revealed together with acute awareness that every interpersonal encounter and social environment “outside the wall” pose intelligence risks that cannot be overlooked. Resistance also includes: a) strict adherence to one’s cover identity; and b) being one hundred percent convincing of that cover through disciplined self-control of one’s verbal, paralinguistic, and nonverbal behavior.

A hostile elicitor will size up sources using a variety of metrics, including *nonverbal* demeanor which is a universal language that’s always on display. An Intel-officer’s or Operator’s confidence while maintaining their cover identity is conveyed through attentive posture with squared shoulders and a slight inward lean, absence of “barriers” (e.g., crossed arms/legs), absence of “supportive gestures” (e.g., sitting on hands, covering the mouth while speaking), frontal alignment, and natural posture shifts which are neither rigid nor erratic. Illustrative hand movements together with strong eye contact that does not border on a defiant stare will enhance credibility. “Grooming gestures” (e.g., adjusting clothing/accessories, fixing hair, brushing dust/lint/crumbs from clothes or surrounding environment, straightening/aligning items within reach such as cups, bottles, napkins, papers) and other “displacement behaviors” (e.g., picking of fingers, hand wringing, manipulation of external objects such as bottle caps, pens, paper clips, rubber bands) are outward signs of internal anxiety which will not go unnoticed by an astute elicitor.

Another metric in maintaining the credibility of one’s cover is through *paralinguistic* behavior. These are spontaneous vocal cues found in the way in which a target source delivers their choice of words. It’s not so much *what* is said but, rather, *how* it is said. Absence of response continuity (e.g., being tongue-tied, confused, irrational, or using incomplete fragmented sentences), fading voice volume at end of sentences, delayed responses, repeating or rephrasing a question, and inappropriate nervous laughter are signs of uncertainty. Credible responses are characterized by rational statements delivered with



brevity, conviction, assertive pitch, and clipped endings to words and phrases.

To be believable, an Intel-officer's or Operator's *verbal* responses should include unequivocally direct answers to questions (versus unresponsive answers, such as answering a question with a question or failing to answer a question at all) and definitive responses (versus qualified responses, such as "I think...", "I believe...", "not that I recall...", "as far as I know..."). One should stop and think before speaking. It's fundamentally sound to say as little as possible, because the more that's said during an attempted elicitation the more likely that a hostile agent might discern contradictions or weakness within the cover. If time-line construction is necessary to support a pretext identity, then selective memory gaps or absence of uniformity of detail throughout a narrative will telegraph deception.

Finally, resistance both to subtle elicitation as well as to overt interrogation requires a *will* to deliberately push the envelope of one's own limitations. Human nature creates breaking points, so it's unreasonable to expect anyone to fully withstand all forms of hostile questioning. For each individual, however, that threshold of tolerance will vary.

Among the tactics that help avoid reaching one's break point is *previsualization*. Previsualization is more than casual aforethought. Instead, it requires vivid anticipation of all five sensory perceptions that are likely to be experienced during an event *before* that event happens. This tactic transcends military operations and has widespread application within competitive sports, professions, and business

environments. For example, it's often reported that winning Super Bowl quarterbacks share a common strength of having successfully "slowed down" the frenetic pace of such a high-stakes event. Their success has been attributed to extensive previsualization not only of technical situations that they might face but also of the heightened perceptions within all five of their senses that they anticipated experiencing during the pressures of the moment. This, in turn, permits positive channeling of the body's adrenaline response, including sharp focusing of mental acuity.

Similarly, if an Intel-officer or Operator vividly previsualizes facing the previously discussed elicitation approaches within a wide array of potentially vulnerable situations, then his or her coping mechanism for resistance will have been effectively primed for a measured response when an incident actually occurs. Adversaries engaged in the tradecraft of elicitation should never be underestimated. To hold cover, one's situational awareness must include recognition of such approaches and resistance to being compromised by exercising exceptional self-control over their own verbal statements, paralinguistic cues, and nonverbal demeanors.

Resistance to interrogation, however, requires previsualization combined with additional mental processes which further sustain alertness and personal resolve under circumstances of elevated physical or psychological stress.

For purposes of previsualization, it's useful to review the following interrogation techniques cited with the Central Intelligence Agency Inspector General's Special Review, dated 7 May 2004, of Counterter-



rorism Detention and Interrogation Activities. Some have been included within United States SERE training programs. All of these cited techniques are among the potential challenges, at a minimum, that should be anticipated, or previsualized, in the event of enemy capture and subsequent interrogation.

1.Attention Grasp, wherein the detainee is quickly grabbed by the collar and drawn to the interrogator.

2.Walling, wherein the detainee is pulled forward and then quickly pushed back into a flexible wall, striking the wall with the detainee's shoulder blades.

3.Facial Hold, wherein the detainee's face is firmly held by the interrogator's hands along the side of the detainee's head.

4.Facial or Insult Slap.

5.Cramped Confinement, wherein the detainee is placed into a confined space, usually a small or large box.

6.Insects, wherein harmless insects are placed with a detainee into a confined space.

7. Wall Standing, wherein a detainee must use their fingertips to hold a leaning stance against a wall from a distance of 4 or 5 feet away.

8.Stress Positions, forcing a detainee to maintain a sitting, standing, or kneeling posture.

9.Sleep and/or Food Deprivation.

10.Waterboarding.

11.Intentional infliction or threatened infliction of severe physical pain or suffering, including stiff brush and shackles.

12.Administration/application or threatened administration/application of mind-altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or personality.

13.Threat of imminent death.

14.Threat that another person will imminently be subjected to death, severe physical pain or suffering, or the administration or application of mind altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or personality.

15.Mock burial.

16.Mock execution.

17.Smoke blown into a detainee's face to induce nausea/disorientation.

18.Use of cold, nakedness, water dousing.

19.Hard takedown.

20.Cruel or degrading treatment intended to induce despair and sense of loss of control.



In addition to previsualization of anticipated interrogation techniques, mental alertness and the will to resist can be enhanced by setting short term goals, such as enduring the next hour, event, or making it through the next guard-shift or meal interval. Concentration upon such short term goals deflects stress, helps maintain clarity of thought during questioning, and provides a sense of accomplishment when those goals are met. “Self-talk” (wherein a detainee reminds themselves that the interrogation tactics being played out are nothing more than that which the detainee had already previsualized) will strengthen a detainee’s confidence and provide reassurance that he or she has full command over their own thoughts despite the interrogator’s persistent attempts to induce feelings of despair, loss of control, and futility of continued resistance. These countermeasures, together with a predetermined choice of internal response control (such as deep breathing or fixation upon the mental image of a loved one) will help cope with the physical/mental/emotional demands of interrogation and thereby defer one’s breaking point for the disclosure of critical information.

Inasmuch as this discussion of resistance has included some methodologies related to the use of SERE interrogation techniques, it is both appropriate and necessary to conclude by referencing the Personnel Recovery Memorandum issued 17 June 2009 by the then Commander of the United States Joint Forces Command, General James Mattis, in regards to “Prohibition on the Use of Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape or Code of Conduct-related Techniques for Interrogation Purposes” which specifically states that “SERE techniques for interrogations of personnel in DoD custody or control is prohibited.” In short, the use of SERE techniques as approved intelligence interrogation, detainee debriefing, and tactical questioning is barred, including upon detainees in any DoD facility.

End.

Philip A. Mullenix has provided instruction in the Reid Technique of interviewing and interrogation since 1978 to the United States’ SOF, MI/CI units, SERE instructors, and intelligence community.

