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2006

## Interviewing Al-Qaeda-related subjects: A law enforcement perspective

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## Chapter 2

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# Al-Qaeda-related subjects: a law enforcement perspective

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### Introduction

National security and public safety are primary concerns for all professionals who investigate terrorism (White 2003; Borum 2004). These investigations frequently involve questioning subjects, either for purposes of intelligence gathering or for investigations that may lead to criminal prosecution. The objective of these interviews/interrogations is to gather accurate and reliable information that furthers security, safety, intelligence and investigative interests. The current threat environment, however, poses some particular challenges for law enforcement professionals investigating terrorism (Hoffman 1999; Laqueur 1999; Simon 2003; Borum, Fein, Vossekuil, Gelles, and Shumate 2004; Borum *et al.* 2004).

Many 'adversaries' in the global war on terrorism have beliefs, ideologies, cultures and life experiences that differ markedly from those of their interrogators – and often differ from those of criminals with whom law enforcement professionals more typically interact. Terrorist groups and networks affiliated with al-Qaeda, in particular, pose ominous threats and present enormous challenges to the investigative and intelligence personnel who pursue them. Al-Qaeda and related operatives are committed to a cause: not just to their own personal interests, but to the interests of the 'brothers' (group) of Islam. They may be trained to withstand questioning and to utilize counter-interrogation techniques (Gunaratna 2001).

Various interrogation strategies have been employed with success against al-Qaeda-affiliated subjects since the first attack on the

World Trade Center in 1993. These approaches were refined over the ensuing decade, incorporating lessons learnt along the way. They have proven effective in the interrogation and/or prosecutions of al-Qaeda terrorists associated with the Africa Embassy bombings in 1998, the attack on the *USS Cole* in 2000 and the 11 September 2001 attacks.

To date, the most extensive interviews with al-Qaeda operatives have been conducted with Sunni extremists from Middle Eastern Arab societies who are held in detainee status. Just as there are differences, however, in how one might approach a custodial versus a non-custodial interview, there may be features and effects of the detainee situation that are unique and may not generalize well to other kinds of law enforcement interviews with people of investigative concern.

Nevertheless, the collective experience of professionals involved in detainee interviews and interrogations may offer insights into the thinking and behaviours of al-Qaeda-related individuals, especially those who are from, or have roots in, Middle Eastern Arab countries. Knowledge about the expectations, communications and behaviours of these persons may aid other investigators to improve interrogation efforts. In addition, what has been learnt about gathering information from these people may inform the efforts of law enforcement and intelligence professionals who work with other al-Qaeda-related people (Einesman 1999).

To state immediately the central theme of this paper: a relationship/rapport-based approach with Middle Eastern Arab subjects who may be affiliated with al-Qaeda networks will generally result in more truthful and reliable information than will an aggressive approach. This is an approach that is advocated in almost all interrogations, not just with Middle Eastern subjects. The following guidelines are offered as an interrogation approach that works well with national security cases and criminal cases. In all instances where interrogation is conducted for the purpose of eliciting reliable and non-coerced confessions, a rapport-based approach is recommended. In the specific case of terrorism, in the opinion of the authors aggressive strategies been ineffective and, whilst yielding information, the information is often not reliable or actionable. Aggressive and forceful interrogation of a subject who may be trained to anticipate torture and to resist questioning is likely to be counterproductive to the goal of eliciting accurate, reliable and useful information (Arrigo 2003).

Clearly differences exist between subjects of al-Qaeda-related terrorist investigations and subjects of other investigations more commonly conducted by law enforcement (Navarro 2002). This

chapter seeks to highlight some of these differences and to provide some suggestions, based on experience, about how best to deal with them. The chapter offers background information and context for interrogating Middle Eastern Arab al-Qaeda-affiliated detainees and subjects of investigation. It also suggests what has been learnt about general interview approaches during detention. The chapter recommends ways to navigate interviews: preparation, development of rapport, development of themes, management of resistance, and detection of deception.

This is not a 'how to' chapter. There is much to be learnt about interrogation, especially with regard to strategies that take cognizance of the culture, background and expectations of the subject being interviewed (Gudjonsson 2003). The goal of this chapter is to outline some themes and ideas that may result in more effective and useful interrogation strategies and practices.

### **Understanding contexts for interrogating subjects of al-Qaeda-related investigations**

Successful strategies recognize that Arab culture is one that is built on relationships, oriented towards a larger collective, and focused on impression management (Nydell 2002). Within much Arab culture is an acceptance of conspiracy theories as a means of explaining the reasons behind certain events. Osama Bin Laden has reinforced these long-standing beliefs that Americans and Jews and their Western allies are seeking to control and dominate the Middle East and attack the faith of Islam. In accepting these theories, it could be said that al-Qaeda supporters and sympathizers have suspended critical thinking. They might have done so in order to find meaning, direction and structure through a strong affiliation with a radical Islamist view of the West and a commitment to the jihad (Borum and Gelles 2004).

Knowledge of these underlining factors may help an investigator to assess deception during an interrogation and to elicit accurate and useful information from al-Qaeda operatives and supporters. For example, many Middle Eastern Arab males think associatively. From a Western point of view, their thinking may appear to jump from point to point and from place to place in a discussion. Associative thinking differs from Western 'linear' thinking (Nydell 2002). Linear thinking is goal oriented, with one point following the next in logical order. Understanding the manner in which information is communicated

is critical in analysing the reliability and usefulness of information offered during an interview or interrogation.

### **Understanding motivation and the importance of relationship**

In our exploration of the motivation of al-Qaeda-affiliated extremists, we must rely heavily on our own observations, assessments and experiences with subjects who have been captured, detained and interrogated. At the time of writing, there has been no systematic study of personal pathways to militant Islamist ideology or of recruitment into its terrorist factions. The existing social science literature and our own appraisals, however, do suggest several vulnerabilities that frequently appear in these subjects. Understanding these vulnerabilities may inform an examination of what may motivate these men to commit to an extremist view of Islam and to waging jihad against the West.

Perhaps we first should clarify that the constellation of these motivational themes does not comprise a 'profile' of the Islamic extremist. In fact, there is no such profile that can reliably be based on demographic, psychological or social characteristics (Borum *et al.* 2003). The extremists of whom we have knowledge come from a range of social classes and possess varying levels of intellect and education. Instead, the thematic consistency we have observed is that many of these men, prior to their involvement with militant Islamist ideas, were actively seeking meaning, direction, structure and connection in their lives. This pursuit often appeared to be related to their radicalization (Borum and Gelles 2004).

It is not uncommon to hear stories amongst al-Qaeda-affiliated detainees of how they were drawn into a jihadist group through others in their social network. Marc Sageman (2004) estimates that more than two thirds of his sample of al-Qaeda-associated extremists had already formed into a social collective (in Western terms 'a bunch of guys') before they committed their terrorist acts. Social networks and relationships are particularly powerful in collectivist societies – such as in Asian and Middle Eastern cultures – where Islam and the presence of al-Qaeda also tend to be most prevalent. People raised with collectivist values quite naturally and normatively see themselves (and other individuals) as being part of a larger meaningful cause. The identities and perceptions of self-worth amongst many in the Middle East – and to some extent in Asia –

are influenced strongly by the idea that 'who I am is part of whom I am with'. Seeking connections is critical in a world where one's value is defined by whom you know and who is in your network (in Arabic, *Wasta*; Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993). These priorities are distinctly different from traditional Western values that tend to emphasize individual achievement and self-worth (Nydell 2002).

Thus, in his quest for personal meaning, direction and structure (particularly in an environment where extremist sects and ideologies are prevalent), a man will often suspend critical thinking, commit to a particular mosque, leader or collective that advocates militant jihad and then, by making that commitment, develop the capabilities and connections to participate in potential terrorist attacks against Western interests (Borum and Gelles 2004). The extremist mosque is generally small, private and, in many cases, found just by happenstance. For example, one extremist told an interviewer that it just happened to be in his 'patch.' Once connected, however, they are powerful vehicles of jihadist ideology. Sageman (2004) found that nearly half of the 400 al-Qaeda extremists he studied came from just 10 mosques.

The mosque may provide a refuge from the turmoil of inner psychological conflicts and crisis. For all people, participating with a group meets an initial need for affiliation and belonging, particularly for those who have failed to affiliate and be validated elsewhere or who have not lived up to the expectations of their families (Luckabaugh *et al.* 1997). Islam – and jihadist ideology – provides structure, meaning and identity (Monroe and Kreidie 1997). *Sharia* (Islamic law) and the teachings of the imam impart a needed structure, and the unequivocal rules are defined by the *Koran* and *Hadith*. Status is achieved through memorization of the *Koran*, not by analysis of ambiguities and nuances.

The radical collective fosters and maintains an unquestioning adherence to its tenets and to one another as 'brothers'. These individuals learn quickly that questioning beliefs leads to rejection, whilst embracing them reinforces the primary motive of affiliation and connectivity (Marsella 2003). Those who question may be marginalized or even shunned by others.

### **Understanding jihad and the history of Sunni extremism: the path to commitment**

The Arabic language root of jihad (the verb *j-h-d*) is defined as 'to endeavor, strive, labor, take great pains' (*Dictionary of Modern*

*Written Arabic*). The noun form is sometimes – depending on one’s perspective – defined as a great effort in the struggle to maintain the straight path of Islam. Bernard Lewis (2003), an eminent historian of Islam and the Middle East, notes the concept of jihad in the great majority of topics in the Arabic language, and the context of Islamic issues refers to a religious duty to wage holy war against infidels or non-believers, for the sake of God Almighty (Allah). Understandably, in the current context of radical Islam, some moderate Muslims have claimed that jihad is misunderstood in the West, and that the word and concept are intended to characterize the effort a Muslim must exert to live a good life. A fair reading, though, of orthodox Sunni and Shia teachings – even setting aside extremist variants – supports Lewis’s contention that jihad almost always refers to the duty to fight against ‘the enemies of Islam’. Modern-day extremists such as Osama Bin Ladin have been profoundly influenced by the notion of this ‘neglected duty’ – i.e. jihad (*al-farida al-gha’iba*) – as were the Egyptian Islamist philosophers of the 1950 and 1960s, Sayyad Qutb and Muhammad al-Farraj. Qutb and al-Farraj averred that after faith in God (iman) and the belief in only one true God (tawhid), there is no more important duty for *all* Muslims than jihad against the unbelievers (Lewis 2003).

Within US government security and intelligence circles, discussions of Islamic extremism usually distinguish between the two major branches of the religion, Sunni and Shia. Militant extremism amongst Shia Muslims is most often associated in the Western public’s mind with the Iranian US embassy hostage crisis of 1979, and with terrorist acts of the Lebanese Hizballah. In contrast to the current form of Sunni extremism, Shia terrorism has been motivated primarily by nationalist objectives, not by strivings for a worldwide Islamic utopia (Ridell and Cotterell 2003).

In the current security environment, however, there is consensus amongst counter-terrorism experts and policy-makers, at least in America, that Sunni extremism currently poses the greatest threat to Western interests. The voice of these jihadists is most aptly represented in the words and deeds of al-Qaeda and its associated groups, and of men such as Osama Bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri and number of lesser known shaykhs. These jihadist groups and the men behind them have a rigid view of Islam and have little tolerance for those whose beliefs diverge from them. They oppose Jews, Christians and less devout Muslims (Borum and Gelles 2004). Their world is divided between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The proponents of this ideology, including Sayyad Qutb, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam al-Farraj and

'Abdallah Azzam, as well as their contemporary counterparts such as Bin Ladin, believe two competing forces seek to dominate the condition of the world. Since the time the *Koran* was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, the states of Dar al-Islam (the abode of Islam) and Dar al-Harb (abode of war or conflict) have been in conflict and will remain so until the end of time (Lewis 2003).

In the current state of Dar al-Harb, true believers of Islam are impelled to wage defensive jihad in order to reclaim lands once under the control of pious Muslims. These territories include parts of Spain and other areas of Europe 'up to the gates of Rome' and, of course, Israel. Once Muslims reclaim the land, then the struggle (jihad) moves to an offensive mode of conquest to ensure the remainder of the world is safe for Islam. In recent times, the USA has been viewed as the primary opponent in the Dar al-Harb because al-Qaeda and recognized Sunni religious leaders believe it has sided and conspired 'against Muslims' in numerous conflicts around the world (e.g. Israel, East Timor, Serbia, the South Philippines, etc.) (Lewis 2003).

Sunni extremism, however, is not a monolithic movement. It includes a number of different groups with varying philosophies. For example, the Salafiun or the Salafi (an affiliation claimed by many in al-Qaeda), are part of a modern reform movement of Islam, founded by the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905). Salafism was preceded by the doctrine of Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (currently referred to as 'Wahhabism' or Unitarians), another fundamental ideology.<sup>1</sup>

The severity and exclusiveness of the Salafiun and the earlier extremist Wahhabian are arguably surpassed by movements such as Takfir wal-Hijra and Takfir wal-Hikma. The principal adherents to this highly militant brand of extremism tend to be concentrated in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The 'takfiris' believe that the pre-eminent jihad calls for the death, first and foremost, of Muslims born of the faith but who reject their narrowly literal application of the *Koran* and the *Hadith*. This has been referred to as a sort of modern-day 'outing' movement in the sense that takfiris have a duty to identify and accuse non-takfiri Muslims of being non-Muslim. From Egyptian president Husni Mubarrak to the entirety of Shia Islam, all have been designated by takfiris as deserving nothing less than death for their un-Islamic ways (Elliott 2004).

It is important to emphasize that to conduct an interrogation of a subject with an extremist ideology and a commitment to jihad, the interviewer must have some understanding of the subject's ideology and the history associated with his thinking, commitments and



beliefs if he or she is to manage an interview better. In a rapport-based approach it is critical to demonstrate respect for the subject. Without a knowledge of the subject's ideology it is difficult to interpret and manage the subject during the interview. The content of his communications will reflect where he stands, when he is being co-operative and when he is using his beliefs to engage in a personal jihad during the course of the interrogation. For some subjects, resisting the interrogator is a continuance of his personal jihad. During the course of an interrogation, adherence to his beliefs reinforces the subject's expectations about the interrogator that influence his perceptions of the interrogator. He may use his beliefs to provoke the interrogator to react in a manner that confirms his established or preconceived expectation of the interrogator as an apostate and infidel. We have found that, by understanding his beliefs, we are better able to anticipate his communications and provocations, to react neutrally with a degree of respect and, eventually, to erode his expectations and perceptions through a rapport-based approach.

A final caveat before moving on to more direct interrogation strategies is to address the issue of competing identities. Competing identities is a concept that is applied to individuals who are born, and to some degree raised, in a country that is different from where they reside and where they have been detained. Many people from the Middle East immigrate to Western and first-world industrialized nations. These people are different from people who have lived their whole lives in their native country and who therefore reflect more strongly that country's ethnic and cultural behaviours and attitudes. An individual who has lived in the West and, in particular has lived most of his life in the West will have assimilated some of the characteristics of his new-found homeland. This will, of course, vary based on the length of time he has lived in a Western country, the community he has lived in and the manner in which he has been raised. In many cases the degree of assimilation can be assessed by where people live, the peer group they have interacted with and the diversity of their experiences beyond the more ethnic or cultural activities indigenous to their native country. For example, we have found during the course of an interrogation that people who have lived in the West for a considerable period of time have a more in-depth understanding of Westerners and therefore a different set of expectations. Additionally, depending on the degree of assimilation to Western thought and activities, immigrants from the Middle East who become subjects of terrorist investigations and interrogations tend to be more linear in their thinking. In some cases, the interrogations are



easier if the subject has lived in the West for a considerable period of time; in other cases, more difficult, based on the subject's expectation of what will occur and his knowledge of the laws.

### **Foundations of the rapport-based interview approach**

The cornerstone of an interrogation that will yield the most reliable information is an effective, ongoing assessment of the subject. Before and during the interviews, the interview team should evaluate factors that are unique to the subject, or at least that distinguish him from other individuals who may be the subject of al-Qaeda-related investigations.

A rapport-building (or relationship-based) approach will yield the best results in an interview/interrogation that occurs over days/weeks/months. Rapport building is designed to develop a common understanding and respect between the interviewer and subject. The interviewer works to build a bond between the two of them based on commonalities and shared experiences in the interview room.

Although sometimes difficult to do, the interviewer should exhibit at least an apparent empathy for the subject's beliefs, motivations and circumstances. Such an approach facilitates the information gathering process for two reasons. First, people tend to share their experiences with someone who is empathic, who values them and who, they feel, can understand them (Schafer and Navarro 2004). Secondly, the importance of relationships is fundamental to many people raised or with roots in the Middle East (Nydell 2002) – relationships are a vital part of a subject's developmental and cultural experience. The relationship that develops during hours spent together between interviewer and subject may, in certain cases, approach or approximate a friendship. That friendship may be genuine or contrived, but the interviewer's goal is always to elicit truthful and reliable information.

Whilst a relationship-based approach has generally been most effective with al-Qaeda-related subjects, individual cases may require a different strategy. No single interrogation or debriefing technique will be successful in all situations. Interrogators tailor their approach to an interview and interrogation based on the current context and the background of the witness or subject. Ongoing assessment of continuously collected information about a subject's behaviour and ideology will assist in identifying or creating moments of vulnerability for optimal elicitation. Each interviewee requires an individualized

approach that is dynamic and modified according to behavioural data collected from different sources (Schafer and Navarro 2004). The interviewer should build flexibility into any interview plan. Changes in interview strategies and techniques should be guided by data from the ongoing assessment.

### *Preparing for the interview*

The attributes generally seen as desirable for a law enforcement interrogator (e.g. good intelligence, an understanding of human nature, an ability to get along well with others, patience and persistence) apply equally to interrogations of al-Qaeda detainees. There are some other specific considerations, however, that can affect the 'fit' between interviewer and a Middle Eastern Arab al-Qaeda-related subject. For example, age should be a consideration when matching or assigning an interviewer to a subject because of Arabic respect for elders and seniority (Nydell 2002). (The more experienced interviewers should similarly be assigned to those subjects who, it is believed, have the most important information). In general, care should be given to selecting an interviewer who can relate to the subject. If possible, the interviewer should speak the subject's native language (or at least know some key terms of the language).

Interrogations are most productive when the interrogator and subject can be paired consistently. Arabic people tend to respond best when interviewed by the same interrogator rather than with a round robin or 'whoever is available' assignment process (Nydell 2002). Consistency allows the interrogator to become familiar with the subject's history and to see how he responds to various questions and approaches. The subjects of investigations are not mechanical objects who can be turned on to pump out information. They require constant care and understanding if they are to respond.

Members of the interview team should read all the available background information and be aware of all evidence seized with or associated with the subject. Sometimes 'pocket litter' in the subject's possession at the time of apprehension, evidence seized during searches and statements from others can be helpful in assessing who the subject is (if his identity is in doubt) or what he has been doing. Pocket litter may also help to corroborate or disconfirm the subject's statements and to aid help interviewer assess whether the subject is being deceptive.

Collateral informants can also be a valuable source of information. Arresting officers, guards, corrections officers or other law enforcement

professionals who have observed the subject's behaviour can assist the interviewer/interrogator to understand the subject. Correctional or detention staff, in particular, can provide information about how the subject behaves in detention and can help measure the impact of the prison environment on an interrogation plan. In a custodial environment, guards see and spend more time with a subject than does an interviewer. Therefore, they may be in an excellent position to monitor a subject's behaviour and to observe comments and activities. Observations by the guards about whether a subject keeps to himself, gets support and counsel from others, about how and what he communicates to others, what he likes to eat, whether he exercises, etc., can greatly assist the interviewers in formulating interview strategies and building relationships with the subject (Walters 2002).

The interrogator should not impose a time limit on an interview or an expectation of the frequency of interviews. The length of the interviews should vary. Having a set, routine block of time for interviews allows a subject to anticipate events better and thus to attempt to manipulate the interrogator and the process. For example, if in a confined setting interviewing takes place for a specified amount of time for each subject, the remaining detainees can anticipate how long they will need to defend themselves and can practise steeling themselves to outlast the interviewer.

#### *Operating with a translator*

If a translator is needed, the translator's role must be clearly defined and continually reinforced so that he or she does not slide into the role of a surrogate interrogator. The interviewers must control the interrogation, not the interpreters. The interpreter must appear subordinate to the interviewer – someone working with and for the interviewer. As a practical matter, some have found it helpful to have the translator sit behind the subject.

#### *Developing rapport*

Developing rapport involves more than simply 'being nice' to a subject or giving him what he wants just to gain information. It requires a series of give-and-take interactions, under circumstances controlled by the interviewer. The interrogator needs to engage the subject in an extended conversation and to develop a relationship that helps to provide insight into the subject's motivations and,

perhaps, deceptive practices or resistance techniques if he or she is to elicit accurate information (Walters 2002).

To build rapport, the interviewer engages in dialogue with the subject, during which he or she identifies and assesses potential motivations, interests and vulnerabilities. Rapport is founded on a *quid pro quo* basis (the perceived ability of an interviewer to help the subject), on commonalities (family, wife, education, adversity), personality and mutual respect. Often, rapport-based approaches include adversarial arguments, disagreements, admonishments, criticism and challenging questions. These are always tempered with the fact that the subject knows that the interviewer is concerned about his future and is fair to him (Schafer and Navarro 2004).

In a rapport-based interview process, the interviewer shapes the relationship, using a variety of interpersonal, cognitive and emotional strategies and techniques, to gain critical information – or a confession – from the subject. The subject shares critical information with the interviewer because this collaborative relationship with the interrogator leads him to value the relationship more than the information he is perhaps trying to withhold.

At the beginning of the relationship, questions of an investigative nature are purposely avoided. This is done to allow the subject and the interviewer to develop a bond on matters unrelated to the investigation. For example, news unrelated to terrorism that may be of interest to the subject has served as a good ice-breaker – for example, news about the World Cup. Offers of food and beverages may be used to build goodwill and, later, to be used as an incentive. Another productive line of inquiry involves having the subject talk about his country of origin and the interviewer showing an interest in learning about his country. In some cases, subjects have seemed particularly interested in maps and graphics (such as National Geographic maps). These might be used to point out significant cities/towns/villages and paths of travel.

Regardless of an interviewer's own style, it is important to remember that a major goal of relationship building is for the subject to see the interviewer as a person (a 'Rob' rather than as an enemy). If a subject sees an interviewer as a person rather than an instrument of an 'enemy' government, when the subject refuses to talk, lies or is deceitful, he is offending that personal relationship. Because the relationship may matter more to the subject at the time than 'doing his duty against the enemy' (as he may have been trained to do), he may choose to share accurate information with the interview team.

### *Gathering information*

The interview team should approach each interview with positive expectations. The interrogator – and team – should enter every interview session with confidence that, over time, they will make a breakthrough with the subject. As noted above, rapport is probably the single most important element in creating a climate for eliciting information. The interviewer should not engage in a sensitive or probing inquiry at the beginning of the interview process or at the beginning of an individual session. This should only be done once rapport has been established or re-established. When getting to the essence of the interrogation, the interviewer should focus on the general and work towards the specific, all the while emphasizing the relationship – that is, the interviewer should concentrate on the relationship before mining for facts.

Once initial rapport has been established, a technique that has worked well for some investigators is to listen to the subject's story with what appears to be an open mind. The interviewer should listen carefully both for content and for emotional and motivational cues. With such active listening, the interviewer can learn about the subject's primary motivations (Walters 2002) (e.g. concerns about family, a son, a daughter, wife, money, coming to the West in the future, spreading the word of Islam or fatigue with the 'jihad life', etc.).

During the initial storytelling phase, the interviewer does not interrupt or criticize as the subject lays out what may, in reality, be his cover story. Once he has laid out his full story, the interviewer can go back and ask him to go over it again in more detail and in a systematic manner, perhaps alternating queries from the general to the specific (Walters 2002).

In reviewing the story, the interviewer should ask detailed questions about every element. It may be that the subject will attempt to give as little information as possible to satisfy the interviewer. The challenge, then, is to identify meaningful, important or inconsistent details and sequences from the subject's outline or story. The greater the level of the detail queried, the greater the likelihood that the subject will eventually 'stumble' over errors or inconsistencies in his cover story. Questions need to be very specific to guard against omission. This process may seem tedious – asking ten questions when it should only take two – but it is an important part of gathering reliable and accurate information.

In the detailed inquiry phase, the interviewer should insert or suggest some type of context or time-line reference, possibly using as

markers, seasons and Islamic holidays rather than Western calendar dates if the subject has not lived in the West or is not familiar with Western conventions about dates and time. When establishing locations with some subjects, the interviewer might use geographic descriptors: direction of prayer, geographic landmarks, valleys, rivers, mountains, lakes, etc. (e.g. along the road, across a bridge over a river, then along the riverbank).

When a time line has been established, the interviewer should have the subject explain all the details provided across the time line. As noted earlier, Middle Eastern Arab male's usual way of thinking is associative rather than linear. Holding him to a 'common sense' time line of when various events happened may increase the conflict he experiences if he is giving a cover story. The subject may not be able to maintain consistency in the details of a fabricated time line. Recognizing the subject's inconsistencies and confronting him with these in the context of a relationship that has developed between the subject and the interviewer may force the subject to recognize that the interviewer knows he is not telling the truth.

Finally, the interview team should develop skills in assessing non-verbal cues (Knapp and Hall 1997). There should be a mechanism for members of the team to report significant observations to the interrogator. Some reactions, such as 'cotton mouth' (i.e. the white foamy saliva that collects at the corners of the mouth), are autonomic or physiological responses and may be regarded as stress reactions common to all peoples. Other non-verbal behaviours, such as crossing one's arms or glancing away, may have particular cultural meanings.

### *Developing themes*

Much interrogation theory and practice relies heavily on the strategy of 'theme development'. In the West, a 'theme' is an excuse or justification for behaviour that the subject can acknowledge to save face. Theme development in Western criminal interrogation often involves mitigating the subject's fear and/or guilt by helping the subject to justify the behaviour in his or her own mind or by diverting blame (e.g. to another person or to uncontrollable circumstances) (Inbau *et al.* 2001). These themes may require substantial modification for use with subjects of Middle Eastern Arab al-Qaeda-related investigations.

Al-Qaeda operatives, members and supporters may not feel shame or guilt in the Western sense for what they believe or for what they

have done. If they experience shame, it may be out of concern for what parents, family or others they respect are thinking about them. Other than this, Middle Eastern Arab subjects of al-Qaeda-related investigations are unlikely to feel shame as it is conceived in the West. Instead, they may feel honoured for what they have done or not done (for example, co-operated with the interrogators). The interviewer should understand and at least acknowledge a subject's sense of honor.

It is generally not productive for the interviewer to try to manipulate Western feelings of shame. If appropriate, however, the interviewer may express concern for the 'trouble' caused to the family at home or to others in the subject's relationship world.

Other modifications of traditional interrogation practices may be required to develop themes of 'justification' or themes not based on the subject's anxiety or negative emotions. For example, one common interrogation strategy is to confront the subject with information that is inconsistent with what he has said. It is believed, however, that people affiliated with al-Qaeda often suspend critical thinking. They ignore information that contradicts their beliefs. Thus confronting a subject who has justified his actions by referring to the *Koran* with opposing viewpoints similarly based upon a study of the *Koran* may be ineffective. In general, it is not helpful or productive to argue with the subject about religion or to engage in a battle of wits (or quotes) regarding Islam. Instead, the interviewer can emphasize that he or she is determined to understand fully the matters at hand and is prepared to spend the time to do so. These matters – will and time – are squarely in the interviewer's domain.

Other traditional Western interrogation strategies involve the condemnation of accomplices or playing subjects off against their co-offenders (Leo 1996). Amongst members of al-Qaeda, however, loyalty to the brotherhood is paramount. Confronting a subject with the statements of another co-operating subject is not likely to be effective, especially in the early stages of an interrogation.

The strength of the relationship between interviewer and subject is critical as the interview team develops themes that may facilitate disclosure of concealed information. At this point, the interview may assume some characteristics common to a negotiation. Two points are central. First, when the relationship has developed effectively, the subject becomes dependent on the interviewer. The interviewer is in control of what happens, and the subject is aware of this. Secondly, because the interviewer maintains the real power, he or she is in a



position to do favours or to grant requests. Accordingly, the subject's disclosure of information often evolves on a *quid pro quo* basis.

Favours, privileges or honoured requests should be contingent upon the subject's co-operation. By granting/attempting to grant a request, the interviewer makes the subject feel obligated to 'repay the favour' (e.g. to co-operate with the interrogation process). The interviewer should expect and ask for a *quid pro quo*, whereby the subject demonstrates an appropriately co-operative response.

### *Managing resistance*

The interview team needs to prepare for resistance. The team should have a plan for dealing with subjects who refuse to answer questions. For example, a subject who is supported by his network in a detention facility is likely to be prepared and to have several strategies that he plans to employ as resistance in the initial phases of the interview. The interviewer and support team need to be prepared to work through these resistances.

### *Recognizing and managing deception*

Subjects of al-Qaeda-related investigations may lie or may try to conceal information at some point in the interview, particularly at the beginning when given the open-ended opportunity to tell their story. It is critical, whenever possible, to recognize and address possibly deceptive communications.

False information provided by a subject may lead to significant fiscal and personnel resources being wasted. Time and energy are expended on attempts to corroborate inaccurate reports or to deal with non-existing threats. Disinformation may also obscure potentially real threats by creating a confusing intelligence picture.

Moreover, if a subject lies successfully to the interviewer, the interviewer will lose credibility and the subject's respect. Subsequent information provided by the subject will be less and less valuable. The subject learns that that he can deceive without any consequences and will be motivated to continue to manipulate and lie.

The interviewer must recognize the lie (if possible) and not tolerate it. The key objective is to condition the subject to tell the truth. When the subject attempts deception, omission or other straying, the interviewer should discuss the fact that what the subject is saying is illogical or does not make sense, and should work to get the subject

to acknowledge this. If the subject digresses or attempts to obfuscate (an anti-interrogation technique), the interrogator should firmly and immediately redirect him. When confronted with generalities or inconsistencies, the interviewer can attempt to force the content into a time line, offering facts that refute what a subject is saying and slowly and incrementally backing him into a corner of admission. In the context of the relationship that has been developed, the interviewer may exhibit disappointment or express a sense of feeling disrespected for being provided with false information.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have outlined an approach for interviewing subjects of al-Qaeda-related investigations. The rapport-based approach described here appears to be the best and most effective approach to elicit reliable and accurate strategic information. Whilst there is debate regarding the use of more aggressive tactics in the face of critical intelligence that might impact on a nation's security and safety, it is our opinion such techniques are morally and strategically inappropriate. Moreover, how we choose to treat suspects may affect how Westerner suspects are treated. Even in the popular 'ticking time bomb' scenario (Dershowitz 2002), aggressive tactics that humiliate, intimidate and cause physical pain and suffering, in our opinion, are unlikely to be effective. Such mistreatment merely reinforces the jihadists' expectations of Western abuses. Of course, some subjects may provide information in response to aggressive tactics, but the information may be unreliable and misleading. Nevertheless, such tactics may at times be employed in ticking-bomb scenarios in a desperate attempt to do something rather than nothing.

When possible, it is held in this chapter that the use of a relationship-based approach is more likely to yield accurate and useful information. The essence of this approach is to lever the relationship between the subject and interrogator. Its tone typically is not sympathetic and supportive but, rather, direct and at times confrontational. The interrogator begins strategic inquiry only after rapport and a relationship have been established. This general approach has been effective in many terrorism investigations and has often produced reliable and actionable information that could be corroborated, validated and subsequently used at trial.

## Note

1. See Dore Gold's *Hatred's Kingdom* for the accounts of the plundering of and killing in Shia cities of Najaf and Karbala c. 1799–1803 by the descendents of the Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and the Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud alliance. This early period of 'Wahhabism' was characterized by death and destruction in the name of God, and not just for the worst of the apostates. According to this belief system, those deserving of death included Shia and Sunni 'brothers' in Mecca and Medina who would challenge the Wahhabi brand of Islam.

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