

INTELLIGENCE AGAINST TERRORISM

Tradecraft or Streetcraft?

by Kathleen Kiernan
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Tradecraft, whether analytical or operational, has been a cornerstone of intelligence discipline throughout history, predating the formation of the formal organizations which comprise the Intelligence Community of today by centuries. On the analytical side, it involves, in part, the methods by which analysts tackle mental issues, how they think about thinking, and how to overcome cognitive biases including those of evaluating evidence and perception as outlined by Richards Heuer in his work *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*.¹ On the operational side, it exists to protect both the keepers and the seekers of secrets while they gain an advantage over an adversary, and protect our Nation from harm.

There is another discipline that is often hidden in plain sight, that of streetcraft—the operational art of law enforcement that is neither codified in any SOP nor taught in a police academy. Rather, it is earned on the street through the experience of dealing with the extremes of human behavior, ranging from the mundane to the deliberate manifestation of evil. There is, in fact, a rhythm to it all wherein schemes are played out and the craft of crime is practiced by amateurs and professionals. The former operates with a tactical sloppiness that is evident to the trained eye, the latter with a strategic and deliberate execution that often removes the principal from any direct contact with the people or institutions which are victimized. There are layers of insulation in between that are designed to prevent compromise of the overall operation or leadership. Of course, to anyone who has ever carried a shield there is an innate understanding about the spaces in between those extremes that are often funny, sometimes quite sad, and frequently rather ingenious. Criminals on the whole are students of human behavior and search for any sign of an opportunity to exploit, manipulate, sell, trade, or leverage for personal gain. Consequently, law enforcement professionals



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must outthink and outpace them, knowing in some cases—at least tactically—they may not outgun them. This requires an ardent and continual study of human behavior as well, learning to detect the nuances of deception and to rapidly adapt to ever-changing tactics and technologies. Officer safety is dependent upon the developed ability to observe, analyze, and react, which is continually honed over time.

There is also ground truth related to the parallels between a criminal and a terrorist that I think has been overlooked, and it is uncomplicated. The simple premise is that not all criminals are terrorists, but all terrorists are, in fact, criminals despite differences in ultimate motivation. Both groups utilize similar methodologies in the manner in which they recruit, learn their craft, finance operations, obtain and conceal contraband and weapons, disguise intentions, and disguise themselves with fraudulent identification. The communication techniques between members range from the rudimentary use of signals to the use of modern steganography. Prisons remain a key component for the refining of skills, the indoctrination of ideology and the recruitment of operational elements. Correctional officers have developed a mastery of the language on the inside which is both spoken and silent and is ever-present. Failure to observe even subtle changes in behavior or routine can result in violence, or worse, the loss of control in the institution. This depth of knowledge is, in fact, a form of streetcraft which maintains a balance of power on the inside, protects the keepers of the keys and which can also contribute to the discipline of tradecraft by providing a keen insight gained only through actual experience—those individuals who can see what is hidden with deliberate action from the casual observer.

It seems apparent that the experience base of law enforcement and correctional officers can be a tremendous source of value to the development and refinement of tradecraft in the war on terrorism. Academies exist to instill foundational knowledge of mission, process, and procedures; however the real lessons of survival are learned and practiced elsewhere. We should consider incorporating the lessons of streetcraft into the operations of homeland security and, in essence, national security. The coalition of the willing is hidden in plain sight and is comprised of the shield carriers across the Country. 🌐

NOTE

- 1 Heuer Jr. Richards J. *The Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*. History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1999.