The Violent True Believer: Types, Vulnerabilities, Interview Techniques

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The Violent True Believer

“An individual committed to an ideology or belief system which advances homicide and/or suicide as a legitimate means to further a particular goal.”

A Typology of Violent True Believers (FBI BAP, 2002)

- Unwavering
- Affiliative
- Opportunistic
- Criminal
- Betrayer
- Psychotic
- Fledgling
1. Unwavering Violent True Believer

- **Description**
  - Hard core, rigid, deeply held beliefs
  - Absolute belief in righteousness of cause
  - Deep sense of his own perfection
  - Irrational fear of imminent assault
  - Warrior mentality
  - Superior IQ, educated
  - Condemns unbelievers
  - Command and control position
2. Affiliative Violent True Believer

- **Description**
  - Anxious and dependent
  - Primarily a follower
  - Idealizes others
  - “Black sheep” of family, angry at them
  - History of depression or suicide
  - Grandiose fantasies to join martyrs
  - Feels disappointed and damaged by others from his past
3. Opportunistic Violent True Believer

- **Description**
  - Filled with self importance
  - Joined to meet selfish needs
  - Wealth, power, control, property
  - Likes to dominate subordinates
  - Appears autonomous
  - Needs attention and admiration
  - The cause is himself
  - May be quite charismatic
Abubakar Shekau—Boko Haram
4. Criminal Violent True Believer

- Description
  - The “berserker” of the group
  - Criminal history
  - In severe cases, a psychopath
  - Sensation-seeker
  - Likes violence and cruelty
  - Only interested in action, fearless
  - Immediate gratification wanted
  - A loner, no attachments
Abu Zarqawi—ISIS father
5. Betrayer Violent True Believer

- **Description**
  - Knows whom he hates
  - Wants to retaliate and betray
  - Feels victimized by past events
  - Generally passive but angry
  - Loves duping or conning others
  - Fearful of direct aggression
  - Presents as arrogant
  - Inadequate and low self esteem
6. Psychotic Violent True Believer

- Description
  - Major mental disorder
  - Schizophrenia or bipolar disorder
  - Religion melds with delusion
  - Falls apart when stressed
  - Beliefs become more bizarre
  - May disregard personal hygiene
  - Will be sidelined, marginalized by cell
  - May be exploited by criminal type
7. Fledgling Violent True Believer

- **Description**
  - Child or adolescent
  - May become one of six other types
  - Immature and inexperienced
  - Indoctrination
    - Learns from parents or teachers
    - Intensive programming or brainwashing
  - Personal suffering
    - Physical abuse or neglect
    - Family suffering through actual oppression
Interviewing the Violent True Believer

● Preparation
  ● Selecting the interviewer
    ● Use the same person to interview across time
    ● Don’t use multiple interviewers
    ● Think about the reasons for selection
    ● Transference is always present
    ● Demographics of interviewer
    ● Skill level of interviewer
    ● Experience of interviewer
Interviewing

Preparation

Do your homework before the interview
- Knowledge of culture, society, religion, politics
- Knowledge of personal data and intelligence

Why?
- Establishes rapport
- Useful to detect deception or manipulation
- Information grid may track information
Interviewing

**Preparation**

- Define approach and direction
  - How many times can he/she be interviewed?
  - What is the goal of the first interview?
  - What should approach of interviewer be?
  - Strategic or tactical information likely false
- Behavioral information
  - Useful to establish baseline
  - Use in subsequent interviews
Interviewing

- Preparation
  - Location of the interview
    - Transportation route to place of interview
    - Safety and security during interview
    - Use of props
    - Service of food
    - Artifacts, symbols, evidence in room
    - Do not allow psychological escape
    - Cognitive dissonance
Interviewing

- Placement Before and After Interview
  - All of us are hard-wired to bond
  - Traumatic bonding ("Stockholm Syndrome")
  - Isolation useful to increase attachment
  - Self-disclosure: true or false?
  - Awareness of interviewer’s attachment
  - Cross-talk monitoring
Interviewing

- Establishing Rapport
  - Smile
  - Listen carefully
  - Find something in common
  - Mirror the interviewee, test it
  - Avoid blunders
- Read *Advanced Interviewing Techniques* by Jack Shafer and Joe Navarro
- Read *The Black Banners* by Ali Soufan
Interviewing

- The Line of Questioning
  - Patience and flexibility
  - 2-3 hour increments
  - Avoid predictability
  - Do not terminate early due to resistance
  - Confessions vs. admissions
  - Open-ended and nonjudgmental Qs
  - Do not challenge religion or beliefs
The Line of Questioning (cont’d)

- “Tell me more”—show admiration
- Terrorist vs. soldier
- Repeat questioning useful
- Three step approach
  - Create a doubt about his beliefs
  - Offer a potential reward for cooperation
  - Ask God (Allah) for guidance of the interview and the interviewer and interviewee as a team
Interviewing

- Emotion
  - Always present and influences thinking
  - Stress reactions: freeze, flight, fight, appease
  - Universal emotions: happiness, fear, anger, disgust, sadness, and distress
  - Rules of display differ among cultures
  - Don’t react to emotional tirades
  - Maintain calmness and control
Interviewing

Calibration
- Measurement of typical behavior
- When lying or telling the truth
- Asking control questions
- Individual differences abound
- Look for deviating behavior when individual lies
Interviewing

- **Deception and Manipulation**
  - No absolute, infallible way to detect
  - Emotion is not a determinant of lying
  - Slips of the tongue and tirades
  - Know behavioral clues to deceit
  - Understand your own biases
    - Eg, confirmatory, availability
  - Most effective means are comparing facts across multiple sources of data
Deception and Manipulation (cont’d)

Most common mistake: being misled by the special skill you think you possess to detect lying and deceit.
Interviewing

- Countermeasures
- Specific cultural issues
- Continuity of data collection
- Teamwork

“Almighty God says, ‘And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah stretches out for you, and be not divided among yourselves.’”
Interview Approaches to the Seven Subtypes

- **Unwavering True Believer**
  - Adapt a student’s stance toward subject
  - Tolerate tirades and look for admissions
  - Compliments need to be done carefully
  - Acknowledge cultural differences
  - Confrontation and threat will usually not work
  - The most difficult type to interview
Interview Approaches

- **Affiliative True Believer**
  - Warm, affectionate, yet dominant approach
  - Older male interviewer familiar with family dynamics and culture of subject
  - Consistently visit with subject to establish a bond
  - Beliefs are secondary to desire to be attached to others and/or powerful group
Interview Approaches

- Opportunistic True Believer
  - Use flattery in a direct way
  - He needs admiration and attention
  - Will be sullen and angry when “narcissistic” supplies are not provided
  - Identify his unmet desires: money, self-importance, power, control, an audience
  - May respond to direct offers
Interview Approaches

- **Criminal True Believer**
  - Short term gratification the key: money, drugs, excitement, power, sex
  - Most dangerous of all types for affective (reactive) violence during interview
  - Don’t spend time trying to bond
  - Will be physical and muscular
  - Positive rewards that focus on creature comforts
Interview Approaches

- **Betrayer True Believer**
  - Look for ways to admire him, and mirror his passive-aggressive style
  - Empathize with his belief that others have betrayed and wounded him in the past
  - Be careful to not injure his self-esteem
  - Help him plan a satisfying way to screw those who betrayed him
  - Be wary of his manipulations of interview
Psychotic True Believer
- He yearns for safety from exploitation
- Isolate from others and psychiatrically treat
- Gratitude will contribute to bonding
- Has many fears, including his fear of others, his inability to cope with moderate stress, and his uncontrollable thoughts, feelings, and perceptions
Fledgling True Believer
- Still a child or adolescent despite beliefs
- Needs safety, security, stimulation, love, and attention
- May be impulsive and grandiose
- May harbor private fantasies of heroism
- Needs consistent supervision, attention, and control from a caring adult