

HumInt Collection

A look through noncoercive field questioning and screening of jihadist combatants

by Philip A. Mullenix & William P. Schrieber

Marines whose military occupational specialties (MOSs) include field questioning and screening of jihadist suspects must operate within the interrogation parameters defined in *Field Manual 2-22.3, Human Intelligence Collector Operations* (Department of the Army, Washington, DC, September 2006) (“the Manual”).

Field questioning (also known as tactical questioning) is defined in section 1-17 of the Manual as expedient initial questioning for information of immediate tactical value, generally performed by members of patrols. Screening as described within section 1-18 of the Manual is generally performed by experienced collectors, usually within a controlled environment, to identify the level of knowledge, level of cooperation, and placement and access of a given source relative to information of high intelligence value.

As a human intelligence (HumInt) collector engaged in field questioning and/or screening, the Marine has a responsibility to adhere to the Manual’s five phases of a HumInt questioning session: planning and preparation; approach; questioning; termination; and reporting.

Planning and preparation. Fully described in chapter seven of the Manual, planning and preparation involves the research and operational planning in preparation for a specific HumInt collection effort. In brief, it is the HumInt collector’s “game plan.” Not having one is the biggest reason for not evoking actionable intelligence from a viable source.

Section 7-3 of the Manual identifies the key to effective HumInt collection as preparation by the collector who must understand not only the

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environment, but also *particularly its human component*. The human component requires an accurate assessment of the traits and characteristics of both the collector as well as the source. This element of planning and preparation involves: a) “checking” the collector’s own demeanor, attitude, and manner of presentation to the source; and b) “sizing up” the source to the fullest extent possible before engaging him in a questioning session.

Quickly establishing rapport with a source. . . .

- *Checking the HumInt collector’s demeanor, attitude, and manner of presentation.* Quickly establishing rapport with a source will improve the chance of a successful HumInt questioning session.

The Marine should not interpret rapport as being the establishment of friendship with a source. The concept of rapport is more a matter of *mutuality of respect* between HumInt collector and source. The HumInt collector should always maintain a dominant posture with a source by displaying self-assurance through posture, appearance, and voice without crossing

the line into arrogance. A collector will command respect from a source through his own confident demeanor, nonjudgmental attitude, patience, and self-control, even amidst the most chaotic and inflammatory circumstances.

Every HumInt source will instinctively assess the behavior of the collector for fear, uncertainty, or loss of confidence. If a source detects in a collector the vulnerability to be baited into either an argument or a defensive posture, identification of that weakness within a collector will be deemed a victory by the source and a validation of the source’s will to resist. Never underestimate a source. A collector should affirmatively display respect toward a source without showing excessive deference or subservience. The price for giving up the dominant intellectual position during a questioning session is failure.

Section 1-28 of the Manual outlines traits of a successful HumInt collector. Key traits among them are: a) patience and tact (creating and maintaining rapport with the source); b) objectivity and self-control (dispassionate attitude regardless of the collector’s emotional reactions); and c) appearance and demeanor (maintaining an organized and professional appearance that reflects fairness, strength, and efficiency). Anticipate that a hostile source will attempt to antagonize the



Marines must learn to distinguish a source's motives and character. (Photo by Sgt Melissa Wenger.)

collector and even demand to speak with someone who the source deems to be his "equal." By maintaining a high degree of patience, tact, objectivity, self-control, and professionalism in appearance and demeanor, the collector will wear down a source's confidence in his will to resist.

- *Sizing up the source.* Often overlooked during the planning and preparation phase of HumInt collection is a conscious effort by the collector to size up a source by assessing the source's motives, beliefs, personal characteristics, and affiliations. The subsequent approach to be taken with the source may well be defined by whether the source is a leader versus a follower (who may be compelled to participate at the risk of harm to himself or family members); a fundamentalist zealot versus an unemployed, educated engineer; or an experienced jihadist versus a common criminal chasing "street cred," just as domestic thugs might find life's meaning as members of an inner-city gang.

As an example, for American Marines whose theater of operation includes Africa, the approach that a HumInt collector might develop for a questioning session might depend upon whether the source is a member of Boko Haram (in which case the stated ideological goal of establishing Sharia law across

Africa is a cover for the overthrow of Nigeria's government) versus al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (in which case the stated pursuit of Sharia law is not much more than a cover for its overt multimillion dollar criminal enterprise in kidnapping for ransom, drug smuggling, arms dealing, and human trafficking). While members of each group proclaim fealty to Allah in jihad against Western culture and Judeo-Christian beliefs, their underlying

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motives are different. Boko Haram's foot soldiers are disillusioned young men who have only loose ties to religious ideology and are easily drawn in because there are few opportunities under the perceived repressive government of Nigeria. On the other hand, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb rivals the world's most sophisticated criminal organizations in that it spans the 4,300-mile corridor across the widest part of Africa that includes sections of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Algeria, Libya, Burkina Faso, and Chad.

The HumInt collector's approach and choice of questioning methodology will not be the same for members of each of these disparate groups. That evolution of approach (phase two) and choice of questioning (phase three) begins by accurately sizing up the source for his personal characteristics, affiliations, motives, beliefs, and possible justifications for his conduct during the first phase of HumInt collection, i.e., planning and preparation.

Approach. Fully described in chapter eight of the Manual, approach is the second of five phases of a HumInt questioning session. During the approach phase, a HumInt collector establishes the conditions of control and rapport to gain the cooperation of the source and to facilitate information collection.

The conditions of control are largely determined tactically by the Marine's environment, working conditions, and MOS. Nevertheless, *privacy* is fundamental to improving the chances of a successful HumInt questioning session. Certainly, within a controlled environment privacy is more easily attained, but in the field, best efforts should be made to create at least the appearance of privacy by taking a source even a few meters away from others within his group. If an interpreter and/or another Marine are present, they should be positioned outside the source's peripheral view so that the impression of direct communication with the collector is maintained. While the HumInt collector's safety should not be compromised, cooperation from a source during a questioning session will be enhanced if the source is not physically restrained or intimidated. Fearlessness by the collector in the presence of a source shows the collector's self-assurance and helps develop rapport with a source who might otherwise have been programmed to anticipate abuse at the hands of American military personnel.

Rapport evolves through mutuality of respect between collector and source that starts with an understanding of the source and his motives during the planning and preparation phase as described above. Rapport becomes an even more critical element during screening when more incisive questioning protocols are

employed than during the less intensive field interviews.

Strategies for building rapport with jihadist suspects or informants require different approaches for their varying levels of commitment to radical Islam. For ease of analysis within this discussion, three broad categories of underlying motivations for jihadist combatants can be considered: a) fundamentalists; b) nationalists; and c) common criminals.

Fundamentalists are unconditionally committed to the political/religious doctrine set forth within the *al-Qaida Jihad Training Manual*, i.e., “to do the work and undergo martyrdom for the purpose of achieving the goal and establishing the religion of majestic Allah on earth” in fulfillment of the belief “that governing the peoples’ affairs is one of the greatest religious obligations.”

Nationalists are motivated less by Islamic fervor than by either their resentment toward the presence of Western military forces in Muslim countries or their perception that Western capitalism unfairly impedes economic achievement among unemployed Muslims.

Common criminals and domestic criminals are motivated by the same incentives such as greed, revenge, or simple gang mentality. Their jihadist commitment is not to religion, culture, or nation—it is to themselves.

Developing a rapport-based approach to a HumInt questioning session involves a willingness by the HumInt collector to walk in the shoes of his source to understand the source’s mentality and core beliefs. That does not require the collector to agree with a source. It does, however, require the collector to empathize with the source’s motivations. Being able to discern the differences in motives and beliefs among fundamentalists, nationalists, and common criminals will facilitate the HumInt collector’s task during the questioning phase (phase three) of presenting a noncoercive persuasive argument to a source in a manner that will yield actionable intelligence.

Questioning. Described within chapter nine of the Manual, questioning is the third of the five phases of a HumInt questioning session. During the ques-

tioning phase, the HumInt collector chooses a questioning methodology and draws reasonable inferences about the HumInt source’s veracity.

- *Field questioning.* Field questioning requires the HumInt collector to quickly elicit useful information from a source while just as quickly assessing the source’s credibility. The collector must be receptive not only to what the source says, but how he says it.

Questions asked in the field should have maximum impact because the time available to a HumInt collector may be limited. For that reason, questions should be short rather than compound. Short, single-issue questions

Field interview questions should be nonaccusatory. . . .

reduce the risk that a source may be confused by a question that contains more than one line of inquiry. They also prevent a source from selectively answering only the nonthreatening portions of a compound question. Open-ended questions (which solicit narrative answers beyond a mere “yes” or “no”) are preferred to leading questions that suggest their own answers and thereby create obstacles for corroboration of facts that would otherwise validate the credibility of an admission. After asking a question, the HumInt collector should not interrupt a source during a narrative answer unless the source is veering far off course. Instead, the collector should allow a source to fully provide his initial version of events before asking follow-up questions intended to develop additional details of who, what, when, where, why, and how. Repetition works against the liar, so repetitive questions asked in an objective, nonjudgmental fashion as to the source’s timeline of events will reveal the credibility, or lack thereof, in his story.

Field interview questions should be *nonaccusatory* and are intended

not only to elicit a HumInt source’s substantive knowledge about an issue under investigation, but are also intended to elicit behavior symptoms indicative of truth or deception. Critical to this process is the HumInt collector’s ability to accurately analyze a source’s *verbal* responses (what the source says, including word choice and arrangements of words); *paralinguistic* responses (how the source vocalizes his responses, including characteristics of speech falling outside the spoken word); and *nonverbal* responses (the source’s demeanor while speaking, including posture, physical movements, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact). These verbal, paralinguistic, and nonverbal responses can be interpreted to identify the probable truthfulness of a HumInt source, even within the context of a brief field interview.

Examples of verbal responses that may indicate deception include qualifiers (“not that I recall,” “not really,” “as far as I know,” “to the best of my recollection”); selective memory (memory gaps at critical times during a descriptive narrative); unresponsive answers (failing to answer a question, changing the subject, answering a question with another question); or lengthy explanations of innocence in response to an accusatory question when a simple denial of participation is more appropriate.

Examples of paralinguistic responses that may indicate deception include delayed answers, repeating a question, rephrasing a question, inappropriate nervous laughter, fragmented or incomplete sentences, or changes in rate, pitch, or volume of an answer.¹

Examples of nonverbal responses that may indicate deception include sweating, dry mouth, hand tremors, hand wringing, aversion of eye contact, inattentive posture, changes in posture, covering of mouth or eyes, and displacement behaviors that may include tapping, pacing, manipulation of small objects, grooming, or rearranging of clothing.

The above behavioral responses are not all-inclusive—there are other similar indicators that exceed the scope

of this article. Most often, however, each of the above are outward manifestations of internal stress that, when timely displayed by a HumInt source in clusters and in response to direct questions, can be interpreted as probable signs of deception. The challenge for the HumInt collector is to convert the process of behavior analysis into a full-time mental discipline so that he confirms the practice of carefully observing and attentively listening to a HumInt source rather than just casually looking at or hearing him. Through detailed study of a HumInt source, reasonable professional inferences can be drawn by the collector about the source's veracity during both field questioning as well as screening.

- **Screening.** Screening is a dual process that starts with a structured interview that builds upon the results of field questioning to further refine the separation of sources who may possess actionable intelligence from those who have no viable information concerning an issue under investigation. Analysis of a source's substantive responses to questions during screening, as well as his behavioral responses, will allow a discerning HumInt collector to either discard or further scrutinize a given source for viable information.

The HumInt collector's choice of questioning methodology is made during this third phase of the collection process. Behavior analysis interviews are legitimate tools for determining the credibility of a source. Once such interviews are completed, a HumInt collector is better prepared to decide whether the source is withholding useful information. Thereafter, more intensive, yet noncoercive, techniques should be employed to persuade a viable source to reveal the sought-after intelligence.

HumInt collectors may employ persuasive arguments in the form of *themes* that appeal to the mentality and beliefs of a source to psychologically (not legally) justify the conduct or incident under investigation. It is a form of rationalization by a HumInt collector for the source's conduct or knowledge that provides a face-saving device and facilitates self-incrimina-

tion within a source's own framework of motives and priorities.

For example, consider a HumInt collector screening a jihadist source from Yemen who is believed to be a member of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula suspected of having planted or detonated roadside improvised explosive devices against American Marines. Without agreeing with the source's motives, an astute HumInt collector could recognize that Yemen is a crucible of snowballing poverty (more than 40 percent of people live in poverty) and exploding population (expected to double to more than 40 million people by 2030) in which radical Islamists cultivate jihadists by fomenting hatred of American "economic repression." The source's

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mentality and beliefs have likely been formed by radical fundamentalists, so within that framework of motivations a HumInt collector may employ themes to psychologically justify the source's conduct by suggesting that by triggering the roadside bomb, the source was doing nothing more than trying to fight for the right to support his family, to educate his children, and to live with dignity. By contrasting that with the intent to indiscriminately murder Marines who probably don't want to be there and who have families of their own, the HumInt collector has effectively justified or rationalized the offensive conduct within the framework of the jihadist combatant's own mentality and beliefs, thereby opening the door to an admission.

As another example, consider the screening of a Salafist jihadist who is suspected of organizing suicide attacks against American troops in

Afghanistan. Recognizing that Salafism is among the most extreme form of Sunni Islamism for which utopia is the Caliphate (the full spread of Islam throughout Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa), a HumInt collector may appeal to the mentality and beliefs of his source by arguing the "moral superiority of Islam" and suggesting that what the source did "was morally justified to fulfill Allah's goal of establishing Islam on earth, just as Allah taught you." The HumInt collector's theme embodies the argument that "the jihadist's moral compass is beyond the comprehension of the Western mentality" and challenges the source to show the strength of his "moral conviction and the superiority of Islam" by not only telling

the truth, but by outwardly embracing the conduct under investigation as an act of faith in Allah just as Osama Bin Laden repeatedly did in his fatwa against Americans and the West.

Adaptation of appropriate themes during screening of the broad array of jihadist combatants encountered in Afghanistan, North Africa, and the Middle East is challenging because the themes are not universally applicable to all HumInt sources. "One size" certainly does not fit all circumstances. Persuasive themes that appeal to low-level jihadist common criminals who are more interested in simple street cred will not resonate either with Islamic fundamentalists or nationalists whose motives are vastly different. Effective selection, however, of the right theme for any given HumInt source during screening begins with a good plan and preparation that includes sizing up the source for his

mentality, core beliefs, and affiliations. Once understood, those elements of the human component of HumInt collection become the collector's weapons of noncoercive persuasive argumentation that will lead to the disclosure of credible intelligence.

Termination and reporting. Termination, which is described in chapter eight of the Manual, refers to the completion of a questioning session and establishment of necessary conditions for future HumInt collections from the same source. Typically this can be handled (in the absence of any logistical impediments such as extreme geographical distance) merely by suggesting to a source that a need may arise to speak with him once again in the future. The collector may affirmatively say to the source (together with a culturally appropriate and respectful gesture such as a handshake and an expression of gratitude for the time spent with the collector) something along the lines

of, "You wouldn't have any problem speaking again down the road, would you?" The polite challenge will be almost universally accepted, whereupon the collector should be certain to obtain address/location/coordinates where the source can reliably be found.

Reporting, which is generally described within chapter 10 of the Manual, refers to the preparation and submission of written and oral summations of a HumInt collection effort. Such protocols will be specifically prescribed by the military unit to which the HumInt collector belongs.

Conclusion

Without question, the task of HumInt collection through noncoercive questioning will challenge both the creative intellect as well as the self-discipline of Marines whose MOSs bring them into contact with sources who are committed to jihad against American assets. The process—both the HumInt collection

effort itself as well as the consequences of failing to evoke from a source actionable intelligence that might otherwise save lives and prevent injury—is inherently dangerous, yet the challenge will inevitably be accepted by American HumInt collectors whose selfless courage, professional finesse, and respect for our Constitutional values will ultimately help contain the threats posed by unconventional jihadist enemies to freedom and democracy.

>Authors' Note: The information and opinions contained herein are based upon the authors' independent research and experience in collaboration with John E. Reid & Associates, Inc., Chicago, IL.



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