Informing History:

Informers and their Continuing Relevancy for Domestic Security Agencies from the Cold War to the War Against Terrorism

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Outline

1. Introduction: HUMINT
2. Universality of Informers
3. Terminology, Types of Informers, and Motivation
4. Relevance of Informers to Counter-Terrorism
5. Conclusion: The Informer Catch-22
Recent Examples

- Terrorism Act: 'They asked me to keep an eye on the Muslim community'

- Four Found Guilty in Bomb Plot - NYTimes.com

- C.I.A. Was Warned About Man Who Bombed Afghan Base, Inquiry Finds - NYTimes.com
Different Types of Informing in the Counter-Terrorist World

These chemicals won't be used in a bomb because a neighbour reported the dumped containers to the Anti-Terrorist Hotline.

Don't rely on others. If you suspect it, report it.
Confidential Anti-Terrorist Hotline Call 0800 789 321

PREVENT TERRORISM
SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY

TERRORISM TIP LINE
1-800-420-5805
REPORT ANY SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY
1. Introduction

- Long history to use of informers by state security agencies
- Increasing emphasis on technology: example of CIA
- Limits on technology in terms of counter-terrorism
- Renewed emphasis on human intelligence (HUMINT), including through informers, post 9/11
- Explain why but also complications that arise from their concentrated use
- Controversy: agent provocateur, entrapment
Introduction, continued

- Human intelligence (HUMINT) crucial for counter-terrorism

- “Hard” (informer infiltration from outside or recruitment from within) versus “soft” (“community intelligence”) HUMINT collection

- Tension between the two but also possible interconnection
Post-Cold War Emphasis on Technology
And In Popular Culture
- Democratic societies: generalized surveillance versus specialized surveillance
- Who gets targeted?
2. Universality of Informers
One Jones, of Tottenham, ... accused (mistakenly) of being a spy, because of his violent resolutions which were alleged to be for the `purpose of entrapping the [London Corresponding] Society'. Jones (the genuine informer, Groves, reported with wry relish) complained:

If a Citizen made a Motion which seemed anyways spirited he was set down as a Spy sent among them by the Government. If a Citizen sat in a Corner & said nothing he was watching their proceedings that the might the better report it ... Citizens hardly knew how to act.

‘The associations had disappeared; public gatherings and even private ones were from that moment on difficult to hold. You were frightened of your neighbour and had lost all hope ... Everyone was suspected of being a spy.’

‘Again and again visiting in the mining camps in the west [of Canada] I have had labour people come to me and say: “If there is any suggestion made in the way of provoking trouble be careful, because that suggestion comes from an agent of the government.”’

–Politician, as quoted in Canadian parliament, 3 May 1932, 2591-2.

‘On April 10, 1947, Special Agents of the Los Angeles Office interviewed Ronald Reagan and his wife, Jane Wyman, at their request in order that they might furnish information to this Bureau regarding the activities of some members of the Guild who they suspected were carrying on Communist Party work.’

–FBI Report, 10 April 1947

‘Fear of provocateurs paralyzed some protestors. Fear of agents and informers eroded trust.’

Estimated 17% of CPUSA members in early 1960s on FBI payroll

Estimated 6% of KKK members in 1965 on FBI payroll

Estimated 7,000 informers recruited as part of FBI “Ghetto Informant Program” in the late 1960s

Mid-1970s, 85% of FBI intelligence investigations involve use of informers versus technology for 5%
3. Terminology, Types of Informers, and Motivation
Terminology

- Sources, assets, contributors, collaborators, agents, operators
- Informers, informants, snitches, grasses, supergrasses, stool pigeons, stoolies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Payment</th>
<th>Nature of Handling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer/ “community intelligence”</td>
<td>Anyone who volunteers information—often on one-time basis</td>
<td>Usually none</td>
<td>One-time or infrequent meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeveloped casual source</td>
<td>Source who occasionally supplies information</td>
<td>Usually none</td>
<td>Recruited-periodic contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed casual source</td>
<td>More permanent source</td>
<td>Occasional, especially expenses</td>
<td>Recruited after planning-source has specific handler who makes frequent contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term penetration source</td>
<td>Most important source: already in targeted group or injected into it</td>
<td>On salary</td>
<td>Recruited after considerable development—extensive relationship between source and handler</td>
</tr>
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Why do they do it?

M: money

I: ideology

C: compromise/coercion

E: ego
4. Relevance of Informers to Counter-Terrorism
“Sources are the lifeblood of intelligence and it all stems from there. You're fighting against a secret organization that wants to keep its secrets and you want them to impart those secrets to you. Terrorist organizations don't advertise their working parts so it's up to us to penetrate them.”

- ”Mike” from Special Branch, 2002

- "Human sources are the bread and butter of counterterrorism; you will never get a terrorist jumping out of a fibre optic cable."

-member of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2002

- "We're spending more money on outreach . . . so we can say: 'Please help us. Please look for people who are turning away from institutions to extremism. Please be our eyes and ears.' "


- “Britishness does not normally involve snitching or talking about someone. I’m afraid, in this situation, anyone who’s got any information should say something because the people we are talking about are trying to destroy our entire way of life.”


- “Our engagement efforts are designed to build trust in communities that can assist in opening doors, facilitating the overall mission of the FBI in keeping communities and the homeland safe. If the public understands the FBI’s mission and views the FBI as cooperative and trustworthy, they are more likely to report a crime, return a telephone call or respond positively to being approached by an FBI special agent.”

-FBI Head of Community Relations, 2010
Why Use Informers in Current C-T?

- NERD
- Nature of target
- Ease
- Resources
- Destructiveness/Effectiveness (agents provocateurs, stings<>entrapment)
C-T Use Over Time

- By the 1990s, one estimate suggests, 80 per cent of IRA operations, including attacks and weapons smuggling, were disrupted before they could be carried out.

- 2003 estimate that 80% of Palestinian attacks against Israel foiled through intelligence from informers

- Key Factors Involved in Capture of Terrorists in 293 US Cases:
  - Informers and infiltrators: 46.4%
  - Surveillance: 29.7%
  - Caught in the Act: 23.5%
  - Investigation: 14.7%
Examples

- Herald Square Subway bomb plot
- Lodi, California
- Irvine, California
- Toronto 18
- Zazi bomb plot

Osama Eldawoody, $100,000 from NYPD

Reda Hassaine, became British Citizen after infiltrating Mosque

Craig Monteilh/Farouk Aziz

Mubin Shaikh, $300,000 from RCMP
Impact

- Use of informers generates tensions in targeted communities in US and UK (currently and in the past: between 1979 and 1981 IRA killed more of its own members than did the British)

- Issues around surveillance, disruption, trust/betrayal, but also stings versus entrapment

- “We feel that we've been violated and being spied on is not an easy thing. When you sit and pray, you're not worried about only paying attention to a prayer, concentrating on your prayer, you're worried about whether the person next to you is spying on you, is working for the Government, working for the FBI, whoever, and this is not an easy feeling.”

  -President of Arab-Muslim American Federation, 2006, in response to revelation that police informer attended 575 prayer meetings at Staten Island Mosque
5. Conclusion: Informer Catch-22

1. Use of informers critical to counter-terrorism
2. Use of informers source of grievance among targeted communities
3. Governments desire “community intelligence” but that requires trust
4. Build trust leads to “community intelligence” but also then can lead to more formalized informer recruitment which undermines trust
5. Requires subtlety and sensitivity