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# STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE



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*A valuable precedent in cooperation between clandestine service and intelligence production offices.*

## THE JOINT DEBRIEFING OF A CUBAN

B. E. Layton

The difference in the disciplines governing clandestine operations on the one hand and analysis and the production of finished intelligence on the other is the root cause of the many difficulties with which we wrestle in the management of requirements, the establishment of collection priorities, the full and economical exploitation of sources, and the evaluation of reports. The separation of the overt and covert components is in part an organizational and security necessity, but it is unnecessarily deepened by a lack of understanding between the two elements, with their so different concepts of the essential skills, methods, importance, and even goals of their respective work. To this extent it has always seemed that the difficulties could be alleviated by more contacts at all levels, within the limitations imposed by security considerations, between the operational and overt analytic staffs. Over the past year there has been some progress in this sense.

One of the best and easiest ways to establish meaningful contacts and facilitate mutual understanding is to mount joint projects such as that at the Madrid interrogation center, whose fruitful operations were described in a recent issue of this journal.<sup>1</sup> Another more recent project, being less elaborate and less a product of unique circumstances, deserves therefore particular attention as a precedent in collaborative enterprise that could to advantage be repeated and multiplied.

### *A Successful Experiment*

Detailed information on Cuba is hard to obtain, and when a knowledgeable Cuban defects he must be thoroughly utilized as a source. One such source—we will call him Carlos—who had excellent contacts in Cuba was after defection intensively debriefed in the field. The reports based on his information

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence E. Rogers, "Project Niños," VII 1, p. 75 ff.

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were among the most useful received in Washington. Initially Carlos was handled according to the procedures standard for defectors who are not to be surfaced. But later, in view of his past position and contacts in Cuba, the amount of information he possessed, and the critical need for information about Cuba, a precedent-setting decision was made to give him joint overt-covert staff debriefings under semi-clandestine conditions. The secrecy added flavor to the meetings but was not germane to the debriefing process and does not affect these observations about it.

In March and April of this year representatives of successive sections of four CIA production offices and the NPIC, together with the clandestine services staff concerned, had six sessions with Carlos on subjects ranging from general political matters to geography. Then three additional sessions using aerial photography were held. Permanent overt and covert representatives, one each, provided session-to-session coordination. All the meetings were taped. Reports based on them were prepared by the clandestine staff with the assistance of the permanent overt representative.

The debriefings were a success, and they demonstrated the value of joint projects. Although Carlos had already been intensively debriefed in the field, both new and corroborative information concerning Cuba was obtained. For run-of-the-mill defector debriefings, requirements and questions sent to the field are usually sufficient; but when a source has detailed knowledge, expert substantive questioning can often unearth and develop information that the less specialized field interrogator might miss. Selectivity in questioning and subject expertise compensate for the analyst's lack of training in interrogation. Specialized knowledge can also lead to more probing and exact questions and is more likely to produce a coherent pattern from the bits and pieces of information obtained.

*Pointers in Procedure*

The Carlos experiment pointed up some considerations for hopeful future joint debriefings. Any debriefing must take its substantive character from the potential of the source; a careful scrutiny of the source's background in advance will avoid scheduling sessions inappropriate to his range of knowl-

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edge. As a rule the sessions should begin with the more technical subjects and conclude with the general. This allows the defector to work up to the subjects he probably considers most important and may increase his cooperation.

The use of aerial photography with Carlos proved very fruitful; much detailed information was acquired from it. Aerial photography would not always be applicable, but where the source has geographic information and where security considerations permit, it should be used from the beginning.

In preparation for the debriefings the analyst personnel must, first, familiarize themselves with the source's background and, second, develop a line of questioning and make some outline of it. During the sessions they should keep notes on the responses they think deserving of dissemination. The first two steps would reduce repetition during the debriefings and between them and the field interrogations, and they would allow points to be developed more coherently and completely. The note-taking would facilitate reporting: unaided use of tapes may result in some confusion.

If at all possible, the debriefings should be held soon after defection. In Carlos' case there was a time lag of four months which reduced somewhat the value of his information. Operational considerations may preclude early joint debriefings, but in any event, once it is decided that a defector should be debriefed jointly, the sooner it is done the better.

#### *Broader Considerations*

The value of the joint debriefings cannot be judged solely by the number of reports produced. There are both tangible and intangible gains from such debriefings, and they vary from component to component according to its interests. The National Estimates staff is only peripherally interested to learn that a certain building is a factory, but operational and geographical components may find this an item of importance. The clandestine services may be keenly interested in where oil is stored in Cuba, while the economic analyst may be more concerned about how long the oil will last. The ideas, perspectives, and impressions gained by all participants may not be reportable, but in the long run they may prove very valuable.

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The most broadly important potential gain from joint debriefings is an increased understanding and rapport between clandestine services and intelligence production personnel. The latter can see some of the operational problems of dealing with the human factors of personality and temperament, the difficulty of obtaining continuity and completeness of information from defectors, the range of vagaries and subtleties involved in debriefing. The operational personnel, in turn, get a clearer picture of the type of information needed in analysis and see the difficulty of integrating defector reports into a composite picture. The two components are thus mutually educated, and the rapport gained should contribute to establishing good working relations and lead to a more useful interchange. The partnership cannot fully utilize its resources in pursuit of the intelligence objective until each component understands the workings and the problems of the other.

If joint debriefings are to be fully effective the production components should know when a given defector is being processed and help determine whether he should be jointly questioned. Improved formal and informal communication with the operating components for this purpose is advantageous to both parties. The analysts are better able to evaluate the information from a source if more detail is available about his background and access than has in the past been provided by the usual CS source description; and the operators benefit from this improved evaluative guidance and find more use made of their product.

Steps to provide better information about sources were in fact taken, with just these considerations in mind, last spring. All clandestine reporting elements were given the guide lines for making more revealing statements, consistent with operational security, concerning sources' character, competence, and access to information. This innovation, which was itself the result of consultation between analytic elements concerned with Cuba and the responsible clandestine components, is still experimental and limited to reporting on Cuban affairs from anywhere in the world; but if successful it could well be extended to clandestine reporting generally.

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It is to be hoped that the increase recently achieved in mutual understanding between clandestine collection and production components will continue. Joint debriefings, besides producing substantive gains, contribute to this end. The joint debriefings of Carlos have established a good and valuable precedent. The groundwork laid by them should be built upon.

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