

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1994
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
18 SEPT 95

TITLE: Experience With Types Of Agent Motivation

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VOLUME: 3 ISSUE: Fall YEAR: 1959

STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



A collection of articles on the historical, operational, doctrinal, and theoretical aspects of intelligence.

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On the importance of knowing whether a foreign agent works for money, ideals, venture, dignity, or love, and what it is he loves.

EXPERIENCE WITH TYPES OF AGENT MOTIVATION

Paul Tollius

Late in World War II, as a young, relatively inexperienced Chief of Station, I had an eye-opening introduction to human motives for intelligence agency. The young Moroccan waiting in my office at the American Legation in Tangier was said to have worked very successfully for the Germans in the past. He was now offering to collaborate with the United States. His motive for changing over, and indeed the condition attached to his offer, he made clear, was that I do away with his rival for the hand of a fair maiden living in Tetuan, over in the Spanish zone. I thought he was joking, and must have betrayed my incredulousness before I realized that he was absolutely serious. I have to confess that our interview that day failed to produce any plan for collaboration.

At our second meeting, however, I managed (without promising to do his unworthy rival in) to persuade him to furnish some proof of his own worthiness, the good faith of his offer. On the spot he tendered the information that 100 tons of canned fish consigned to Germany were being stored under our very noses, in a huge warehouse near the Legation. The German intelligence services had bought it some time back, he said, but as German and neutral ships had become scarcer and scarcer they had not yet devised a way to get it to a German port.

We found the fish, mostly tunny, just as he had described it; but I never saw the agent again. The full story of his motivation took some reconstructing. His original bloodthirsty proposition may have been prompted by unwarranted conclusions from the fact that another Moroccan who had worked for the Germans had been found dead in the well on the prop-

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erty where I lived in Tangier. (I think he fell in trying to get a drink.) When the agent realized from his first contact with me that there was little likelihood of our literally wielding the axe on his rival, he made us the instrument for as devastating a blow as he was able to deliver him at the moment: it was the rival's father, I learned later, when as Allied representative I took over the German consular files in Spanish Morocco, who had sold the fish to the Germans. They had paid him, but left the fish for cover in his name, and he was hoping against hope that it would never be delivered, that the ending of the war would leave him with both the money and the fish.

Motives and Results

The brief collaboration of my Moroccan did not justify any great psychoanalytical effort on my part, but the motivation of a continuing agent is, or should be, the subject of constant study on the part of his case officer. Why is it, if we are getting the desired results out of an agent, that we worry about his motivation? Given the complexity of human behavior, you may say, the determination of any but the most superficial motives is a job for an expert, and if we like what the agent is producing we shouldn't particularly care why he produces it.

Maybe we shouldn't, until something goes wrong; but if we don't, by then it is likely to be too late. Results, the take from an operation, are without question a primary consideration, but so is the agent's possible disaffection if it should result in his passing our information to the enemy. And even short of that extreme, unless a case officer knows what it is that drives his agent he cannot know to what lengths the man will go, freely or under pressure, what risks he is willing to take, at what point he will break, tell another intelligence service what he is doing, or simply stop producing. Perhaps nothing is really more important than learning just why an agent is willing to take the chances entailed in clandestine activity. And the closer the case officer comes to a true assessment of his agent's motivation, the more likely that he will be able to run a successful, long-term operation.

The experience of almost twenty years in the active handling of agents has begun to provide us with a body of knowl-

edge about their psychology from which it should be possible to draw certain generalizations. Despite the complexity of the subject, several types of needs or wants which lead men to become agents can be distinguished and described. There is the ideologically motivated agent, a kind that was not difficult to find during the war. There is the seeker for personal security—often, after the defeat of Germany, the same agent who had earlier been motivated by the highest principles. There is the agent pursuing one aspect or another of financial gain, the camp-follower of intelligence networks since primitive man first spied on enemy tribes. There is the adventurer, the hater, the criminal, the patriot, the man driven by religious zeal.

Ethically, the motives can be noble, crass, or base, and I believe this moral scale is not without useful application in the assessment of an agent. A few case histories may serve to show how the value of an operation is affected by the character of the agent's motivation and by our understanding it.

The "Practical" Mercenary

The agent who is working for purely "practical" reasons—money—can be expected to play it practical all the way. And one eminently practical step he can take is to keep the intelligence service or the police of his own country informed of what he is doing, as a kind of insurance policy against the chief occupational hazard of spying. This is why the "fearless" agent is suspect. It is not man's normal nature to be free of fear when he is doing dangerous work. Although an occasional agent who frightens you by his disregard for his own—and unfortunately *your* own—security is fearless simply because he is not well balanced, the lack of fear is most often due to "reinsurance" with the local service. And it is not long before the agent who is in touch with his own service begins to wonder what the Russians or another Communist service would pay for what he knows. If he doesn't get the idea by himself, his local service is likely to give him guidance and help in establishing contact with other services and agents.

There may, of course, be practical reasons for not taking out this insurance. Testing one agent who claimed, and perhaps had convinced himself, that he was not working for the

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money but out of patriotism—many mercenaries will not admit their true motivation—I posed him a theoretical question, ostensibly about one of my other agents. “Why,” I asked, “didn’t this man, since he was working solely for money, go to the police of his country and tell them about his activity as a means of ‘reinsurance’?” “Oh,” he replied, “the police would have made him turn over most of his pay to them.” This danger, I am certain, that the police, corrupt in many countries of the world, would demand a large cut, is the only deterrent preventing a good many mercenary agents from keeping the local police or intelligence service fully informed.

The Ideological Zealot

Among the ideologically inspired agents plentiful during and for a time after the war, of particular interest were the anti-Franco Spaniards, and especially those of Socialist bent, those whose frustration and pent-up fury had been wreaked on the Communists during the last grim defense of Madrid. Case officers who recruited Spanish Socialist agents early in World War II from the refugee camps in French Africa have attested to their vitality and devotion to the Allied cause. Most Spanish Socialists with whom I became acquainted were motivated by the expectation that the Allies would finish their wartime job by effecting Franco’s downfall. A chain of these men with whom I came in contact in 1945 lived with the hope that their efforts would culminate in the defeat and destruction not only of Hitler but of the dictatorship in Spain. These agents worked unsparingly and with fervor.

In 1950, when I renewed contact with groups of these agents, I at first found their motivation cooled but their work still sustained by the same hope. When in 1946 the U.N. countries had recalled their ambassadors from Franco Spain, there had been general elation and a feeling among them that their objective was finally in sight. But in October 1950 the United States and other U.N. powers resumed diplomatic relations with Franco. Now the bottom fell out of these agents’ motivation.

Their disillusion soon began to color their work. A close scrutiny of their efforts as reflected in their reports revealed a substantial falling off in both the quality and the volume of information produced. As good case officers, we made every

effort to revitalize their spirit and motivate them anew. This effort continued for several years, until a final assessment convinced us that the spark was gone, the desire to work for U.S. intelligence no longer there. Not only in these Socialists: other Spanish republican elements scattered around the world, particularly in France and Latin America, had also lost heart. Our worst problem was with those who remained agents, in spite of having concluded that the fight was over, for entirely practical considerations, the necessity of earning a livelihood. Continuing to go through the motions and in some instances camouflaging their disinterest, they were harder to assess and more troublesome to terminate when their contribution had become of questionable value.

The Patriot, Bound by Personal Tie

An agent whom I had inherited from another U.S. agency seemed a questionable individual. We were in great doubt about his true reason for working for the United States and had some reason to believe that his close acquaintance with Communist leaders in his country might mean, not that he represented a penetration of the Party on our part, but that he was a Communist agent. I was constantly pushing him to prove by the revelation of Communist Party secrets that he was in fact on our side. We spent the better part of a year in close fencing over this issue, and during this time I took great care about what leads were given him.

In 1948, a revolution, rather bloody for his peace-loving Mediterranean country, broke out. He was in the midst of the fighting and obviously very close to the Communist element which bore the brunt of the battle. Before the final scrimmages in which the Communist element was routed, the agent sought refuge in my home. I hid him for some three days. Whether because his presence was suspected or because of a lot of sniping was coming from the direction of my house, I was called on by armed riflemen wanting to search the house. I told them in a voice loud enough to be heard by the agent in hiding that I could not permit them to search the home of an American diplomat but that as I had nothing to hide I would be glad to have them in and talk with them. They were young boys, obviously nervous with a rifle, more friendly than hostile.

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They came in and I brought out a dozen cans of American beer. The beer was a happy choice, something they had not had and all that was needed to distract them. They were much more interested in carrying this loot off to their comrades than in searching the house. They were in such a hurry to go that one young man forgot his rifle and I had to call him back for it. A few days later, in a jeep with license plates bearing the American flag, I drove the agent about a hundred miles into the back country to his father-in-law's home. He emerged when things had quieted down and returned to work.

Whatever his leanings may have been before, this agent never forgot his rescue from a precarious situation. Before this incident, he told me years later, he had felt that the United States never trusted him and he therefore had little reason to trust us. He feared that we were even capable of exposing him to the Communists. Throughout the next ten years he proved beyond doubt his devotion and honest intent to serve the aims of U.S. intelligence.

Double Agent or Regenerate Adventurer?

An agent's motivation can be changed, either by circumstances or through the efforts of an interested and patient case officer. Some of the less desirable motive forces—money-hunger, hatred, love of adventure, fear—can be redirected and tempered by a careful program of indoctrination designed to bring out whatever finer purposes the agent has. Even the motivation of the enemy-controlled agent can be and has been changed through this process combined with a demonstration of superior tradecraft. It is surprising to see the effect on a double agent, one whose whole aim has been to serve his Russian master faithfully, when he comes to believe that the U.S. case officer is the superior of his Russian handler. This superior skill, coupled with bits of intelligence calculated to convince him that we know infinitely more about him and the Russian than he ever suspected, causes him to wonder whether he is working for the wrong or losing side.

It is often necessary to work with an agent when the direction of his primary allegiance is not clear and his motivation difficult to fathom. One such agent came to our attention by virtue of his contact with a known Soviet intelligence off-

cer. Our preliminary investigation of him had not even begun when it was reported from another area that the man had come in and told the story of his work for the Soviet case officer. He came quite clean, a fact verified by close surveillance and substantiated by his willingness to help entrap the Soviet case officer and get him declared *persona non grata*. He admitted freely, however, that his walking in to confess was mostly a means of buying insurance with the authorities of his own and the U.S. government. It was also, although he did not say so, a means for protecting his job with a steamship line which regularly called at U.S. ports.

Probably the best present test for double agency is a close analysis of the importance of the agent's take and the sensitivity of the target to which he has access. There are few intelligence services today that willingly give a double agent access to highly sensitive material. Now a close scrutiny of the use of this agent by the Russians led us to believe that they may have planned that he eventually become an unwitting double agent. The peculiarity of the requirements given him—the procurement of unclassified material with limited commercial distribution, for example, material the Soviets could get through any number of contacts—led us to the conclusion that they were being used for test assignments.

Further, the usually penurious Soviets seemed eager to pay exorbitant prices for this material, evidence that they believed the agent's motivation to be monetary and were building up in him a dependence on his new income. The superficial Soviet conclusion that the agent was motivated by greed was derived from his having bargained hard when first contacted, rationalizing his act in working for an unfriendly service with the justification that if he made them pay enough his crime would become honorable or at least forgivable.

While it was evident that this agent needed money and that this need motivated him, motivation is rarely simple, comprising only one element. It is as complicated as human nature, and changes with changing circumstances. This man had got along without money for a long time, and fundamentally he was not the type to whom money meant much. When he had it he spent it; when broke he cut down to cigarettes and coffee. His fixed weekly pay from the steamship line covered the sup-

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port of his estranged wife and children. He must, we thought, be driven by some more compelling motive.

We kept the agent under close observation, using surveillance and technical means. It gradually became apparent that he considered his life to date pretty much a shambles. His two marriages had ended in failure. Although he was easily successful with women, now in middle age the fascination of the chase was gone. In a less than morose or despondent stock-taking of his own worthwhileness, he had apparently concluded that his ledger was heavily weighted on the debit side.

We could only theorize, on the basis of our study, that he wanted somehow to do something worth while for himself and country. By chance he had become involved in a rather shady business which he finally recognized as an opportunity to do something against the Russians and for the West. This was the only solid reason we could find for his decision to carry on in the work. And if eyebrows should be raised at this conclusion, it can be added that he also needed money, the most common motivation of the cold-war agent, and that he was intrigued at the idea of being a "spy."

Was this enough to explain what made him tick? It would have to be, for the present, until the rope from which all agents dangle became so short as to reveal his soul. Sooner or later we would know, but probably not for a good long time, perhaps not until after his termination.

The Hungerer after Recognition

An intelligent European exiled from his native land had become through his ability and hard work a kind of financial seer in his adopted country. He was an intense, strange person whose driving force permitted him no rest and whose complex character defied analysis. He was recruited by a case officer who spoke his native tongue and was able to develop with him a personal rapport that made for successful working relationships. Among other things, this officer didn't mind that the agent dictated his reports, using him as secretary.

On the departure of this case officer the agent was turned over to a younger, less experienced one, who had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. At bottom democratic and

basically unaffected, he nevertheless usually left an impression of aloofness and perhaps condescension on many less well born. This new case officer found it unpalatable to act as a secretary. In meeting after meeting he cajoled the agent to write out his reports. He tried every trick and gimmick to this end. While the agent became more and more taciturn and stubborn, the officer grew increasingly determined that he would get him to write rather than dictate. A year of effort along these lines ended in making a once productive operation barren.

With a view to salvaging this operation a complete reassessment of the agent was now made. A careful scrutiny led to the conclusion that the agent's work for us was based largely on a desire to be accepted as an equal by the service. He also wanted to be accepted in the American community and in diplomatic circles. He needed this recognition both for its own sake and as a means of expanding his business contacts. If this analysis was correct, he should respond to carefully arranged invitations to cocktail parties of the local government and diplomatic set. A new case officer who could arrange such invitations was assigned, and he effected a complete about-face on the part of the agent. The question of dictating reports was never brought up, and after each party the reports began to flow as never before.

Motivation Misemployed

This is the case of Mr. X, exiled one-time general secretary of a European Communist Party, who in his late fifties showed the physical toll of a life divided between open and underground struggle but remained a mental giant beside the pigmies then leading the Party he had led. X was a short, bent, burly, grey-haired myopic, shambling along on his cane, whose very quietness seemed a veil to cover the dangerous quality lurking in a slowed and greying but still fierce bear.

He had challenged Stalin's high-handedness and come out only slightly scarred. He had been held a prisoner for some months in Moscow, but was finally released to return home. Ultimately he broke with the Kremlin. His brother-in-law, who had also been released from prison in Moscow, with considerably less prudence continued his Party contacts. In a

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street rendezvous with Kremlin agents in a Western European city he was stabbed to death.

Now Stalin was dead and the Soviets wanted X back. Since leaving the Communist Party he had become an important left-wing Socialist. The Kremlin bosses, X concluded, wanted to replace the Party leaders in his native land. These had been hand-picked by Stalin and were undoubtedly somewhat suspect.

A contact of mine who was a close friend of X called on me urgently one day to report that an important Soviet official had visited X. The Russian had offered him a trip to Moscow to talk things over with a view to resuming the Party leadership in his country. X had turned the proposition down. My contact believed, however, that he could get him to reconsider and accept with U.S. backing. Controlled general secretaries are not easy to come by; X was worth a real try.

Every means we could muster and many hours of work and planning went into this venture. It was of no avail: X would not go back. He feared he would meet the same fate as his brother-in-law if the Russians ever got him into the Soviet Union. He was eager to establish himself favorably in the eyes of the West but gave good reasons why he could not undertake this operation:

If he went back and even became general secretary again, he would still have to do as the Kremlin told him on all major matters. He was sure that a general secretary was only a puppet.

He no longer believed in Communism and would soon be found out by the Kremlin.

He would do nothing that might reflect on his sincerity and dedication to socialism or that could unfavorably affect his role in a new government in his country. It was in the cards that sooner or later a new government would be formed in which socialism would, after an interim, play an important if not dominant role.

He was mortally afraid of the Russians.

X did agree to another Russian proposal, a meeting in France or Italy to discuss their plan, and was willing to go

with U.S. backing if we had a distinct prior understanding that he would accept no Russian proposal to return to the fold. This opportunity to explore exactly what the Russians had in mind was deemed not worth to the United States the cost of a round trip for X and his wife. It was rejected, and this was the end of the X affair.

It should have been fairly evident to us from the first meeting with X that he could not be induced to go back to Communism by our glowing offers. Although he worked for a living, money was no inducement. He had no burning desire for revenge, nor was he attracted by the possibility of deceiving the Russians. From our viewpoint his motivation was negative. His having no children or close relatives blocked another channel through which some agents can be enticed. For this operation his basic interests were diametrically opposed to our desires.

Nevertheless we had doggedly persisted. In insisting on the all which X refused we ended up with nothing. We failed to develop the obviously more realistic opportunity to use X as a key man and continuing bait for the Russians. Surely what the Russians had really planned was to use him as a penetration of the Socialist Party; this must have been the main reason they wished to rehabilitate him. And X had been agreeable to a working arrangement which might even have given us time to create a motive he did not now have. We failed because we did not understand the motivation of the agent; we had lost sight of the agent's own desires. If X had been a weaker character and we had been able to persuade him to accept the Russian offer, it would have been a sorry affair indeed.

Ethics and Pragmatics

These cases illustrate how motives noble, crass, and base are made to serve intelligence objectives, but not with equal value. It can be argued that full control of an agent is more readily achieved if he is motivated by some base desire or want: the unprincipled man soon compromises himself, exposes himself to blackmail, or falls subject to some other hold. It is my view that no type of crook can be trusted and that the best agents will be found among those who are moved by the nobler purposes.

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Some intelligence officers scoff at motivation based on friendship and respect, feeling that neither is necessary or even desirable. As each case is a matter for the individual agent and the individual officer, it is certainly true that operations have been run in which even hostility was the order of the relationship between them. There are agents considered so low and despicable by the case officer that the working relationship has been reduced to pure physical control and intimidation. In my view, these agents won't last, are the source of many double agents, and are intrinsically unworthy of the time and money they cost. The crass and base desires, perhaps good enough for the short haul, are not of the stuff that will pay off over any prolonged period of time.

The higher motives, such as ideological zeal for U.S. objectives, patriotism, a parent's aspirations for his children, or religious devotion, are extremely reliable ones. In my own experience the best agent motivation has been his respect for the case officer and friendship with him, backed by an identity, even if not a total one, between his aims and the basic aims of the United States and its allies. There can be no question, even among those who may think these views ingenuous, that the case officer must know as nearly as possible what it is that drives his agent on.