

Negotiating Information under Conditions of High Asymmetry: An Exploration into the Domain of Interrogation

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Received 9 February 2022; accepted 25 April 2022

Abstract

The interrogation situation is a particularly asymmetric type of negotiation where the interrogated persons are prisoners and/or terrorists, having nothing more to lose because they know that their fate is already sealed. This type of relationship strictly responds to the definition of what is a negotiation, a process involving two or more parties to achieve a transaction. The objective of this article is to highlight the logic and techniques available to interrogators so that they succeed in establishing a form of exchange allowing them to gather strategic information, in particular when the parties to the conflict are engaged in open warfare. Five types of methods are distinguished and their effectiveness assessed: emotionally focused interrogation, morally based interrogation, manipulation, hard questioning, and extended object interrogation. Cases and examples are provided as illustrations.

Keywords

negotiation – interrogation – asymmetry – power – information – torture – manipulation – terrorists – bluffing – threats – intimidation – persuasion

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The following research started after reading a literary work by Arthur Koestler, “Darkness at Noon.” It was about the interrogation of a prisoner who was condemned to death in order to get him to admit wrongs he had never committed. My objective was to see if one could consider such an interrogation as a negotiation, and then shed some light on how one could manage such a process of attitudinal change to reach a mutual agreement.

As a negotiator and researcher, I have had the opportunity to meet many practitioners who negotiate in difficult situations. In particular, I have dealt with hostage-taking where negotiation is required by definition. I have also talked with practitioners who work as interrogators in active conflict situations. In addition to these discussions, I have examined the existing literature on this very special topic and analyzed interrogations from a negotiation angle. The outcome of this analysis, concerning negotiations that sometimes should not have been, is presented here.²

“Darkness at Noon”

In Koestler’s 1941 novel, Rubashov, an active and important member of the Communist Party, is thrown into prison and kept in solitary confinement. He is tried for treason against the government that he has always served with great loyalty. The whole story happened during the times of the “Stalinist Purges” and the “Moscow Trials” in the Soviet Union. He knows his fate, but before being executed he has to confess his “wrongdoings.”

Rubashov, when younger was a most faithful communist, highly devoted to the Party. On several occasions, he put his life at risk for the Party. In the past, he also controlled the behavior of other Party members in a most strict fashion. He was also arrested by the Gestapo during ww2, jailed, and tortured. However, he did not betray the Party. When back in his country he was regarded as a hero. Nevertheless, he recently started to question the legitimacy

2 This research proved particularly difficult given its subject and purpose. Meeting interrogators and former detainees, and getting access to documents usually considered highly confidential, is a challenge. The briefs published by interrogators that I have been able to obtain are often blacked out by various censors to protect sources, methods, and classified material as soon as they address questions of a strategic nature. Often, the most important information remains inaccessible. Concerning the moral aspect of certain types of interrogation, I remain a researcher and analyst, and will not make any personal comments. As a sociologist, I subscribe to the line of conduct defined by Max Weber and maintain the radical distinction between scholar and politician, because here “ethics of responsibility” and “ethics of ultimate means” do collide. It is up to citizens to make a judgment, but that is no longer the domain of research.

of the Party after two decades of dictatorship, terror, and executions, taking it far from its initial goals and values.

He is taken for a first interrogation by Ivanov, an old acquaintance who shares the same view about the drift of the Party. Ivanov's job is to get Rubashov to admit he has betrayed the Party. They do not discuss the reality of the fault because both know that it is a fabrication. Ivanov simply explains to him "as a friend" that he would do better to admit. At first, Rubashov adamantly refuses.

Before the next interrogation, Ivanov discusses with his assistant, Gletkin, the effectiveness of interrogation techniques. Gletkin favors harsh techniques, even torture, while Ivanov argues that Rubashov will confess because in the current situation it is the only rational behavior. Gletkin reminds him that, during the collectivization of the agricultural sector in the Soviet Union, the peasants had to be tortured to confess where their crops were hidden. Borrowing from this historical fact, he considers it is effective and acceptable to proceed the same way.

Later, Ivanov visits Rubashov in his cell and advises him to give up "sentimentality" and just remain rational with the Party, which leads to recognizing wrongdoings. Rubashov eventually makes a false confession and accepts his conviction.

Afterward, Ivanov meets Gletkin and tells him that Rubashov confessed to him after using techniques different from what Gletkin recommended. Still, Gletkin proceeded to interrogate Rubashov, resorting to very harsh techniques such as harassment and sleep deprivation. Gletkin tells Rubashov that Ivanov has been executed, but he has reached such a state of mind that this news does not have any effect on him. Finally, Rubashov confesses to the false accusations after thinking of the many situations in which he treated his own people with the same mercilessness. Unfolding his dedication to the Party logic to its final stage, he accepts his death sentence. The story ends with Rubashov's execution.

This typical asymmetric relationship can easily be framed as negotiation because it meets all the basic characteristics. The main relationship is between Rubashov and Gletkin: two parties with highly diverging initial positions who engage in a discussion process to reach an agreement. Ultimately, Rubashov agrees with the demand of Gletkin, which is to publicly recognize that he is a traitor, a renegade, and an enemy of the working class.

The overall situation pits an interrogator against a prisoner who is viewed as an enemy, but the power balance is more complex. The interrogator holds the power to control the conditions of the interrogation. The prisoner has nothing to lose any longer. He is going to be executed and he has accepted his fate. Thus, he still possesses the power not to cooperate. In the case of Rubashov,

though, he does not want to harm the Party to whom he has dedicated his life, whatever the personal cost to himself. Gletkin plays on this psychological lever.

Interrogation and Negotiation

Interrogation is a simple act. It involves asking questions to gather information. The Cambridge dictionary defines interrogation as “a process of asking someone a lot of questions for a long time in order to get information, sometimes using threats or violence.” The means employed may involve a diverse array of techniques, ranging from developing a rapport with the subject to going as far as enhanced interrogation techniques and torture.

There are situations where questioning turns out to be an infinitely complex activity and can take the form of a negotiation, that is to say, a transaction, an exchange. Classically, negotiation is defined as “a joint decision-making process through which negotiating parties accommodate their conflicting interests into a mutually acceptable settlement” (Faure & Sjostedt 1993). The interest of the interrogator may be to obtain information, in the case of terrorists, for example, on their accomplices, their intentions, and their resources. For the detained terrorist, it is a question of not denouncing the members of his group and not releasing information that could endanger their safety. Lax and Sebenius (1986) propose a definition of negotiation that addresses the decision-making domain: “a process of opportunistic interaction in which two or more actors (parties) in a situation of apparent conflict, try to obtain by an agreement a result better than by other means of decision.” The Oxford dictionary provides a useful complement to these definitions that may apply to interrogation situations: the search for a mutually acceptable agreement refers to “a situation where they need jointly to achieve a goal that is not available to either party alone and their preferences for outcomes are usually negatively related.”

In all cases, interrogation is an activity intended to collect or obtain information. It falls within the scope of negotiation because this information can be defined as a good or resource that is negotiable. When dealing with terrorism, the problem for the interrogator is not so much to recognize crimes that the detainee has committed or not, but how to make him speak, and disclose strategic information possibly to save lives. To serve this purpose, he has to provide a tradeoff. The goal is to define the terms of exchange, enabling both sides to come up with an agreement. Interrogations may simply represent the hardest form of negotiating.

A number of professional interrogators tend to regard interrogation as not only a form of negotiation, but a most desirable one from the point of view

of effectiveness (Reddington 2017). Interrogation subjects are typically motivated to commit themselves to a position of non-cooperation, feigning ignorance, giving false information, or stubbornly not speaking. Interrogators may overcome these obstacles by creating shared interests, reducing the detainee's resistance, and creating perceived benefits from confessing. An approach based on the Reid method, a psychologist specializing in interrogation (Inbau, Reid, Buckley, and Jayne 2011), alternates between hard pressure and sympathy, and combines the techniques of interrogation and the fundamental logic of negotiation to achieve the collection of information that otherwise would be considered highly unlikely to obtain (Air Command And Staff College, Air University 2014).

State of the Art

The literature on interrogation is very limited. This is mostly due to the nature of the domain in which protagonists, be they interrogators or detainees, wish to remain particularly discreet. Most publications in the field of interrogation do not enter into the strictly academic register but offer descriptions and testimonies, which provide content for further analysis. Several subsets can be distinguished according to the role – interrogator or prisoner – and the context, such as the wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq.

The Vietnam war gave rise to descriptions of methods used to collect information by DeForest (1990), Herrington (1982), Kulka (1990), and Phillips (2010). The Iraq war yielded, in particular, scandals surrounding the practices at Abu Ghraib prison, in the testimonies of Greenberg and Dretel (2005), Lagouranis (2007), Gourevitch and Morris (2008), and Clemens (2010). The Afghan war provided another proving ground for sophisticated interrogation techniques (Mackey & Miller 2004). What follows are narratives of interrogation sessions followed by thoughts and assessments on the ethical questions they raise.

Gelles (1995), a psychologist, asks a series of queries about detention at Guantanamo and the interrogation methods he was supposed to apply. So do Greenberg (2010) Sands (2008), Denbeaux and Hafetz (2011), all of them lawyers. They describe the treatment of detainees and also raise ethical issues. The fight against al Qaeda drives Katz (2002), Alexander (2008), and Soufan (2011) into the field of interrogation with high stakes, such as capturing the main leaders. Lopez (2011) and Phillips (2010) bring their personal experiences in war-torn countries, primarily from the perspective of hostage negotiation with human lives at stake. Heads of organizations in charge of the interrogation procedures, such as Wakin (1986) and Mackey and Miller (2004) offer descriptions, analyses, and conclusions. Other groups of commentators and analysts

ask important questions, particularly on ethical issues related to the practice of interrogations; these include Lasseter (2008), Fletcher and Stover (2008), Greenberg (2010), Skerker (2010), and Phillips (2011).

Victims also speak out, such as Denton (1982) as a detainee in the North Vietnamese jails, Ghahramani (2009), a young Iranian woman detained in Tehran, and Phillips (1947) detained in Manila by the Japanese during WW2. Fletcher and Stover (2009) provide a number of interviews of detainees in Guantanamo. All of them bring to the fore testimonials, descriptions of situations, and treatments especially belonging to the toughest interrogation register.

In situations of interrogation, this research identifies five different methods that have been able to lead to some kind of agreement: Emotionally focused interrogation; morally based interrogation; manipulation; hard questioning; and extended object interrogation (broadening the game). These five approaches refer to the different ways of building a relationship with a view to obtaining information. They are based on different conceptions of the relationship, all play on different driving forces, and borrow from different arrays of techniques. My conclusions at the end of the article are based on two categories of sources: a review and analysis of the existing literature and interviews carried out in the Middle East with people involved in various ways in interrogation processes. My final remarks on the relative effectiveness and difficulties involved in using each of these approaches are derived from assessing these sources.

Emotionally Focused Interrogation

One of the possible approaches that can be used in order to be effective while interrogating a prisoner is to employ emotion: compassion, good sentiments, understanding, empathy, or ultimately triggering just the opposite emotion, fear. The basic tradeoff is information for inner peace or a better future.

During the Vietnam War, the North Vietnamese soldier Lanh was offered a career as an interrogator himself by his American interrogator, dramatically changing the perception he previously had of American soldiers based on communist propaganda. When taken as a prisoner, he was expecting to be tortured to death, but instead, he was never tortured and much better fed than when he was in the North Vietnamese army, where he was prevented from communicating with his own family for several years. His officers told him that safe conduct passes offered by Americans were just “tricks.” Working in the US army and interrogating North Vietnamese prisoners, he rendered eminent service to American intelligence (Herrington 1982: 214–233).

In dealing with Vietcong prisoners, an American officer devised a specific method to build a rapport, the “TLC approach” (Tender Loving Care approach), which he successfully applied to the Ly case (DeForest & Chanoff 1990: 163–167). The basic principles were to avoid being “hard nosed,” try to be compassionate, and show sympathy – try to understand why they joined the guerillas, listen to their stories, and develop empathy. Treating an Asian with decency and respect should provide the interrogator with positive platform to gather information. One should not start by asking prisoners about anything sensitive, but by first establishing a rapport (DeForest & Chanoff 1990: 86–87).

Dong Van Ly was a Vietnamese defector and a former intelligence chief, which meant he knew all the top military and intelligence people of North Vietnam. Previously, he had fought with the Vietminh against the French, then had gone north after the Geneva conference in 1954. He had expected a nationwide free election enabling him to go back home but the elections were never held. He gradually became angry and bitter. Down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, he spent a couple of years in the fetid air of the tunnels, recovering from malaria caught during his years in the jungle, and then he gave himself up. His wife was brought to him and he was allowed to smoke and drink. He understood that his life would be so much more comfortable with the Americans in the South than what he had experienced in the North.

Treated with the TLC approach, Ly provided a host of strategic information including a diagram showing every member of the Northern Vietnamese Sub-Region One by name, code name, position, and job description. Altogether he provided over 70 names.

Playing with emotions when rationality is not working could be a way to move on in the process of getting information from a detainee. Using the resentment felt by an al-Qaeda operative for not being rewarded as he should after having made considerable sacrifices can help to turn him, such as in the Kherchoun case (Soufan 2011: 122–130). The man could not get US\$500 from his leader so that his wife could have needed surgery. He felt emotionally disturbed as he considered that he was not treated fairly according to Muslim principles. Speaking out was for him a way to take revenge and get sympathy from the former enemy, the US intelligence agency. After some time, Kherchoun began to tell all about al-Qaeda, how they operated, how they recruited, the training camps they used, the daily routine of bin Laden, the aliases of the main decision-makers, and so forth. Showing empathy means sharing the codes of the terrorist. For instance, al-Qaeda never uses the expression “suicide bombers” but instead speaks about “weddings” because the bomber is supposed to go directly to heaven and marry 72 virgins promised to “martyrs” (Soufan 2011).

An interrogator handed a phone to a jihadist in custody, at a time when al-Qaeda was preparing for the “Millennium Plot,” a series of terrorist attacks against Jordanian targets planned in 2000. The mother of the jihadist was on the line and when she heard her son’s voice, she talked to him in such a way that he became extremely moved and he started to cooperate. Playing on emotions and good feelings, the interrogator managed to get the prisoner to reveal useful details, such as that he got a license to work as a jeweler because this job enabled him to legally buy nitric acid and other chemicals for bomb-making (Soufan 2011: 135).

Feelings of frustration and injustice sometime serve as a trigger for terrorist actions (Faure 2014). In such cases, it is important to be able to play on this sensitive emotional dimension and use it against him through some manipulation. Playing on emotions in a negative way, such as triggering fear may lead to extremely positive results. It was the case with the Bojinka plot, a large-scale terrorist plan to assassinate Pope John Paul II and blow up 11 airplanes flying from Asia to the United States. After ineffective use of tough methods such as waterboarding and other physical tortures for two months with Murad, a most resolute terrorist who had been captured, two new police officers pretended they were Mossad agents ready to send him to Israel if he did not speak out. Then, the terrorist started cooperating (Katz 2002).

Taking advantage of the “shock of capture,” the moment of maximum disorientation for a prisoner who has just been captured and who fears the worst, is part of a classic interrogation approach, borrowing from the manipulation of emotions (Lagouranis & Mikaelian 2007; Soufan 2011). The interrogator spins out a series of promises and threats, blowing hot and cold. The prisoner has to believe that what is coming next might be much worse. Thus, fear rather than real pain might make him break. In all cases, his level of expectation can be modified. The prisoner may be destabilized, taken out of his “comfort zone,” thus, making him much more vulnerable and willing to speak.

The duet formula, “good cop-bad cop routine,” sometimes known as the “friend and foe” approach, is a psychological ploy in which the first interrogator displays a tough and hostile attitude. When the detainee starts feeling hopeless, the second interrogator appears to show a more friendly attitude. He, then, will capitalize on the work of the previous interrogator and establish the necessary rapport to control the questioning process.

Playing with emotions can be a double-edged sword. If the interrogator displays anger or impatience, the detainee may also use it to try to take control of the relationship (Soufan 2011). One major problem with focusing on emotions and empathy lies in the process of compassion itself, as the terrorist may consider his life being over soon. Trying to get into the mind of the detainee may

lead to developing more than an intellectual understanding of his behavior. The interrogator has to constantly remind himself that he is not dealing with a hero but with an enemy, a merciless killer who supports suicide bombers, does not mind assassinating women and children in airplanes or crowded markets, and whose purpose is to spread fear, violence, and chaos.

Although such an approach as the emotionally focused interrogation may lead to some very positive results, practitioners tend to consider it as extremely time-consuming and seldom productive.

Morally Focused Interrogation

Another lever to obtain information from an inmate is to invoke moral principles, to call upon values, a sense of justice, or the moral obligation to contribute to the relationship. The basic tradeoff is information against inner peace.

An interrogation can be framed as a negotiation process based on mutual concession-making. Reciprocity can be used as a guiding principle for organizing rapport. “I helped you. Now I’m asking you to help me” (Alexander 2008: 136) or “I want to bring you into our program and get you out of here (...) but I need you to do something for me” (Alexander 2008: 269). The goal for the interrogator is to penetrate the mind of the terrorist to gain his trust, to make him believe that he and the interrogator share the same objective, an exchange of information, and that they face the same obstacle, the public authorities. Once a rapport is formed with a detainee, coercion could be used more effectively through psychological techniques such as shame (Gelles 1995: 337–355). The issue becomes to make smart use of the ideology of the terrorist to oblige him to follow its ethical principles.

In Afghanistan, Fadl, an active member of al-Qaeda, was doing business for bin Laden. In order to buy some land and a car, he took a personal commission. Bin Laden considered it as stealing money from the organization and started punishing him. Fadl felt that he was unfairly treated compared with other al-Qaeda combatants and went to an American embassy to take revenge by disclosing strategic data (Soufan 2011: 66–68). The US interrogator could easily and effectively manipulate Fadl’s sense of fairness and play on his frustration to extract a significant amount of information. He then became one of the most credible sources of information on details concerning the life of bin Laden.

Kherchtou was another al-Qaeda combatant operating between Sudan and Kenya. His wife had major health problems and he asked for money from his fellow operatives. His demands were rejected. He had loyally served bin Laden

in Afghanistan and elsewhere in dangerous places and he cruelly resented being rebuffed. After being arrested, he was taken care of in a friendly manner. The interrogator would somehow praise him for “being a good Muslim” and expressed regrets for the fact that al-Qaeda did not have respect for him. This way a rapport was built up with an American Muslim interrogator and gradually Kherchtou started disclosing useful information. After some time, the interrogator indicated that Kherchtou was “singing like a canary” (Soufan 2011: 126–130).

Using the culture of the enemy against him may also be considered a possible means of action (Faure & Rubin 1993). An interrogator has to know as much as possible about the terrorist he is facing. The terrorist himself may be motivated by nationalist, separatist, ethnic, tribal, ideological, or religious claims. Terrorist groups are elusive and their rationale is often extremely difficult to capture, but they are typically resolute in their beliefs. These groups are elusive because they are weakly structured, fluid, volatile, and de-territorialized. Their rationale is a mix of beliefs, a demonization of adversaries, and somehow opaque. They are dangerous in that they do not mind engaging in massacres that target civilians and innocent people (Faure & Zartman 2010: 7).

When terrorists are clearly identified as having a religious motivation, defining themselves as “holy warriors,” “martyrs” or the “armed arm of God,” religious inconsistencies pointed out by the interrogator may sometimes lead to positive results. For instance, terrorists may claim that they joined al-Qaeda for the defense of their religion (Soufan 2011). But both Hadith and the Quran are written in classical Arabic, a language that many do not really understand.

A prisoner caught lying sees his credibility weakened and cannot pretend to truly cooperate any longer. Even more important, if he states that he is a religious person – for he knows that in Islam lying is a sin – he would not be entitled to the heavenly rewards bestowed to good Muslims (Soufan 2011: 317). Reminding the terrorist that he is a prisoner of his moral system can force him to reveal more information than he normally would. While the interrogation process is unfolding, the point may be to find contradictions in the statements of the detainee and corner him until he tells the truth.

A value is an ideal that determines what is correct, desirable, or morally proper. In most asymmetric negotiations such as interrogation, it is particularly difficult to invoke common values to generate cooperation, even if the interrogator tries to share some with the terrorist. The value gap is typically too large to serve as a bridge. The terrorist sees his behavior as perfectly justified while the interrogator regards it as totally unacceptable.

It makes sense to conclude that the morally focused interrogation method may elicit surprising results sometimes, but it is always time costly and seldom

very productive. Furthermore, to be effective, it requires a deep knowledge of the religion and system of values held by the detainee.

Manipulation

Using the manipulative approach, the interrogator can adopt an apparently friendly approach. He can act as if he is the advocate of the prisoner. He can simulate empathy and understanding. He can pretend he shares some of the values and principles of the detainee. He can play on the psychological dimension. The basic tradeoff is information against psychological comfort, respect, and safety for the prisoner and his family.

Historically, the manipulation approach was formalized by a German from the Luftwaffe during WW2, Hans Scharff (Scharff 1950; Toliver 1997). He considered that the best way to obtain information was not through harsh methods, but by adopting an attitude as if he was his prisoner's greatest advocate while in captivity. He would take advantage of the prisoners' fear, destabilization, despair, and isolation to collect as much information as possible.

He would pretend that unless the prisoner cooperates, he would have no choice but to turn him over to the Gestapo, the secret police of Nazi Germany, for questioning. Using the terrible and well-deserved reputation of the Gestapo, he would require some detailed proof that the prisoner was not, for instance, a spy, as the tradeoff for the prisoner only being sent to a normal POW camp.

Afterward, Scharff continued to play the role of the good friend, sharing jokes, food, and drinks. He was fluent in English and could easily communicate and gradually develop some trust. To serve this purpose, he would mention that he was married to an English lady but also that his father-in-law was a World War I British fighter ace. He would bring prisoners to German airfields, drink with German pilots, and invite them to banquets. On occasions, Scharff would take his prisoners on strolls through the nearby forest, first having them swear an oath of honor that they would not try to escape. He would not ask questions directly connected to military information but just let them speak as much as they wanted. Prisoners would provide information without realizing what they were doing.

When faced with a prisoner who was reluctant to speak, Scharff usually resorted to files borrowed from interrogation sessions of other prisoners. He would begin by asking a question for which he already knew the answer, telling the prisoner that he already knew everything about him, but that he had received instructions that the prisoner had to say it for himself. Asking questions and providing the answers, he could convince his prisoner that there was

nothing he did not already know. At some point, the captives would disclose some strategic information, assuming that Scharff already had it.

Often, trust is linked to rapport and positive relationships. In the Scharff case, as in most situations of interrogation, it is not a matter of actually building confidence but rather of pretending that confidence is being established, which simply refers to manipulation. Trust can be defined as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectations that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor” (Mayer et al. 1995). Trust in another person means that one considers that person as reliable, frank, and honest. This certainty does not come from intellectual reasoning but from intuition, from a personal feeling. There is very little possibility that such an occurrence will take place when interrogating a terrorist. The point for the interrogator is to control the detainee, not to establish a truly friendly relationship leading to the development of trust.

Considering more recent war situations, such as in Iraq or fighting al-Qaeda, psychological ploys, verbal trickery, and other ruses can be used without limitations to conduct effective interrogations according to the “U.S. Field Manual: Intelligence Interrogation” (1992). Originally, fear and control were the main variables while interrogating, but now “respect, rapport, hope, cunning, and deceptions are the new tools” (Alexander 2008: 6). For instance, the “love of family approach” becomes an option based on the fact that the detainee will cooperate out of love for his family and desire to return to them.

Otherwise, as the Army Field Manual list of approved approaches mentions, futility, logical reasoning, fear, and rapport may be tried to extract useful information. If the interrogator can play on doubts that already exist in the mind of the detainee the “futility approach” may be used to make him believe that it is useless to resist and to convince him to cooperate. Providing that there is enough open information to establish credibility, the “we know all” technique or the “you’re totally screwed routine” may be enough to convince the detainee that he will not be disclosing anything new and harmful to his cause and to show honesty and goodwill.

A basic strategy while interrogating a prisoner is to discover his main motivation: ideology, religious beliefs, money, revenge, or sense of obligation to the family, for example. Once this motivation has been identified, an incentive can be crafted and the interrogator can take full control of the process.

Interrogating can be defined as a mind game in which one has to use wits to steer the suspect to speak out. The point is to lull someone into a false sense of security and then trap him, for instance, on small details. One has to get the detainee convinced that the interrogator knows all about him and that any

lie will be spotted. A basic tactic used by the terrorist is to only admit what he believes the interrogator knows. Then, the point for the interrogator is to never let the suspect know that he is giving information he himself did not know. Step-by-step, the detainee discloses more information than he should, bearing the costs of the salami tactic.

Bluffing is part of the game and each side is aware of it and is systematically suspicious. Al-Qaeda terrorists often believe that they can smartly outwit the interrogator by appearing credible and do not want, out of pride, to be caught lying. Thus, they may sometimes corner themselves by trying to cover a lie with another lie, a process that ultimately leads nowhere. Going through a story in great detail helps to see where the story becomes inconsistent. Then, when the lie is pointed out, the terrorist has to correct himself and disclose more information. Thus, he gets trapped in his lies and his ego (Soufan 2011: 226, 336). This is how CIA interrogators got to know that originally al-Qaeda operatives planned to use ten planes for the 9/11 attacks, including operations carried out simultaneously in Southeast Asia. Such a plan was later abandoned because of the extreme complexity of organizing it (Soufan 2011: 276).

Another technique used effectively is to split the terrorist group. For instance, a member of the staff of bin Laden was pushed to list his disagreements with his boss and ultimately cooperated by telling how he would purchase weapons for jihad through a humanitarian organization (Soufan 2011: 440).

When sitting down facing each other, silence usually unnerves the prisoner and he feels the stress growing. Then, a “take it or leave it” approach, a one-time offer, may help to get something.

The classic “boss introduction technique” may bring some good results in strongly hierarchical societies such as the Arab one. Status and prestige add to the normal pressure stemming from the interrogation booth. The argument can be phrased as: “My boss is the type of person you want on your side. He can influence people with just a few phone calls. He can speak to the judges on your behalf” (Alexander 2008: 195).

Resorting to a duet approach may elicit positive results. Two interrogators launch a barrage of unconnected questions forcing the detainee to change his mind from one place to another, to confuse him and push him out of his comfort zone. He has no time to make his answers consistent and discrepancies start to appear. Then, throwing all sorts of curveballs, running multiple approaches mixed with a clever ruse, may get the terrorist to reveal more than he would have wanted (Alexander 2008: 77–78).

One way to know if there is any change in the mindset of the terrorist is to read his eyes as poker players do. Observing body language may also provide

clues. Nodding, folding hands, and leaning forward may tell something about their state of mind. The voice may sound neutral but the body could “scream hate” (Alexander 2008: 36).

A classic technique, “fear down,” consists in showing the prisoner the worst consequences of what he has done, then giving him a way out, and how the interrogator becomes his savior. A formula may be, for example, to say “Look, you are a good person who got trapped. I understand that.” For instance, the punishment for assisting in a suicide bombing in Iraq is death. This provides a strong incentive to speak out or at least start collaborating. Offering hope, a most powerful weapon, often opens a new avenue.

Building a rapport with detainees through developing a relationship over time is considered by many seasoned interrogators as the most effective approach. Playing the empathy card is a way to get insight into the character of the detainee to set up a smart interrogation strategy. For instance, feed the prisoner properly with real meals and provide him with cigarettes. Show that you respect him, his religion, his culture, be empathic, and even show compassion. Gratify his ego and make him feel important. Say things such as “I want you to play a role in the future of your country.” Do not be hard nose on him. Talk slowly and gently and see what might develop. Demonstrate a kind of “tender loving care” approach, especially if he is an Asian. Offering to pass along a message to his family could be an option. Specific questioning in the form of a dialogue would only come after some time (DeForest & Chanoff 1990). After a rapport has been successfully built, the detainee could even be turned into a double agent.

Showing that the interrogator is not an enemy, that he can be trusted in his promises if there is enough cooperation, can greatly help to obtain useful information (Soufan 2011: 452). The “carrot and stick” routine may provide payback if the detainee is not well trained or determined. The reverse situation may also be used. The interrogator may insist on the detainee delivering information if he wants to be trusted in return. This is a basic requirement if he really wants a deal.

Sometimes, the interrogation process may lead to changes in the perception of the terrorist. He may stop demonizing the country of the interrogator because of the new information supplied to him and the friendly treatment he received (Soufan 2011: 456; Herrington 1982: 214–233; DeForest & Chanoff 1990: 86–87).

An interrogator may play a “Prisoner’s Dilemma,” getting the detainee to turn on another. The technique consists of telling two prisoners in separate cells that the first one who cooperates will get the deal while the other will get the noose (Alexander 2008: 36).

Using the pride of the terrorist to get him to release information may be effective. He wants to get respect, even recognition, and these gratifications may be offered at no cost by the interrogator. A face-saving action is one that prevents damage to the reputation or the loss of respect. It can constitute a useful lever when dealing with a terrorist particularly concerned about his image or his future fame. The face-saving concern becomes an element that is negotiable. A classic trick consists of threatening the terrorist that you will spread the rumor that he denounced his brothers in arms.

Self-esteem, an individual's subjective evaluation of his own worth, may also play an important part in the interrogation process. A terrorist, after all, remains a human being, sometimes with an oversized ego, which makes him more vulnerable to certain manipulations such as flattery, the recognition of personal courage, or his spirit of sacrifice.

On the interrogator's side, the risk is to prevent oneself from feeling sympathy for the traumatized man who is kept in harsh conditions. Rather, the interrogator should use the trauma to his advantage.

If the detainee is innocent, the point becomes not to turn him into a new enemy. Interrogation must be understood as a rehabilitation period. Treating the detainee with dignity is a basic condition (Soufan 2011: 447).

According to a number of practitioners, the manipulative interrogation approach is by far the most effective with its wide set of sophisticated techniques. Its only weak point is that building rapport can be very time consuming. If the interrogator is facing an emergency situation, he may not be able to get the information he needs in due time.

Hard Questioning

This type of interrogation is based on physical and psychological torture. These "enhanced interrogation techniques," which are meant to inflict suffering on the target, aim to obtain information against his will. The basic tradeoff, besides sometimes satisfying the sadistic gratification felt by some interrogators, is to get information to end the suffering.

Throughout history, torture has been widely practiced in an impressive variety of forms. In antiquity, Persians, Greeks, and Romans used it for interrogation. People were supposed to be incapable of lying under torture. In the Middle Ages a lot of innovations were introduced such as whipping; the crushing of thumbs, feet, legs, and heads in iron presses; burning flesh; and tearing out teeth, fingernails, and toenails with red-hot iron forceps. Limb-smashing and drowning were also common practices.

In China, “Ling Chi” (slow slicing) was officially practiced until 1905. The Japanese inflicted “water treatment” on American prisoners during WW2 in the Pacific. A spigot was forced into the mouth of the victim, creating a high-pressure stream of water that flooded the stomach and lungs until the prisoner passed out (Phillips & Goldsmith 1947). The German Gestapo and the Soviet NKVD (People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs) practiced torture beyond all principles and limits, not to mention the so-called “self-criticisms” extracted during the Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic of China. Other more or less legal techniques were also developed, among them, mock executions, “white torture” (sensory deprivation), waterboarding, isolation of prisoners, putting prisoners in stressful positions, and sleep deprivation. The mission given to interrogators would be to extract information “by any means necessary” (Soufan 2011).

CIA interrogators, at Guantanamo dealing with al-Qaeda operatives, would proceed through three stages regarding harsh techniques. The first category included yelling at the detainee and issuing threats; the second involved putting the prisoner in stress positions, isolation, using lengthy interrogations, playing on exhaustion, and instrumentalizing phobias of detainees; and the third category, the toughest, included waterboarding, a technique inducing a sense of suffocation (Soufan 2011: 465).

A directive issued to the coalition forces in Iraq in 2003, titled “Interrogation and Counter-Resistance Policy,” authorized 29 techniques but twelve of them exceeded limits imposed by the Army Field Manual. Prisoners could, for instance, be suspended with chains and exposed to extreme temperatures. Suspects could be forced to hold stressful positions, such as kneeling for hours. Prisoners were dehydrated by being fed salty crackers and peanut butter while deprived of water. Among the enhanced interrogation techniques (EITs) used in Afghanistan and in Iraq at Abu Ghraib, and on the assumption that Arabs have a particular fear of dogs, American interrogators forced aggressive dogs to bark at detainees to terrify them (Phillips 2010) and take them out of their “comfort zone” (Soufan 2011: 442). American prisoners of war detained in North Vietnam were kept in solitary confinement in a special facility where they spent day and night in small windowless cells mostly in leg cuffs to break them down and extract strategic information from them (Denton & Brandt 2009).

Intimidation, an extremely common tactic, belongs to the emotional repertoire. It is an action meant to cause fear and the classic means of intimidating or bullying are bursts of anger and threats. But for trained and resolute terrorists, in most cases, intimidation should not be expected to yield significant results.

Blow hot-blow cold techniques were used in Iran to break down a student girl caught in a demonstration. The interrogator humiliated her, instilled fear, created hope, and proceeded back and forth with these methods (Ghahramani 2009). The interrogator may simply play on the psychological exhaustion of the detainee who cannot take any more endless questions in this imbalanced duel. It might be the final stage of a marathon the detainee has no chance to win.

Americans usually avoid direct physical torture and rather resort to the psychological domain, such as stress positions and isolation to control prisoners. Keeping them out in the cold for a full night or preventing them from sleeping, and using strobe lights, music, and ice water have been standard techniques. The ultimate goal is to induce regression of the personality to inculcate dependence and dissolute resistance (Lagouranis & Mikaelian 2007).

In a constrained interrogation booth, hardcore prisoners are considered unlikely to start cracking until after 14 hours of interrogation. Before that, they may bend but not break. The pain does not get the prisoner to speak out, but the fear of increased pain may do the job. The CIA's "Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual" indicates that the threat of coercion usually weakens more resistance than the coercion itself (Lagouranis & Mikaelian 2007).

Sometimes interrogators are faced with a dramatic situation in which a bomb is set to explode and the clock is ticking. Enhanced interrogation techniques can then be seen as measures of last resort. Under these circumstances, EITs can be seen as a way to establish total power over the detainee until he is broken. In a situation like Iraq, ticking bombs were everywhere and every prisoner could be a source of information to save American soldiers' lives.

Knowing how terrorists such as al-Qaeda combatants view the West is essential information to take into account before any interrogation. This vision often refers to a degenerate, unjust, rotten, perverse, immoral, decadent world, the kingdom of fornication, homosexuality, and gambling. The main enemies responsible for all Muslim sufferings are supposed to be Jews (the worshipers of the devil), the Heretics (the Christians), the Apostates (the Shia), and the United States as the "head of the snake." This vision enables interrogators to measure the difficulty of their task. Persuasion and threat will not be enough to make the terrorist speak; it will be necessary to call for other means. The process of demonization of the West makes any negotiation highly improbable and may invite the use of harsh techniques.

Concerning al-Qaeda, the "Manchester Manual," discovered in 2000 in a terrorist hideout in the UK, contained 18 chapters on how to wage war and how to brace oneself when facing interrogation and even torture from captors. It offers insight into the mindset and behavioral patterns of trained combatants when

interrogated. It tells how to hold off, especially during the first 48 hours, so that other members of the cell can reorganize themselves. Ideologically motivated terrorists are trained to face torture and are ready to die for their cause. In case of being interrogated by some especially tough Middle East governments, they are prepared “to have their sisters and mothers raped in front of them” (Soufan 2011: 116) and themselves “sodomized by animals.” Their reward will come in heaven if they cleverly manage to pretend to cooperate while buying time to protect their fellow combatants. Depriving them of sleep, keeping them standing for hours, threatening them, and even waterboarding them will not break these terrorists.

On occasions, the overall situation may elicit a process of mutual demonization, an escalation of commitments leading to intractable deadlocks (Zartman & Faure 2005), failure to collect useful information, and possibly, death of the detainee (Lopez 2011). The death of a prisoner can be considered a failure by interrogators, as he would not be able to speak out any longer. There are so many non-lethal ways to take someone down that there would be no excuse for a dead prisoner (Lagouranis & Mikaelian 2007).

Enhanced interrogation techniques may lead to useful outcomes when time is the most important variable, but physical and psychological suffering or fear of suffering may induce false confessions. For instance, a Guantanamo detainee, after being subjected to hard techniques, started to tell about links between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, a complete fabrication. He did this to escape from very harsh treatment and to avoid being transferred to another intelligence service that had the reputation of torturing prisoners (Soufan 2011: 451).

An example of extremely violent interrogation using torture that has given rise to unfounded confessions are the practices in Syria by the “al-Mukhabarat” secret police. Seventy-two different types of harsh techniques used on prisoners in detention centers such as al-Khatib, or “Branch 251,” have been identified. They range from scalding with boiling hot water and slicing off body parts, to rape and other sexual violence, and medical ethics disregard, such as allowing students to use prisoners for surgical training (Syrian Network for Human Rights 2021).

Research on ethical issues concerning torture has concluded that “it is not good for the people doing it” (Kulka 1990). The torturer may be a collateral victim of his own devices. Post-traumatic stress disorder such as severe anxiety, insomnia, nightmares, depression, memory lapses, and a persistent sense of guilt and shame may affect both the detainee and the interrogator.

Enhanced interrogation techniques have to be kept within legal limits as specified in the United Nations Convention against Torture of 1984. This convention includes 33 articles committing 170 states not to resort to “torture”

understood as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person ... It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

However, the Convention does not get into details and does not provide a list of techniques that should be prohibited. This type of resolution “against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” leaves room for interpretation. Nowadays, Amnesty International indicates that at least 81 countries currently employ torture.

Extended Object Interrogation (Broadening the Game)

This type of interrogation is based on the following principle: being smart instead of being harsh. When facing extremely well-trained terrorists, ready to stand any torture, interrogators have to seek their weak point outside their very person. For instance, they can try to redeploy the game by integrating components of their immediate periphery. The basic tradeoff, in this type of situation, is to get information against some external benefit for the terrorist by way of extending the strategic spectrum.

In preparing for the interrogation, it is essential for the interrogator to understand the psychological profile of the terrorist. For example, if he is a jihadist, he conveys an apocalyptic vision of the outside world, a world he loathes. He has dehumanized the enemy, whether American, Western, or “Jewish.” He never uses the term Israeli, and Israel as a country is never referred to other than as “the Zionist entity.” He has participated in massacres of civilians, innocent victims, and children, whether in planes, buildings, towers, cafes, restaurants, trains, or others. He has planted bombs, tortured, and executed without any qualms. He believes himself to be the arm of God destined to inflict just and divine punishment on disbelievers. He is ready for anything including dying at any time. He is only waiting for the supreme reward after sacrificing his life.

Generally speaking, a prisoner motivated by an ideology or religious belief at the origin of his action draws from it a strength making him capable of withstanding the harshest or the most sophisticated interrogation techniques. He evolves in sacrificial transcendence because he is the instrument of what he believes to be the great cause. The psychological or ideological reward strongly outweighs the suffering endured. It seems to be almost impossible to convince a terrorist who does not care about what is going to happen to him. Harsh

techniques, such as fear and control, do not operate and those more sophisticated, such as the Scharff method do not bring any better results. Such a terrorist is ultimately the most improbable negotiator imaginable.

To be a “soldier of Allah” ready to live the martyrdom and then go directly to paradise gives certain confidence, even arrogance towards the interrogator. The terrorist may get a sense of superiority and invincibility. He is no longer afraid of anything because he has nothing to worry about, nothing to lose. There is no room for any kind of negotiation. For the interrogator, it is, therefore, a question of recreating something negotiable by bringing new issues into the game.

As the Arab proverb goes, “Every knot has someone to undo it.” In the same way, each detainee has a soft spot, a weak point, and the overall task of the interrogator is to find it. For instance, to subvert a hardcore ideologue, the only way to do it may be through his family (DeForest 1990; Alexander 2008). It works especially well in societies of Southeast Asia and the Middle East where family bonds are much stronger than in the West.

The case of a captured Iraqi terrorist who will be sentenced to death provides a typical example (Alexander 2008: 134). To get him to disclose information, the interrogator needs to discover his real identity, and ultimately found out that he has a second wife and a hidden family. Then, it became possible to exert pressure on him about this second family: “A.G. knows what he’s just done. He’s given up his own life. That was his only asset in this negotiation. He’s confessed, and he knows he will hang now. But his sense of obligation to his wife, his true love, propels him to continue giving us information.” The prisoner may not any longer care for the cause of his group but will fear first of all for his family. Not all al-Qaeda members truly write off their families when joining.

An interrogator is not meant to be a provider of justice. He simply negotiates to gather information from a mass murderer, possibly to save lives. It is the court that will ultimately send the terrorist to death. The responsibility is not on him.

Considering a basic concept such as “best alternatives to a negotiated agreement” (BATNA), if the ultimate outcome is death, the terrorist’s attitude may be to take his BATNA, which means resolve to be executed and therefore not to provide the information being sought by the interrogator. Reconstruction of the game by introducing new elements to be negotiated might radically modify his BATNA. If a threat weighs on the terrorist’s family, his BATNA is no longer not to speak but to confess in order to save his family.

The method based on extended object interrogation is definitely a measure of last resort when nothing else seems to work to break the terrorist. It has been demonstrated to work on occasion and in certain contexts. However,

such a method meets legal and ethical limits. Is it acceptable to threaten the lives of innocent people and use them as a bargaining chip? This is exactly what hostage takers do.

Conclusion

The interrogation situation is a particularly asymmetric type of negotiation. The very context of the “interrogation pit” constructs inequality. A relationship in which it is always the same party who questions and the other who tries to answer reinforces the asymmetric character of the distribution of power. One might therefore think that this is not a real negotiation. In fact, the questioning fits perfectly with the classic definition of negotiation: two or more parties engaging in an interactive process in order to find a position acceptable to each, a way of accommodating divergent interests (Faure 2003). One could question the unbalanced nature of the relationship but, in fact, a perfectly symmetrical negotiation is a very particular and rare occurrence. For a question to fall within the definition of negotiation, it is necessary and sufficient that each of the parties have a right to veto any agreement proposed by the other party.

In terms of research, it is the analysis of extreme situations that often makes it possible to highlight processes that are otherwise not very visible or considered to be of little significance. Here the asymmetry makes it possible to touch upon the essential.

Two different types of activity are undertaken in terms of negotiation, extracting information, and exchanging it. Information is obtained by different methods such as appealing to feelings, manipulation, and threat. The exchange consists of offering tranquility, an improvement in the detainee’s situation, the interruption of the suffering endured, or the safety of a loved one. The point is to combine these two activities in order to define balanced terms of trade, which means that the value of the information received has to justify the compensation offered.

Several standard variables pertaining to the negotiation field may play a role in the asymmetric interrogation situation. Some, such as face-saving, resorting to emotions, or self-esteem, have proven to be operative while others, such as trust or resorting to values, have rarely been effective tools. Deceptive approaches such as intimidation, threats, and enhanced interrogation techniques have also demonstrated their limits.

The culture of the interrogator and that of the detainee may play an important, and sometimes essential, role in the negotiation process. Culture contributes to constructing the way one sees the other, the situation, understanding

the logic of the process, and the tactics used on both sides. It inscribes values as a guide to behavior and tells what could be done and what should not (Faure & Rubin 1993). For example, resorting to lies does not have the same importance depending on the culture. Self-esteem and prudery are highlighted as particularly important cultural characteristics in Arab culture. Interrogators can use it to put the detainee in a difficult situation.

Those questioned are most often prisoners, enemies, and terrorists whose fate has already been sealed because most often they will be or have been condemned to the death penalty. However, the game does not end there because the ultimate goal in this type of situation is not to execute the prisoner but to obtain strategic information from him.

There are many ways for reaching such a goal. Five questioning methods are distinguished here according to the nature of the interactive game and the techniques used. The first two methods concern personality variables such as the terrorist's emotionality or his values, his culture, and his religious principles. These methods require a heavy investment in knowledge and in the relationship, and the effectiveness of results is far from being guaranteed.

The third method is considered by far the most efficient. It is a question of manipulating the terrorist by simulating empathy, by reframing the relationship as if the interrogator and interrogated were in the same camp facing a constraining external system. It is a treasure hunt in which it is a question of discovering the weak point of the detainee and of exploiting it as much as possible. This approach may look very much like talking, but goes much beyond that, as the final goal is not the relationship but what can be extracted out of it (Zartman & Faure 2011).

A fourth method is often considered in case of the failure of previous ones: enhanced interrogation techniques that call for harsh techniques. These are largely free from any moral consideration and lead to actions that often amount to torture. Under the empire of suffering, the inmate almost always speaks out but the information gathered is far from being reliable because he will pretend to cooperate with the sole aim of alleviating his suffering.

A fifth approach, belonging to the Machiavellian school, consists of opening up the game to external parties and including them as potential targets, such as the terrorist's family. It is a way to escape from the fixed-pie problem by adding new issues to be negotiated: increasing, for instance, the penalty and then offering possible concessions. The game is not easy because the interrogating side has to meet a number of conditions, including discovering the true identity of the terrorist, locating his family, ensuring that this one is not out of reach, that the threat is credible, and that the terrorist has retained a real attachment to family through the vicissitudes of his fight.

The detainee is not deprived of means of action in the system of interrogation/negotiation. He can refuse to give information by declaring that he knows nothing. He can lie and furnish false information, give partial information, set conditions, and gain time so that his accomplices can conceal themselves. In extreme situations, he can feign madness, fainting, or as a measure of last resort, commit suicide.

The interrogation/negotiation formula can be described as a paradoxical treatment of a particularly asymmetric situation because until then the terrorist has nothing more to lose, that is to say, ultimately nothing to negotiate in order not to betray his cause. The task of the interrogator precisely consists of reintroducing something negotiable. It is no longer a question of persuading, of exchanging a better being for information, but of transforming the game.

Each one of the five different interrogation approaches that have been identified relates to a specific action system endowed with its own rationality. The principle of questioning calls upon negotiation techniques that tend to reinforce its effectiveness. This study shows that it is possible to shed light on the logic of each of these approaches using analytical grids pertaining to negotiation. Furthermore, it paves the way for subsequent developments likely to generate valuable insights, both practical and theoretical.

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