

# The Interrogation of Suspects Under Arrest

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM  
RELEASE IN FULL  
2 JULY 96

**SECRET**

*The recalcitrant subject of an intelligence interrogation must be "broken" but broken for use like a riding horse, not smashed in the search for a single golden egg.*

## **Don Compos**

Your virtuous interrogator, like the virtuoso in any field, will tell you that formulating the principles of his art would be a presumptuous and sterile procedure. Interrogators are born, not made, he almost says, and good interrogation is the organic product of intuition, experience, and native skill, not reducible to a set of mechanical components. Yet the organic whole can usefully be dissected, and examination will reveal its structural principles.

This article selects from the many different ramifications of the interrogation art that *genre* which is applicable to suspected agents under arrest, and sets forth some of the principles and procedures which characterize it. The essay is slanted toward relatively unsophisticated cases, and does not cover the subtler techniques which should be used, for example, against a suspected double agent, nor those required when access to the subject or the control of his person is limited. It does, however, treat interrogation as a process designed to yield the highest possible intelligence dividend. Such an interrogation is usually incompatible with one intended to produce legal evidence for a court conviction, since statements by the accused may be barred as court evidence on the ground that they were made under duress, during

prolonged detention without charge, or in some other violation of legal procedures.

An interrogation yields the highest intelligence dividend when the interrogee finally becomes an ally, actively cooperating with the interrogator to produce the information desired. It is to a discussion of principles and procedures helpful in transforming a recalcitrant prisoner into something approaching an ally that this article is devoted. This kind of interrogation is essentially a battle of wills in which the turning-point is reached as the subject realizes the futility of his position. It usually develops in three tactical phases: a) breaking the cover story; b) convincing the subject that resistance is pointless and acquiescence the better part of valor; and c) getting active cooperation.

The question of torture should be disposed of at once. Quite apart from moral and legal considerations, physical torture or extreme mental torture is not an expedient device. Maltreating the subject is from a strictly practical point of view as short-sighted as whipping a horse to his knees before a thirty-mile ride. It is true that almost anyone will eventually talk when subjected to enough physical pressures, but the information obtained in this way is likely to be of little intelligence value and the subject himself rendered unfit for further exploitation. Physical pressure will often yield a confession, true or false, but what an intelligence interrogation seeks is a continuing flow of information.

No two interrogations are the same. The character, behavior, and degree of resistance of each new subject must be carefully assessed, and his estimated weaknesses used as the basis of a plan for intensive examination and exploitation. Each interrogation is thus carefully tailored to the measure of the individual subject. The standard lines of procedure, however, may be divided into four parts: a) arrest and detention; b) preliminary interview and questioning; c) intensive examination; and d) exploitation. The first three stages may often be merged; they constitute the softening-up process during which the cover story is broken and the subject may be shown up as a liar, an important step in making him realize the futility of further resistance.

In the matter of proving the subject a liar a word of caution is necessary. Showing some subjects up as liars is the very worst thing to do, because their determination not to lose face will only make them stick harder to the lie. For these it is necessary to provide loopholes by asking questions which let them correct their stories without any direct

admission to lying.

When the cover story and the will to resist have been broken, when the subject is ready to answer a series of carefully prepared questions aimed at an intelligence target, the exploitation can begin, often in a veiled spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance. At this stage the interrogation may for example be moved to an office assigned the subject, where he might even be left alone for a few minutes to show that he is being trusted and that there is something constructive for him to do. This feeling of trust and responsibility can be very important to a broken subject, because he may now have suicidal inclinations; he must be given something to occupy his mind and keep him from too much introspection.

We shall examine in detail each stage of the interrogation procedure after a word on the language problem. Without doubt an interrogator using the subject's language is in a much better position than one who has to work through an interpreter. But the interrogation skill is infinitely more important than the language skill, and a good linguist should not be substituted for a good interrogator. In the absence of an interrogator who speaks the language, an interpreter should be used, preferably one with some training in interrogation techniques. It is very important that the interpreter not only report accurately what both parties say but also reflect as faithfully as he can their inflection, tone, manner, and emphasis. He should try to become part of the furniture in the room rather than a third personality, and the interrogator should act as though he were not there.

## **Arrest and Detention**

The interrogations officer, since his critical objective is breaking the subject's will to resist, should attempt to control the psychological factors in every aspect of the subject's life from the earliest possible stage, normally the time of arrest. If possible, he should plan in advance the conditions of arrest and immediate detention. If the subject is already in detention, the principles set down in the following paragraphs may be applied to his removal from ordinary detention to the place of interrogation.

The arrest should take the subject by surprise and should impose on him the greatest possible degree of mental discomfort, in order to catch him off balance and deprive him of the initiative. It should take place at a moment when he least expects it and when his mental and physical resistance is at its lowest. The ideal time which meets these conditions is in the early hours before dawn, when an abrupt transition from sleep to alert mental activity is most difficult.

If the arrest cannot be made during the pre-dawn sleep, the next best time is in the evening, when a person is normally relaxed in his own home. One is most impressionable when relaxing at home, as witness the findings of advertising firms who have studied the impact of television commercials. A less desirable time is in the morning when the day's routine begins, especially in the case of underground personnel, because they will have thought through the day ahead of them and steeled themselves to its risks.

The police detachment which effects the arrest, or removal from detention to the interrogation center, should impress the prisoner with its cool efficiency and assurance. This scene is important enough to justify a rehearsal, if necessary. A subject arrested by three or four ill-dressed, clumsy policemen is more likely to regain his composure after the initial shock and draw some confidence from his superiority over his captors. If he is abruptly awakened by an arresting party of particularly tall, smart, well-equipped and business-like officers, he will probably be exceedingly anxious about his future.

The arresting party should also be schooled in observing the prisoner's reactions and in the techniques for a quick but thorough search of his room and person. In ordinary arrests there are arguments for having the prisoner witness the searching of his room: he cannot then claim theft or willful damage to his property; he can be asked questions about what is found; and his reactions may help the searchers uncover hidden objects. But during the search preceding an intelligence interrogation it is usually better to have the subject out of the room; his ignorance as to what has been found there will foster uncertainty and uneasiness in his mind. One member of the arresting party should be specifically charged with watching the prisoner's reaction to everything that goes on.

Other aspects of the arrest and the conditions of initial detention should be governed by the interrogator's preliminary assessment of the subject's personality and character on the basis of records, reports, and

any other sources available. If, for example, the prisoner belongs to a subversive organization which makes a practice of stressing the harsh and summary treatment its members should expect if they let themselves fall into the hands of the security authorities, the arresting party might make a point of treating him correctly and even courteously. This unanticipated finesse might disconcert his antagonism and be a useful factor in winning him over later.

Some of the alternative detention conditions from which the interrogator must choose according to his preliminary assessment of the subject are: a) a long period or brief interval between arrest and initial questioning, b) solitary confinement or quartering with other prisoners, c) comfortable or discomfiting accommodations, and d) subjection to comprehensive personal search or no. Some subject-types would be enabled by any delay between arrest and questioning to firm up a cover story, regain their composure, and fortify themselves against the interrogation. On the other hand, a prisoner left in solitary confinement for a long period with no one, not even his custodian, speaking a word to him may be thoroughly unnerved by the experience. When this course is chosen it is important to deprive the prisoner of all his personal possessions, especially of things like snapshots and keepsakes, symbols of his old life which might be a source of moral strength to him.

Other techniques which may or may not be employed at this stage, according to the subject's personality, include the use of a stool-pigeon, the double stool-pigeon routine, microphoning the cell and doctoring it in other ways. The double stoolpigeon technique has two stool-pigeons in the cell when the prisoner arrives. One of them befriends him, warns him that the other is a stool-pigeon, and if possible enlists his help in agitating for the removal of this plant. When the third man has been removed the subject may have come to trust his fellow-agitator and confide in him. The cell can be doctored by having messages written on the walls, either with deceptive content recommending for example some attendant as a sympathetic channel to the outside or with discouraging and depressive impact.

## **The Preliminary Interview**

The preliminary interview is not intended to obtain intelligence, but only to enable the interrogators to make a firm assessment of the character and type of subject with whom they will have to deal. It is useful to have the interrogators - preferably two of them - seated behind a table at the far end of a long room, so that the subject after entering will have some distance to walk before taking his chair in front of them. This device will enable them to observe his poise and manner, and may often quite unsettle the subject. The interrogators should sit with their backs to the main source of light in order to obscure their faces, veil their expressions, and place a strain on the prisoner.

The subject can be placed under further strain by providing him an uncomfortable chair, say one with a polished seat and shortened front legs so that he tends to slide off it, or one with wobbly legs. On the other hand, an opposite technique has sometimes been successful: the prisoner is made so comfortable, after a hearty lunch with beer, that he drops his guard in drowsiness.

The interview must of course be recorded, either on tape or in stenographic notes. The interrogators must on no account try to do this job themselves; it would distract them from the critical task of framing questions and steering the course of interrogation according to the implications of the subject's replies. Whether the stenographer or recorder should be concealed or visible depends on the subject's sophistication and the state of his alert. If the recording process is not evident some subjects may become careless of what they say when they see that the interrogators are not taking notes, whereas a visible recording would alert them to be more cautious. For others, consciousness of a recording going on in full view may be unnerving, and they may betray the weak links in their stories by showing signs of distress at these points.

At a later stage of the interrogation it may be of value to play back to the subject some part of this recording. The sound of his own voice repeating his earlier statements, particularly any with intonations of anger or distress, may make a psychological breach in his defenses.

The attitude of the interrogators at the preliminary interview should usually be correct, studiously polite, and in some cases even sympathetic. It is imperative that they keep their tempers both now and throughout the interrogation. The prisoner may be given the true reason for his arrest or a false one, or he may be left in doubt, according to the

circumstances of the case. The interrogators must try to determine whether his usually vigorous protestations of innocence are genuine or an act, but they should not at this stage give any indication of whether they believe or disbelieve him. A clever prisoner will try to find out how much the interrogators know; they should at all costs remain poker-faced and non-committal.

At this interview the interrogators should do as little as possible of the talking, however many questions they are anxious to have answered. The prisoner should be asked to tell his story in his own words, describe the circumstances of his arrest, give the history of some period of his life, or explain the details of his occupation. The object is to get him to talk without prompting in as much continuous narrative as possible; the more he talks the better the interrogators can assess his personality.

Personalities are individual, but some typing of subjects can be done cutting across factors of race or background. One category displays no emotion whatever and will not speak a word; another betrays his anxiety about what is going to happen to him; a third is confident and slightly contemptuous in his assurance; a fourth maintains an insolent attitude but remains silent; a fifth tries to annoy his interrogators by pretending to be hard of hearing or by some trick like repeating each question before answering it.

After the interview the interrogators should confer, formulate their assessment of the subject's character, and work out a plan of intensive examination, including the kind of detention conditions to be applied between questionings. The details of this plan will vary widely, but it will be based on two principles, that of maintaining psychological superiority over the prisoner and that of disconcerting his composure by devices to bewilder him.

## **The Intensive Examination**

The intensive examination is the scene of the main battle of wits with the prisoner, having the critical objective of breaking his cover story. The cover story, if it is a good one, will be a simple explanation of the subject's activities as a straight-forward normal person, plausible even to his close friends, containing a minimum of fabrication and that

minimum without detail susceptible to a check or ramifications capable of development. Its weakness may often lie in the subject's abnormal precision about certain details, especially when two or more subjects are using the same cover story.

The most difficult subject is one who will not talk at all, and prolonging his solitary confinement usually increases the difficulty of getting him to talk. It is best to put him into a labor gang or some such group of prisoners where he may be drawn into conversation. After some days or perhaps weeks he may be communicating normally with these others, and may have concluded that his interrogators have given him up for good. At that time some incident can be created involving the labor gang which requires that they all be questioned. If innocuous questions are put to the silent prisoner rapidly in a routine and indifferent manner, he may answer them. He may then find it hard to revert to complete silence if caught off guard as the questioning is switched without break to matters of real interest. The device of starting with questions easy for the subject to answer is useful with many whose replies to significant questions are hard to elicit.

Everything possible must be done to impress upon the subject the unassailable superiority of those in whose hands he finds himself and therefore the futility of his position. The interrogators must show throughout an attitude of assurance and unhurried determination. Except as part of a trick or plan they should always appear unworried and complete masters of the situation in every respect. In the long and arduous examination of a stubborn subject they must guard against showing the weariness and impatience they may well feel. If a specialist in the subject's field is used to interrogate him, say scientist to interrogate a prisoner with a scientific specialty, this interrogator must have unquestioned superiority over the subject in his own field.

Many prisoners have reported amazement at their own capacity for resistance to any stable pressures or distresses of an interrogation, such as onerous conditions of confinement or the relentless bullying of a single interrogator. What is demoralizing, they find, is drastic variation of cell conditions and abrupt alternation of different types of interrogators. A sample device in the regulation of cell conditions for unsophisticated prisoners is the manipulation of time: a clock in a windowless cell can be rigged to move rapidly at times and very slowly at others; breakfast can be brought in when it is time for lunch or in the middle of the night's sleep; the interval between lunch and dinner can be lengthened to

twelve or fifteen hours or shortened to one or two.

The questioning itself can be carried out in a friendly, persuasive manner, from a hard, merciless and threatening posture, or with an impersonal and neutral approach. In order to achieve the disconcerting effect of alternation among these attitudes it may be necessary to use as many as four different interrogators playing the following roles, although one interrogator may sometimes double in two of them:

First, the cold, unfeeling individual whose questions are shot out as from a machine-gun, whose voice is hard and monotonous, who neither threatens nor shows compassion.

Second, the bullying interrogator who uses threats, insults and sarcasm to break through the subject's guard by making him lose his temper or by exhausting him.

Third, the ostensibly naive and credulous questioner, who seems to be taken in by the prisoner's story, makes him feel smarter than the interrogator, gives him his rope and builds up false confidence which may betray him.

Finally, the kind and friendly man, understanding and persuasive, whose sympathetic approach is of decisive importance at the climactic phase of the interrogation. He is most effectively used after a siege with the first and second types, or after a troubled sleep following such a siege.

The course of the intensive questioning cannot be standardized, but some useful procedures are outlined in the following paragraphs.

When the subject is brought in he is asked to tell again the story he gave at his preliminary interview. Then he is asked to repeat it, and again a third time. He will be annoyed and with luck might even lose his temper. He at least will be worried about possible inconsistencies among the four versions he has given. In some cases it will be better that the interrogator not disclose his awareness of any such inconsistencies; in others it may be advantageous to emphasize them by making a comparison in his presence and perhaps playing back a recording.

If the cover story is still intact, the next step is to probe for detail. One of two interrogators questions rapidly into many details of a particular aspect of some incident. Then the other puts detailed questions on

another aspect of the same incident. Then the first takes up a third aspect, and so on alternately for some time. The object is to force the subject to invent detail hastily. Finally, without any break, the interrogators start going back over their detail questions a second time; and the subject, not having had time to fix his improvisations in mind, is most unlikely to remember them.

By deliberately misquoting the subject's replies the interrogator may often succeed in confusing him, or better yet in irritating him and making him lose his temper. A talkative subject should always be encouraged to give full and lengthy explanations; he is likely of his own accord to get mixed up and introduce inconsistencies into his story. Catching the subject in a lie of relatively little importance sometimes unnerves him and starts his resistance crumbling.

A not too sophisticated subject can be told that his fellow-conspirators have let him down, that an informer among them has betrayed his secret, or that some of them are in custody and have been persuaded to talk. Incriminating testimony from others, true or false, can be read to him, or a hooded man can pretend to recognize and identify him. The subject can be placed in profile at a window while two guards lead a "prisoner" past outside who will send in word that he recognizes his true identity.

Sometimes a very long period of silence while the interrogators are pretending to go over critical evidence will unnerve the subject.

The whole procedure is a probe for an opening - a confession of guilt, an admission to having lied, a state of confusion or even extreme concern on some particular point. Once an opening is found, however small, every effort is concentrated on enlarging it and increasing the subject's discomposure. At this stage he is allowed no respite until he is fully broken and his resistance at an end.

## **The Exploitation**

When the subject has ceased to resist his interrogators and is ready to talk freely he must be handled with great care, both because this attitude may change and because he may now have suicidal impulses.

He should get better treatment and better detention conditions. He should be induced to ally himself with his interrogators, and encouraged to believe that he is doing something useful and constructive in assisting them. It is often important to keep him hard at work regardless of whether the product of his efforts is of any real value; he could be asked to write out a lot of details about his subversive organization, for example, whether or not such information were required. The object is to keep him busy, to keep his mind occupied, to prevent his having time for introspection.

Since interrogators for the exploitation must be well acquainted in the particular field of information involved, it may now be necessary either to introduce new specialist interrogators or to give the earlier ones a thorough briefing in this field. Which course is better will depend on the subject's character, the way he was broken, and his present attitude toward those who have been handling him. Sometimes only a fresh interrogator can get real cooperation from him. Sometimes, on the other hand, he is so ashamed of having broken that he is unwilling to expose himself further and wants to talk only to his original questioner. And sometimes he has built up a trustful and confiding relationship with his interrogator which should not be destroyed by the introduction of another personality.

**SECRET**

Posted: May 08, 2007 07:10 AM