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The Scharff Technique: On How to Effectively Elicit Intelligence from Human Sources

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“What did he get out of me? There is no doubt in my mind that he did extract something, but I haven’t the slightest idea what.”¹ (Hubert Zemke)

The quote setting the stage for this report is from U.S. Army Air Corps Colonel Hubert Zemke, one of the many World War II prisoners interrogated by Hanns Joachim Scharff (1907–1992). Scharff worked at the German Luftwaffe’s Intelligence and Evaluation Center (Auswertestelle West), where he interrogated over 500 American and British fighter pilots.² Within today’s Intelligence Community, Scharff is often recognized as a constructive—even iconic—role model for interrogators,³ one typically portrayed as uncommonly affable, with almost psychic powers to obtain information from his prisoners.

While all available accounts support this portrayal of Scharff’s engaging personality and refined interpersonal skills, far less emphasis has been placed on the actual strategies and methodologies that, together, might explain his uncommon effectiveness as an interrogator. Where mention is made of his actual tactics, little discussion has occurred beyond the fact that he was reportedly friendly (especially in contrast to his Luftwaffe peers), exceptionally respectful toward the Allied air crewmen he encountered, and deeply knowledgeable about the U.S. air order of battle as it related to fighter operations based in the United Kingdom.

Herein we systematically explore and assess the tactics used by Hanns Scharff. We indicate how Scharff’s suite of techniques came to inspire a major research program on the elicitation of human intelligence. And, for the very first time, a summary of the outcome of this pioneering research program is here presented.

GATHERING INFORMATION

The academic literature on intelligence and counterintelligence typically focuses on the analysis of intelligence, the ethics of intelligence gathering, the recruitment and classification of informants and sources, and the history of intelligence.^{4,5} In reviewing the work published on human intelligence (HUMINT), an important gap is discovered: very little work has been done on techniques for gathering human intelligence. This is especially true in regards to an objective, evidence-based approach to deconstructing and evaluating the efficacy of such techniques. This is remarkable considering the prominent role of human intelligence collection operations in historical terms, and even more so given the resurgent interest in collecting human intelligence in the period following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.⁶ The need for tailored information in support of national security interests has given rise to a wide array of tactics and techniques within the human intelligence domain,⁷ but these have rarely

been subjected to scientific evaluation. Furthermore, psychological science offers an extensive array of concepts and principles of relevance to HUMINT activities (e.g., persuasion, verbal and nonverbal communication, cross-cultural aspects, and the detection of deception), but the body of applied psychological research on techniques aimed at gathering HUMINT has remained limited.

We begin with a brief description of some aspects unique to information elicitation.

Information Elicitation

Human intelligence gathering involves the collection of information through the interaction between two or more individuals.⁸ One specific form of HUMINT gathering is information elicitation, for which the goal is to gather information in such a way that the source remains unaware of the true purpose of the exchange. More precisely, the goal is to gather information in such manner that the source (1) underestimates his or her own contribution in terms of new information, and (2) remains unaware of the interviewer's information objectives.⁹

HANNS SCHARFF—A HISTORICAL NOTE

One of the most common forms of HUMINT collection operations conducted during an armed conflict is interrogation. In World War II, each of the parties to this conflict aggressively pursued the intelligence potential that could be derived from a systematic interrogation effort involving the collection of information from captured prisoners-of-war (POWs). In support of the German war effort, the Luftwaffe interrogation camp, *Dulag Luft*, proved to be an irreplaceable source of intelligence on Allied air operations.

History has documented the exceptional performance of one *Dulag Luft* interrogator, Hanns Scharff, who artfully elicited detailed, high-value intelligence from Allied aircrews. His accomplishments would be remarkable if only for the exhaustive volume of intelligence he was able to gather. Equally noteworthy, however, were his methods. Rather than compelling his prisoners to reveal classified data through the employment of coercive methods, his success was the result of carefully orchestrated, outwardly friendly exchanges with his prisoners.¹⁰ The overarching philosophical construct that informed this approach was, according to Scharff, both simple and profound: he behaved “exactly opposite to the way [Army Air Corps airmen] were taught to expect. Instead of torture or degradation, we offered captured airmen the utmost in courtesy and

consideration . . . [w]e took them to cinema shows as we could manage to put on, and invited them to share our tea and coffee when we could get it.”¹¹

His success appears to have bred a degree of confidence in his ability to effectively elicit information from POWs, even those who had been trained to resist interrogation, as were most of the Allied POWs he encountered at *Dulag Luft*. This was illustrated after the war as he reflected upon his experiences in the challenging art of interrogation and the timeless value of interrogation as a form of intelligence collection:

As long as wars have been waged on this earth, captors have taken the right to question captives. As long as POWs are interrogated, they will talk. No patriotism, no self-control, no logic gives any man enough strength to repel relentlessly pressed attacks utilizing accumulated combinations of facts and circumstantial evidence.¹²

The methods Scharff used to achieve his success have until now been characterized in what can only be described as sweeping generalizations. For example, he has been routinely portrayed as an interrogator who sought to create a non-adversarial relationship with the prisoners he questioned. Without formal training as an interrogator he was unconstrained by standard procedures. Scharff was actually an enlisted administrative specialist who was pressed into service as an interrogator only when the officer responsible for interrogating Allied fighter pilots was killed in an aircraft accident. After observing the high-pressure, threat-based techniques used with limited success by his predecessor, Scharff sought to create an environment that might make the POW momentarily forget he was being interrogated. In addition to being questioned in an office environment, for example, Scharff would take a given POW for a walk through a nearby forest or for drinks at the officer’s club.¹³ In sum, the methods Scharff used were the product of his own trial-and-error experimentation.

In discussing Scharff’s methods, most contemporary interrogators will describe them as variations on a fairly narrow theme: display a friendly demeanor in an environment devoid of hostility. While this is true, it falls well short of capturing the nuance, strategic thinking, and tactical maneuvering that can objectively explain Scharff’s consistent success. To reach such an understanding, his methods must be deconstructed, analyzed, and assessed on a much deeper level.

SCHARFF: A MASTER AT PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Scharff received no formal training in how to interrogate prisoners. Instead, he carefully observed his fellow interrogators and how they interacted with their prisoners. By imagining himself in the prisoners’ position, he uncovered how they resisted conventional interview techniques. With that

knowledge, he then formed his own tactics to counter the prisoners' strategies.

Scharff's approach bears strong similarities to the psychological concept of *perspective taking*: the cognitive capacity to consider the world from another's viewpoint, which facilitates the anticipation of other people's behavior and reactions.^{14,15} The ability to take the perspective of others is predictive of success in negotiations,¹⁶ and, due to their inherent similarities,¹⁷ likely to be of importance also for interrogators.¹⁸ Research has notably shown that people typically use themselves as the point of reference when describing and thinking about others,¹⁹ a mode of thinking that can prove counterproductive in the interrogation context.

Scharff used perspective taking to plan for, and profitably respond to, the counter-interrogation strategies adopted by his prisoners.^{20,21} Utilizing different sources on Scharff's approach,^{22,23} three such counter-interrogation strategies employed by Allied airmen can be identified:

- "I will not tell very much during the interrogation."
- "I will try to figure out what they are after, and then make sure not to give them what they want."
- "It is meaningless to withhold or deny what they already know."

Having identified his prisoners' most common counter-interrogation strategies, Scharff formed his own tactics to successfully maneuver around those of the prisoners. This process reflects the diligent approach adopted by Scharff and places perspective taking at the core of the Scharff technique.²⁴

The importance of perspective taking for HUMINT contexts can be further illuminated by introducing the following principles:

- a. a source typically forms a hypothesis regarding how much and what information the interviewer already holds;
- b. the source's perception (of the information already held by the interviewer) will, in turn, affect his or her counter-interrogation strategies; and
- c. the counter-interrogation strategies employed will affect how much and what information the source reveals.²⁵

An interviewer who fully grasps these basic principles and how they are related can use perspective taking to systematically anticipate the specific reactions of an individual source.

To assess how effective Scharff's technique was is not possible, but at least four sources speak to its success. The first is Scharff's own words, expressed first and foremost in Raymond F. Toliver's biography.²⁶ The second source

is the post-war testimonies from some of the prisoners Scharff interrogated. The following quotes are representative of their experiences:²⁷

“Scharff really knew his subject and his interrogation procedures, enjoyed his work, and no doubt was effective. I had the impression that it might even be dangerous just to talk about the weather with him as he’d probably gain some important or confidential information from it.” (Colonel Hubert Zemke)²⁸

“What did Hanns really want to know from me? I still don’t know. I am sure he knew more about everything than I did.” (Major Walter C. Beckham)²⁹

“Scharff was not pushy or arrogant at all, just talked as if we were passing the time of the day. So far he had not asked me for a single answer to his questions.” (Lt. Col. Francis S Gabreski)³⁰

The third source is the testimony from Scharff’s superiors at the camp. Sergeant Nagel—one of Scharff’s superiors at Auswertestelle West—stated “I read the reports each interrogator wrote and in this way knew which ones were best. Scharff was unbeatable.”³¹ The final source is more indirect, but the fact that Scharff—after the war—was requested by the United States War Department to lecture on his technique to a variety of audiences at the Pentagon speaks to his reputation as an exceptional interrogator. Importantly, our research has not been dependent on the reliability of the indicated sources. That is, we do not use these subjective sources to conclude that the Scharff technique was extremely successful. Instead, these sources worked as inspiration for formulating a research program with the aim of testing the Scharff technique empirically.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE SCHARFF TECHNIQUE

The first conceptualization of the Scharff technique was presented by Pär Anders Granhag³² during a seminar organized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG). This conceptualization draws on a set of five interrelated tactics:

1. *To employ a friendly approach.* Create an atmosphere in which the source feels relaxed and comfortable by, for example, displaying acceptance and adopting adaptive interpersonal behaviors.³³
2. *Do not press for information.* Instead of being asked explicit questions, the source is offered opportunities to add information and confirm/disconfirm claims. For this tactic, acknowledging the source’s autonomy and intrinsic motivation is important.³⁴
3. *The illusion of knowing-it-all.* The interaction begins with the interviewer presenting previously known information to the source, thereby demonstrating a fair amount of reliable knowledge on the topic. The aim is twofold: First, to

be perceived even as minimally cooperative the source must provide information beyond what was revealed by the interviewer. Second, the source might assume that the interviewer holds information beyond what was told. In brief, if the source (a) misperceives the amount of information held by the interviewer, and (b) strives to provide only already known information (a common counter-interrogation strategy), the source might reveal information that is in fact new to the interviewer.

4. *The use of confirmations/disconfirmations.* Rather than asking direct questions, the interviewer presents claims that the source must confirm or disconfirm. This tactic draws on the assumption that the source will perceive responding to claims as a less active form of complicity as compared to answering explicit questions.
5. *Ignore new information.* When provided with previously unknown critical information, the interviewer downplays it as unimportant or already known, hiding the fact that the information provided is of interest.³⁵

Importantly, our conceptualization of the Scharff technique is very different from the Scharff technique described in the *U.S. Army Field Manual*.³⁶ The manual provides what is, at best, a very sketchy description, essentially limiting the technique to the “illusion of knowing it all” tactic. In sharp contrast, we argue that the Scharff technique is a sophisticated interview process, consisting of several intricately related tactics.

THE OUTCOME OF THE FIRST WAVE OF RESEARCH

In an effort to end the use of enhanced interrogations techniques in the U.S. military and intelligence community, the *U.S. Army Field Manual* was formally established as the government-wide standard for conducting intelligence interviews³⁷ during any armed conflict. According to this manual, the source should be initially approached with open-ended and explicit questions posed in a business-like manner (described in the *Field Manual* as the “Direct Approach”). Indeed, research shows that the Direct Approach is one of the most commonly used techniques by U.S. interrogators,³⁸ In comparing the Scharff technique with the Direct Approach, we reached four consistent findings:

1. the Scharff technique elicits more new information than the Direct Approach;
2. the Scharff technique is better at masking the interviewer’s information objectives;
3. sources faced with the Scharff technique underestimate how much new information they have revealed during the interaction, whereas those facing the Direct Approach overestimate how much new information they have revealed; and
4. the sources facing with the Scharff technique consistently believe the interviewer to have held more information prior to the interview.

The sources interviewed using the Scharff technique also misperceived to a comparatively higher extent which particular pieces of information the interviewer held before the interaction, that is, they tended to believe that the interviewer held information that was not held.

Reviewing the Results

How the Scharff technique has resulted in this impressive outcome is significant. Its superiority in terms of the amount of new information collected is attributed to two factors working in tandem. The first pertains to the information management dilemma that sources must navigate, meaning that they need to be semi-cooperative by revealing some, but not all, of the information that they hold. Briefly, a source striving to be perceived as sufficiently willing, and who is faced with the Scharff technique, needs to provide information beyond the information being shared by an interviewer attempting to create the “illusion of knowing it all.” Thus, the source cannot simply repeat or confirm the interviewer’s comments. In brief, any information given by a source interviewed by the Scharff technique is therefore likely to be new to the interviewer.

The second factor draws on real life observations, showing that sources seem to be particularly keen to disclose information that they *believe* the interviewer already holds.^{39,40} Importantly, this strategy by the source resonates well with lessons set forth in resistance manuals, like the *AQ Manchester Manual*. By traveling this road, sources can pretend to be willingly cooperating without revealing any new information. But the success of this counter-interrogation strategy is dependent on the source’s ability to correctly predict what information the interviewer holds. In brief, a source who misperceives the interviewer’s prior knowledge might reveal information that is, in fact, new to the interviewer.⁴¹

That sources faced with the Scharff technique find it relatively more difficult to read the interviewer’s information objectives is attributable to the fact that the interviewer neither presses for information nor poses explicit questions. A further contributing tactic is that the interviewer ignores all new information gathered during the interview. Those subjected to the Scharff technique tend to underestimate how much new information they have revealed during the interview due to several tactics. The “illusion of knowing-it-all” leads the source, to some extent, to misperceive what information the interviewer holds; as a result, the source is more likely to unknowingly reveal new information. An additional contributing factor is that new information is gathered by the interrogator posing claims to be confirmed or disconfirmed. The “ignore new information” tactic also carefully avoids crediting the source with having provided new information.

That the sources in the Scharff condition consistently believe the interviewer to have held comparatively more information prior to the interview is primarily a result of the interviewer's having shared information in an effort to create the "illusion of knowing it all." Sources faced with the Scharff technique also more often misperceive what information the interviewer holds due to that illusion.

GETTING THERE: RESEARCH ROUNDS

Our research program included three different rounds of research. For the first round we established proof of concept. The second round focused on issues pertaining to the different Scharff tactics. In the third round of research we examined how the effectiveness of the Scharff technique is moderated by different contextual factors.

The initial studies aimed to introduce the Scharff technique and to present the first conceptualization of the technique.^{42,43} In addition, we outlined the general psychological principles upon which the technique rests. For this round of research we introduced a novel set of measures for mapping the efficacy of the Scharff technique (and for that matter, for any other human intelligence gathering technique). In brief, we identified five prime measures of efficacy.

Measuring Efficiency

The first measure is the objective amount of new information elicited. This is a straightforward measure; the more new information elicited, the better the technique. The second measure is the source's understanding of the interviewer's information objectives. In brief, an interviewer has a clear tactical advantage if able to conceal his or her information requirements, thereby reducing the risk that the source will withhold or fabricate information about this particular topic. The third measure is the source's perception of the interviewer's knowledge. This measure reflects the extent to which the source perceives the interviewer to be informed about the topic, whether correct or incorrect. The fourth measure is motivated by the following reasoning: the more information a source misperceives the interviewer to hold, the more favorable the circumstances for information elicitation. In essence, the greater the source's misperception, the less the counter-interrogation strategy of "I'll reveal only what they already know" will work in favor of the source (and the more in favor of the interviewer). The fifth measure of effectiveness, perhaps the most central, is obtained by relating the objective amount of new information collected to the amount of new information that the source believes that he or she revealed. Simply put, an effective information elicitation technique should leave the source

underestimating the amount of new information revealed during the interaction.

For the first round of research we also introduced an experimental set-up designed for studying human intelligence gathering techniques. This set-up mirrors some of the more important features of a typical HUMINT interaction. In brief, our set-up is characterized by the following four trademarks, all reflecting essential features in a typical HUMINT interaction: (i) the situation is one where investigators already holds some intelligence on a possible future crime (e.g., a terror attack); (ii) important gaps are present in the intelligence and an interviewer therefore seeks information from a source (detainee); (iii) this source holds knowledge that can fill some, but not all, gaps in the existing intelligence; and (iv) the source needs to navigate an information management dilemma. Specifically, the source is motivated to talk to the intelligence officer. For example, in order to receive some “advantages,” the source needs to show some degree of evident willingness to provide information. But at the same time the source is also motivated not to share too much information, perhaps because in revealing too much information the source might risk retaliation from the group planning the attack. Simply put, the source was placed in a situation wherein a balance needs to be struck between not telling too much and not telling too little information.

Our research program rests on experimental methods. Broadly speaking, the use of experimental methods allows for the identification of the precise factors underlying effectiveness and changes in the outcome measures while also making it possible to reach firm conclusions concerning causality that would not otherwise be possible. In simple terms, the experimental method used for the current research program allowed us to assess the comparative effectiveness of the Scharff technique.

For the second round of research we focused more closely on the specific Scharff tactics, examining how the use of specific tactics and the order in which they are implemented affect the technique’s efficacy. This round of research led to four findings. The first is that gathering information by having the more probable claims confirmed seems to more effectively mask the interviewer’s information objectives as compared to having the less probable claims disconfirmed.⁴⁴ Second, playing on confirmations reinforced the source’s perception of the interviewer’s prior knowledge more than trying to collect information by having less probable claim disconfirmed.⁴⁵ Third, the “illusion of knowing it all” tactic must be properly established before employing the confirmation/disconfirmation tactic.⁴⁶ Fourth, in order to leave the source believing that the interviewer holds more information than is actually the case, the interviewer is better off immediately sharing information rather than starting the interaction by making claims such as “We already have all the information that we need”

before doing so.⁴⁷ Our research suggests that making such claims might prompt the source to more actively search for “gaps” in the interviewer’s knowledge.

For our third round of research we examined the efficacy of the Scharff technique within three different types of contexts: (1) for different categories of sources varying in their level of cooperation and capacity; (2) for small cells of sources; and (3) for situations where a source is interviewed repeatedly.

Sources Varying with Respect to Their Level of Cooperation and Capacity. Sources are commonly screened before they are interviewed. The aim is to assess the likelihood that the source holds actionable intelligence, and the individual’s estimated level of cooperation. Hence, in one study we examined the comparative effectiveness of the Scharff technique on more/less cooperative and more/less capable sources.⁴⁸ As expected, the superiority of the Scharff technique was particularly pronounced for the less cooperative sources. This finding is important because the less willing sources are the most challenging, and especially so if they are capable of providing critical intelligence. For the more cooperative sources the type of interview technique used may matter less.

Repeated Interrogations. Because a common practice in the past decade, especially in the war on terror, has been to repeatedly interrogate a detained source, it is therefore remarkable that so little psycho-legal research has been devoted to how repeated interrogations can be most effectively conducted. In one of our studies, we showed that the Scharff technique outperformed the Direct Approach when summing up all the new information gathered across three different interrogation sessions.⁴⁹ On a negative note, using the Scharff technique during repeated sessions resulted in the sources (a) having a rather realistic view on how much new information they had revealed and (b) demonstrating an increasing ability to read the interviewer’s information objectives with the same ease as for the Direct Approach. In other words, in using the Scharff technique over and over the risk is that the source will keep better track of how much information he or she is revealing. As a result, the source will come to more accurately identify the interviewer’s information objectives.

Eliciting Information From Small Cells of Sources. We have also addressed the issue of how to most effectively elicit intelligence from small cells of sources. This relates to a scenario where a small group of individuals sharing information on a notional attack are intercepted and then interviewed individually. For our study each member of the group was made to believe that he or she was the last in the group to be interviewed,

and we used the information elicited from the first group member to make the “illusion of knowing it all” tactic stronger for group member 2, and the information elicited from members 1 and 2 to make the illusion even more convincing for group member 3. Whereas the Scharff technique and the Direct Approach resulted in a similar amount of new information, the Scharff technique was better at masking the interviewer’s information objectives. Consistent with previous work, we found that the sources faced with the Scharff technique underestimated how much new information they had revealed, whereas the sources faced with the Direct Approach significantly overestimated their contribution in terms of new information.

Interestingly, the sources interviewed with the Scharff technique came to believe that their fellow group members had revealed much more new information than they had, in fact, objectively revealed. In contrast, this was not the case for the sources who had faced the Direct Approach. Importantly, a source who is under the impression (correct or incorrect) that fellow group members have started to share information during interrogation might move from less to more willing to contribute information (on the basis of “Why should I be the only one sticking to our agreement of silence?”). Hence, the finding speaks in favor of using the Scharff technique when dealing with small groups of sources.

LIMITATIONS

Some aspects of a typical HUMINT interaction are very difficult or even impossible to reproduce in a laboratory setting. The first limitation concerns the sources’ willingness to reveal information. Simply put, sources faced a situation wherein they were required to reveal only a small amount of information, but not to be completely silent. Thus, our research deals with the effectiveness of interviewing sources who are—to some extent—prepared to talk to the interviewer. Hence, although Scharff himself was very successful in collecting intelligence from his POWs, systematic research on how to effectively interview very uncooperative sources is still lacking. Furthermore, we have not yet mapped the degree of precision of the new information revealed, as this measure is easily confounded with the quantity of information.⁵⁰ Nor have we assessed the relative importance of the information provided. This might be viewed as a limitation since, in real life, information on one theme is often more critical than information on another.

Additionally, as our studies relied on structured interview protocols and quite short interactions we have assuredly missed out on some of the dynamic aspects of a typical HUMINT interview. For example, in our studies the sources have had little time to question the interviewer’s knowledge and the friendly approach has not been allowed to grow into a

positive atmosphere. Thus, future work would profit from examining the effects that might follow from developing and maintaining the friendly approach and/or the “illusion of knowing it all” during longer interactions.

Finally, we acknowledge a few limitations pertaining to the Scharff technique in general. First, in some situations revealing what and how much intelligence is held on a certain topic would be a clear tactical mistake. For example, if the sources are not being held in custody they could be deployed by colleagues to find out what intelligence is held on their group and its planned activities. However, the current study showed that the illusion of knowing-it-all can be established by outlining rather general background information. Hence, it may be possible to establish a convincing illusion without disclosing particularly detailed or sensitive information. Second, in some situations the Scharff technique would be rather difficult to use. For example, possessing accurate information is necessary to properly paint the illusion of knowing-it-all. Relatedly, in our lab-based studies no issue has arisen with the confirmation/disconfirmation tactic in producing false information.⁵¹ However, presenting claims runs the risk of influencing the source to provide unreliable intelligence by, for example, disconfirming correct claims or providing a false positive response. Third, the Scharff technique is aimed primarily at custodial settings where the source expects to be questioned. Hence, the results of the current study may not be satisfactorily generalized to apply to HUMINT activities taking place outside a custodial setting.

OPERATIONAL RELEVANCE AND DIRECTIONS FOR POLICY

Our work shows that the Scharff technique is more effective for gathering intelligence than such commonly used protocols as the Direct Approach. This conclusion has substantial implications for the interrogation practitioner. Equally important, however, is the process by which we reached that conclusion.

Much of the customary knowledge that exists within the law enforcement and intelligence communities about what is or is not effective in eliciting reliable information through interrogation is not evidence-based. Longstanding protocols comprising untested strategies continue to be taught to new generations of police and intelligence officers, employed by current practitioners, and required by senior management. While learning and applying the current strategies of customary knowledge is a requirement, no similar requirement is in place to objectively assess their efficacy through established methods of scientific inquiry. For example, we can support our conclusions with properly collected and analyzed data that establish causal relationships. In contrast, for any individual to assert

causal relationships between specific interrogation strategies and certain outcomes is, at best, subjective.

The subjective nature of reflective analysis arises from two primary cognitive biases. First is the fundamental attribution error. In examining one's past activities, an individual cannot help but view these through the lens of his/her intentions. The way people remember their actions is as indelibly shaped by what they intended to do as by what they actually did. Second is the availability bias. When thinking about the probability of an event occurring (e.g., successfully using the Direct Approach to elicit information during an interrogation), recent or easily recalled examples will inform—and potentially skew—one's assessment. In sum, to gather the narrative recollections of experienced practitioners in the effort to better understand the inherent complexities of the interrogation process can be of enormous value; however, conflating the reported correlations with causation can be a most precarious path to follow.

We believe the Scharff technique, as conceptualized in the present research, has immediate operational relevance. In brief, the Scharff technique has wide applications, for example in gathering both strategic and tactical level information, and can be used with a number of different types of sources, including prisoners of war, detainees, suspects, and informants. Revealing the merits of the Scharff technique also adds to the operational relevance by offering a much fuller description of the technique than the limited treatment found in the current version of the *U.S. Army Field Manual*.⁵²

Current and past research on the Scharff technique has meaningful relevance for policy. The use of “enhanced interrogation techniques” and extraordinary renditions⁵³ has been at the center of an immense politically charged issue within American national security policymaking since 9/11. Several initiatives have been taken toward ending the use of these unethical methods. For example, President Barack Obama made it clear that American intelligence interrogators operating in support of an armed conflict can use only the methods described in the *Army Field Manual*.⁵⁴ Yet, despite the fact that the *Army Field Manual* has been established by Executive Order as the standard upon which interrogation operations are to be conducted by representatives of the U.S. government during an armed conflict, the methods set forth in that manual are notably not evidence-based, nor are they officially claimed to be. In fact, few of its listed interrogation methods have been subjected to scientific evaluation.⁵⁵ This is especially true in regard to interviewing sources who vary in their level of cooperation and capability to provide information. As a result, customary knowledge—in the absence of scientific knowledge—has directly informed what is now the overarching guideline for interrogations conducted by U.S. personnel.

The rigorous methodology used for examining the efficacy of the Scharff technique demonstrates the possibilities for a similar examination of the

various approaches described in the *Army Field Manual*, specifically, the process of deconstructing the underlying dynamics involved in an approach, of designing an experimental framework for objectively testing and comparing various strategies, and rendering a meaningful projection of the potential operational relevance and application of those strategies. Our present research, augmented by an increasing body of similar studies,^{56,57} has demonstrated that the approach strategies set forth in the *Army Field Manual* can be objectively and meaningfully examined to establish—or refute—their purported efficacy.

Looking forward, the series of studies that have examined the Scharff technique also provide a useful model for examining and testing other examples of excellence in interrogation operations. Detailed reporting—to include books, journal articles, and case studies—has documented the activities of other interrogators whose efforts have been described as exceptionally effective. Retired U.S. Army Colonel Stuart Herrington,⁵⁸ for example, described in detail the interrogation methods he employed during the Vietnam War. Similarly, Orrin DeForest⁵⁹ provided a fascinating account of his interrogation strategies during that same conflict. Other accounts of interrogation operations conducted during various military operations since the Vietnam War and up through the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan provide extensive details regarding strategies, methodologies, context, and outcomes, and lend themselves to a similar systematic deconstruction, modeling, and objective testing. As does the present examination of the Scharff technique, an evidence-based exploration of other historical and/or contemporary interrogation operations has the potential to inform a more effective and adaptable interrogation doctrine going forward.

FILLING A VOID

Recent terrorist attacks and the increased threat of terror worldwide indicate an urgent need for demonstrably effective human intelligence gathering techniques.^{60,61} In light of this, it is remarkable that there has been so little research on the efficacy of different intelligence gathering techniques. The empirical findings emerging from our research on the Scharff technique seek to help fill the gap in the scientific literature. In brief, we have shown that the Scharff technique consistently outperforms the Direct Approach on the most critical efficacy measures. The combined evidence marks the Scharff technique as an effective tool for eliciting human intelligence.

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