

Concerning Espionage and Social Courtesy

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Good private dinners are an excellent way to gather information.

-Richard Sorge

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Of the many ways in which adversary intelligence services go about recruiting agents a particularly insidious one is by "social contact," when officers of the service operating under diplomatic cover first approach their targets at receptions, parties, sports affairs, conventions, etc., or through social calls at home. This approach is distinguished by the fact that it initially carries no hint of resemblance to the classical methods of recruitment that depend upon blackmail or other kinds of duress. Far from upsetting the target, it presents itself to him as a pleasant relationship apparently devoid of any kind of danger. This is exactly why he needs to be put on his guard against it.

The usual pattern of such an operation exhibits the following phases.

The Meeting

First is the initial contact. It may be really accidental or just have every appearance of accident. To the target, in any event, it will always seem accidental. The handler, who is ever on the lookout for agents, will at least

have made it a point to be where fruitful contacts are likely. That is why the first approach most often comes, not in mass gatherings, but at affairs that attract a particular intellectual or social elite.

In this first contact the handler will usually confine himself to bland but friendly conversation, learning the prospect's identity and professional position and identifying himself and his cover position. If the prospect interests him, he will suggest having a coffee or lunch together sometime soon.

Operation Charm

The second phase is the laying of groundwork. The handler strives to make the target like him. He is most engaging, treats the target to a good meal, and produces tickets for the ballet or a sports event. At the same time he takes advantage of the favorable atmosphere thus created to try to learn more about his companion, getting him to talk about his family, how his children are doing at school, his way of life, his money problems. He also brings up, circumspectly and without taking sides, current political topics and the international situation; if he is from the Soviet Bloc he emphasizes that what his country wants is peace. He tries to find out whether his guest has strong political opinions and whether he nurses any definite antipathy toward the Eastern nations.

If at this stage the target has a negative or guarded attitude and has perhaps declined invitations, there is an intermediate phase in which the handler renews his suit and will not let himself be put off. He mails him some new show tickets, say, along with his visiting card, or telephones in a friendly way to suggest getting together again, or he may sometimes even venture to call on him at home. In most cases he is at least partially successful; out of simple courtesy the target cannot go on forever categorically turning down all invitations.

Nibble on the Bait

The third phase is the intelligence approach proper. It sometimes begins quite a long time after the end of the preceding phase. The handler now knows his target's personality well and tries to exploit its most vulnerable aspects—financial need, ideological leanings, weakness of character, hunger for an

important role, professional ambition, etc., as the case may be. As soon as he feels on sure ground he ventures a first request, a quite natural-seeming one for some innocuous information obviously in the target's field of familiar knowledge.

The essential purpose of this request is to test the prospect's reaction. But the handler, in return for the harmless information he gets, does not hesitate to offer him some little gift, perhaps something for his wife. After this, the dinners to which the nibbler is invited are likely to become quite sumptuous and the checks so high that he does not even offer to pay his own.

The Trap Closes

The fourth phase is that of recruitment and manipulation. Having established that the target is ready to furnish information which he does not consider very compromising, the handler—and this is the most difficult part of his task—gradually directs the conversation to the man's professional duties. Finally he asks direct questions about documents or information to which he has access, but at the same time he tries to make it seem a mutual exchange by offering to supply him with some that will help him in his work.

The chaste "social contact" is over; they have begun to talk business. Now things will move fast as the handler proceeds to drive in his last wedges. Gauging his speed by the psychological reaction, he thrusts by stages or directly to the burning questions. He may pull another stop to overcome the last bit of resistance, producing a more substantial gift. After that it will be hard for the beneficiary to refuse to get more important and somewhat more confidential documents. When these are delivered a reimbursement for the effort will be called for.

At this stage the meetings occur on two levels; alongside the "social contacts" are more furtive ones, as of hurried businessmen. Soon the confidential aspect begins to predominate: "Better not call me on the telephone." Finally, when they arrange to meet in a safe house, a subway station, or a public park, the target will perhaps realize that he has embarked on a clandestine operation. This is the point of no return. The handler sometimes now turns him over to one of his colleagues, who, not being bound by the atmosphere of friendship that permeated the earlier phases, can force him to toe the mark, make him understand if he doesn't already that he has taken an irreversible course, and ultimately use blackmail if need be. As a last step the recruit will have thrust upon him a complex system of communications, involving dead drops, secret writing, or perhaps trips abroad to meet a handler from the headquarters of the adversary service.

Unhappy Ending

Need one tell the rest? There are only two possibilities: either the target, recognizing the machinery in which he is caught, will at the last moment have enough courage to go to his own chiefs or to the security service with the story; or he will be irretrievably enmeshed, the docile tool of a foreign intelligence service. From then on he loses all freedom of action and, as XXXXXX XXXXX² put it, "ceases to be a friend and colleague and becomes instead a common spy."

In the midst of friendly faces, of animated social intercourse, it is hard to believe that it may be "later than you think." And yet it may.

A Stitch in Time

In a sense it is never too late to stop the progression of treason. A sudden awakening of conscience and understanding can undo a lot of harm even long after stepping across the line. But it is so much better to forestall the risks; all too often, otherwise, we can only assess the damages without any hope of repairing them.

There is one extremely simple step which can shield everyone from these dangers and protect our security—namely, for those who have access to classified documents to keep their superiors informed of any contact with foreigners. They will have a clearer conscience for doing this. And they will help us protect our common heritage.

Bibliography

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