

COMMENTARY

CHANGING INTERROGATION FACILITY MANAGEMENT TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY

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“Abu Ghraib,” “Guantanamo,” “water boarding,” and “torture” are politically charged and evocative terms that bring to mind interrogation. Nine years into the Afghanistan and Iraq wars (though the “combat phase” of the latter has recently ended), strenuous debate continues over the efficacy of human intelligence (HUMINT) techniques employed to obtain critical information. It is my definite sense that this debate has become so politically charged as to be counterproductive. Since interrogation often provides the essential elements of information in asymmetrical-warfare analysis, perhaps the time has come to end the debate and ask the question, “How is the military intelligence (MI) community preparing and supporting its interrogators for the future?” Now is the time for MI to enact significant structural changes in interrogation-facility management to enable exploiters more effectively while providing necessary oversight. These structural changes should include an increased understanding of complex prison social systems and the utilization of central orchestration of interrogation operations.

By way of introduction, interrogation can generally be divided into two distinct

categories—tactical and booth. “Tactical interrogation,” sometimes referred to as “mobile interrogation,” takes place in the operating environment—that is, in the field or at the tactical objective. Its aim is to exploit quickly time-sensitive, perishable information for the mission commander. Should the tactical team identify a high-value individual (HVI)—one who is known or suspected to be directly involved in terrorist or enemy

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operations—it will generally transport the HVI to a holding facility for further questioning. This leads to the second category of interrogation, which I will call “booth interrogation,” since the interrogation booth in traditional holding facilities is the designated area for questioning that focuses on both the tactical and larger operational pictures. Booth interrogation is generally long-term, works multiple priority intelligence requirements, and is staggeringly complicated when compared to tactical interrogation.

Once transferred from the tactical team and made a detainee, the HVI becomes part of an intricate social system that involves interrogators, security personnel, clergy, medical staff, nongovernmental organizations and outside agency representatives, translators, administrators, analysts, and, most important, other detainees. While the Army field manual (FM) 2-22.3, which guides all Department of Defense interrogation, devotes particular attention to effective communication with guards and the use of interpreters, it does not focus on the larger social system.¹

Understanding the effects of this social system is vital to a successful interrogation. It is a system that many terrorists have been trained to work to their advantage. This training takes the form of printed training manuals and doctrine, online discussion forums or chat rooms, and even e-magazines and autobiographical accounts that tutor terrorists in how to “triumph over interrogators.”²

Since the enemy understands how to use the complex social systems within an interrogation facility to his advantage, it is reasonable that the MI community should examine this aspect in greater depth as well and make the changes necessary to leverage all the moving parts of this system in a way that will give interrogators the greatest advantage.

ISOLATION EFFECT AND REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

A traditional interrogation facility is relatively isolated from the combat zone. Once a detainee is taken into its custody, the United States becomes responsible for his welfare.³ Conducting interrogation operations away from the tactical objective is necessary for security; also, the isolation produces a fishbowl effect. All personnel who work the mission, from clergy to guards to intelligence analysts, work and live together and, depending on the security parameters, there may be little outside interaction.

The isolation influences interpersonal relationships within the facility, and the detainees take note of that. While I am not suggesting that the facility staff deliberately shares information with detainees, detainees certainly talk to each other and compare notes about everything they see.⁴ Security forces, for example, interact with the detainees simply because of their proximity, and interpreters build fundamental bonds with detainees through language and, often,

religion.⁵ Even informal relationships between staff and interrogators can have the potential either to sabotage or to promote an interrogator's intelligence collection mission inside the booth. When an interrogator enters the booth to conduct questioning, it is likely that he is already a known entity to the detainee.

This makes an interrogator's reputation among the population as important as his rapport with the individual—maybe more so, depending on the value a specific detainee group places on character. “Reputation management,” therefore, becomes paramount for successful intelligence collection. Word of how an interrogator interacts with a detainee or a facility staff member spreads quickly, especially to the detainees themselves.

While isolation may appear to be a disadvantage for managing a detainee population's perceptions, seclusion can provide a unique opportunity. The fishbowl effect is ideally favorable in highly controlled, well structured environments that can leverage centers of influence by design. An example of this is boot camp.

SEND IN THE MARINES

The military is adept in “breaking” people and gaining their loyalty. While this is accomplished during recruit training, a similar method could be effectively used in interrogation facilities. Recruit training is characterized by a tremendous structure, a rigid schedule, and indoctrination that is led by a group of drill instructors playing specific roles in the transformation of civilians into service members. A comparable structure in a detention facility could create an economy of force and maximize intelligence collection.

Drill instructors are trained to work as a team and are assigned such specific roles as “the nurturer,” “the heavy,” “the parental figure,” etc. They portray their specific roles knowing they will have tremendous effects on the group, as one role plays off the others. One could say it is the most effective “Mutt and Jeff,” or “good cop, bad cop,” technique in existence. The successful manipulation of the group is dependent on drill instructors' efficacy and on their ability to work together, as well as with all outside staff. Moreover, they are bound in purpose by a solid code of ethics and strong leadership.

ORCHESTRATING A LARGER EFFORT

A centralized “drill instructor” model within an interrogation facility could tie together several small-team efforts, utilizing the interrogators' strengths and weaknesses and managing detainee perceptions of those interrogators prior to booth questioning.

At present, interrogation planning is often limited to the concept of a small team, or “tiger team.” Interrogator-analyst teams submit their interrogation

plans to a supervisor for approval. Once a plan is approved, however, supervisors do not orchestrate how interrogators interact with others in the detention facility, simply because their roles are big enough already. Supervisors are already responsible for the conduct of several tiger teams, tracking intelligence, and ensuring quick dissemination of tactical intelligence, as well as for several other intelligence and administrative functions. Yet success, if defined by the collection of actionable intelligence, is ultimately driven by an individual interrogator's ability to question a detainee, and that ability is linked to the interrogator's reputation within the facility.

In this model, experienced interrogation "leads," or conductors, attempt to mitigate inexperience and capitalize on the strengths of individual interrogators by assigning roles and working closely with their teams of interrogators to create and augment interrogator reputations. To this end, a conductor would require strong command and control over all actions both inside and outside the booth, as well as an understanding of the larger social system. As with drill instructors, the interrogators' roles would have tremendous effects on the group, and a conductor, in essence, would become the unseen custodian of a centrally orchestrated effort to influence all moving parts and shift centers of influence within a facility structure so as to promote intelligence collection. This rigid perception management would ensure that staff and detainees become participants (if unwittingly) of the overall design to support intelligence collection.

While this high level of perception management is not possible in an ordinary setting, the fishbowl effect makes it attainable in an interrogation facility.

CHANGING PHILOSOPHY, COUNTERING PERCEPTIONS

Additionally, an orchestrated interrogation effort driven by strong central leadership can exploit a detainee's expectations to the interrogator's advantage. A strong conductor can recognize numerous holes in enemy doctrine or perception and act quickly to have the interrogators meet or counter them. For example, the 179-page field manual *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants, Military Series*, commonly referred to as the Manchester Document, was located by police in Manchester, England, during a home search of an al-Qa'ida member. It provides specific guidance for operatives. Lesson 17 instructs al-Qa'ida operatives about what to expect and how to organize in a detention facility.⁶ As in any guidance, it leaves holes for interrogators to exploit. This is only one instance; every blog, article, and fatwa (formal Islamic opinion) contains holes. A centralized effort can assure that interrogation tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) adapt as the enemy does, especially given the advances in biometrics, forensics, and polygraph examination.

Strong centralized interrogation is achievable within a highly selective and rigid professional structure, and the effects can be swift. Structure manipulation for management of detainee populations is nothing new. In 605 BC, the Babylonian empire captured Jerusalem. Rather than enslaving the population, King Nebuchadnezzar indoctrinated his prisoners, instructing them in Babylonian language, culture, and religion. He allowed them to eat at his table and even gave them Babylonian names. When the Medo-Persian empire overthrew the Babylonians in 539 BC, Cyrus the Great freed all Babylonian captives, but many would not leave. It is worth noting that this happened in the span of a modern lifetime.

Somewhere between lockdown and “friendly captivity” a balance can be struck, orchestrated by interrogation leadership (fully visible only to interrogation leadership), in the recognition that all staff and detainees affect detainee exploitation. This model has the potential not only to shape intelligence collection through interrogation in the short term (delivering timely tactical intelligence) but to shift the “hearts and minds paradigm” over a longer detention period.

EXPANDING THE ROLE OF NAVY HUMINT?

Although the Army has long dominated booth interrogation operations for the military, Navy HUMINT is the ideal service component to innovate and implement such structural changes. While the Army has groomed some of the best interrogation professionals in the intelligence community, it is an exceptionally large organization, with a spotty reputation (think human pyramids). The Navy and Marine Corps, on the other hand, have controlled the growth and quality of their HUMINT program through a rigorous selection process and willingness to dismiss unfit candidates from the training program. The program is autonomous, highly specialized, and built on a long-standing and successful model. At present, Navy and Marine Corps interrogation training focuses on tactical interrogation more than booth interrogation, which is understandable, given Navy HUMINT’s mission to support special operations.

The Navy and Marine Corps have an organizational culture conducive to change, since their focus on maneuver warfare and distributed operations has forced swift TTP changes in the field for troop protection and intelligence collection.⁷ Marine Corps distributed-operations tactics are analogous to the changes necessary for successful interrogation facility management, “exercising tactical initiative and creativity based on their commander’s intent and rapidly changing rules of engagement.”⁸ Due to its culture and its quality, Navy and Marine Corps HUMINT can rapidly integrate change, such as shifts to enemy counterinterrogation techniques like those advertised in *jihadi* chat rooms.

Expansion into booth interrogation operations would require significant increases for the Navy and Marine Corps HUMINT program; detention

operations at the brigade- and division-level interrogation facilities are labor-intensive. However, this would seem a wise investment. The Navy and Marine Corps HUMINT program is scandal free, which is remarkable considering the current operating environment, and it has a distinct lack of “battle scars.” It is the elite, thinking force that can operate to shift TTPs successfully in interrogation-facility management, fuse all-source intelligence into single-source operations for tactical intelligence exploitation, and shift the “hearts and minds paradigm” in the medium term.

It is time for the military intelligence community to conduct a clear-eyed review of its booth interrogation tactics, techniques, and procedures and to redefine itself. Navy and Marine Corps human intelligence is best poised to lead the way.

NOTES

1. U.S. Army Dept., *Human Intelligence Collector Operations*, Field Manual 2-22.3 (Washington, D.C.: 2006).
2. For training manuals and doctrine, see *Declaration of Jihad against the Country's Tyrants, Military Series* [hereafter Manchester Document], available at www.investigativeproject.org/. For online discussion forums or chat rooms, see “Forum Participant Shows Possible Detainees [*sic*] Tactics for Beating Investigation,” *Open Source Center*, Jihadist Websites OSC Summary in Arabic, 7 August 2009. For e-magazines, Abdul Hameed Bakier, “Countering the Counter-terrorists: Senior Jihadists Offer Advice on Security Techniques,” *Jamestown Foundation Monitor* 7, no. 11 (2009), pp. 6–9.
3. U.S. Army Dept., *Military Police Battlefield Circulation Control, Area Security, and Enemy Prisoner of War Operations*, Field Manual 19-4 (Washington, D.C.: 2009).
4. Manchester Document.
5. Jae Jung Song, “The Translatability: Universals Connection in Linguistic Typology: Much Ado about Something,” *Babel* 51, no. 4 (1993), pp. 308–22.
6. Manchester Document.
7. Terry Terriff, “Innovate or Die: Organizational Culture and the Origins of Maneuver Warfare in the United States Marine Corps,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 3 (2006), pp. 475–503.
8. Vincent Goulding, Jr., “Just Do It,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 132, no. 11 (2006), pp. 32–35.