

“The Ten Commandments of Counterintelligence”

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INTRODUCTION

In a personal reflection of Mr. James Olson's time in the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as a CounterIntelligence (CI) officer, he looks back upon his encounters with James Jesus Angleton, head of the CI Staff from 1954 to 1974. The purpose of Mr. Olson's reflection is to see where his career has taken him, as well as to give a taste of what life is like as a CI officer, so that others may join if interested.

As he describes it, such a life is an adrenaline-filled adventure, filled with mystery, suspense, deductive reasoning, the constant proving and disproving of hypotheses and guesses, and a concern that best practices shared here are not being followed as closely as they should be in order to be effective measures, in service to the people of the United States. That said, here are Mr. Olson's commandments:

I. Be Offensive

Also known as "Trust No One", this mantra dictates an understanding that while we have friendly diplomatic, economic, and militaristic ties with any number of western nations, we really should trust none of them 100% [Olson, J. M]. His point being, if we suspect for any reason that our trust with a friend has been compromised in the slightest manner, we should test our theory by enticing them with "and enticing morsel", and send it over to them. If they reject said morsel, be it an espionage operation, a lure of economic and

financial incentives, an exploitation of a perceived weakness by way of a third party agreement with someone we don't like, or any other means rejected by our "friendly nation", then we have learned something valuable, and "plausible deniability" is preserved. We should covertly test this every so often, but not with any predictability or pattern in mind, for obvious reasons of suspicion.

II. Honor Your Professionals

The work of a counterintelligence officer is not easy, traditionally has not been well respected, and does not necessarily come with a "fast track" of promotions and bonuses. The reason for this is given because of the nature of the work itself... it is the underground "devil in the details" work that lays the foundation for future tradecraft to build upon, and for upcoming espionage and HUMINT missions to be carried forth, based on this research and reconnaissance carried out beforehand. For example, it is frowned upon when millions of dollars have been spent for an operation to catch a spy, when it takes "too long" to do so [Olson, J. M]. When quantity of the bottom line is examined and placed at a higher value than quality and effectiveness of the mission, then what suffers is the reputation of the counterintel profession and the field in general.

To counter this trend, it is suggested that more promotions, bonuses, pats-on-the-backs, incentives and non-financial qualitative rewards are given to mission operatives when

their duties in the field are successfully accomplished. While Angleton left a “distasteful legacy” which discredited the legacy of CIA CI operations, Ted Price reversed the trend and restored the profession to an aspirational role, worthy of pursuit.

III. Own The Street

A commitment to the success of the mission in the field is the number one priority, and must not be compromised by lack of funding, mission failure, compromised priorities of operands or field agents, technical glitches, or a lack of knowledge of the enemy and their territory. We must perform due diligence in unknown areas, so that we do not cede victory to those wishing to do us harm.

Every cost that is associated with any mission, from vehicles used, to safe apartments, to selection of the right person to do the job, is essential to the mission, and steps must be taken at every level to know what we are doing there, and to do it well. This adds value to each mission performed, and builds a reputation of trust within the CI community of professionals after the fact. Not owning the street lends itself to a certain degree of discredibility which builds up over time and must be combatted against via the incentive measures described above.

“Owning the Street” can also be interpreted as an offensive measure to proactively observe and perform reconnaissance on any activity known or unknown, and not just as a reactive measure towards known activity with respect to a mission in a certain field, for example Iraq or North Korea, or even across eastern Europe.

IV. Know Your History

To err is human, and CIA CI Ops is no exception. Any new recruit, and for that matter, any current operative must learn the mistakes made by predecessors in the field, regardless of theatre and relevance of circumstances. Various case-study examples include an intensive study of the Angleton era, the stories of “Legend” and “Wilderness of Mirrors”, the Loginov case, Aspillaga and the Cuban DA crisis, among others [Olson, J. M].

Not knowing the history of why strategies are the way they are, understanding the orders given by a senior operand, or the intricacies involved in any mission may add confusion to chaos in the field, and are reduced via a thorough understanding and background prep work for all parties and handles involved.

For if we do not learn valuable lessons from the mistakes and mission failures of others, rather than shunning those mistakes and moving on, we are doomed to repeat those same

mistakes anew. Again, we see how the positive reputation of this field is maintained by future recruits by understanding the lessons of the past and building upon their own reflections.

V. Do Not Ignore Analysis

The value of good, solid, reliable analytic data cannot be understated and is at present undervalued and underappreciated in the CI community. As Mr. Olson vividly points out, good analyses leads to a better quality of understanding for any mission at hand, past present and future. As a ballpark estimate, beefing up the current pool of analysts to at least one per field operators would do wonders for the quality of intelligence data that comes out from each day's work.

The danger to undervaluing the work of data analysis is obvious to the risk of mission failure, and is often the result of having field operators analyze their own data as they go, with the assumption that they are the ones having the best collection of knowledge going forward with their own missions each day. That cannot be further from the truth, as the two fields of intel analytics and field operations are as contrasting as night and day. Actors, doers and shakers impulsively take action on hunches and guesses when they feel the timing is right, but could definitely benefit from an approach from those who take a step back and give a second pair of eyeballs to the action that is taking place, reinforcing

the mission as it moves forward each passing second, each passing day [FBI Counterintelligence].

On the flip side, data analysis takes a calm, stealthy approach that can only be achieved once removed from the direct, daily action. Persons who can do both, alternating these roles throughout their mission, are indeed more valuable CI officers, but in most cases, the CIA would benefit greatly by increasing the value placed in the role of intel analytics [Olson, J. M].

VI. Do Not Be Parochial

Going back to points touched upon earlier, a certain level of respect, authority and professionalism throughout the CI community must be maintained, and highly regarded as well. A culture of superiority, interagency gossip and sniping has persisted, and has damaged the counterintel profession to the point that new recruits are affected by this culture, and are reluctant to join the ranks.

As noted in the article, CI is so hard to do, that the only way to do it effectively is to do it together. Sister services from the FBI and the DOD are likewise hardworking professionals, who also take risks in these same types of operations within their respective departments.

To combat this issue, the author suggests to simply cease badmouthing their interagency coworkers across the government, “knocking it off”, and to maintain and restore a high level of trust and cooperation going forward.

VII. Train Your People

The training and shared experiences of fellow counterintelligence operators is invaluable, and adds to an earlier point of not repeating mistakes, lest we are doomed to repeat them. Community-wide training reduces the risk of duplicating efforts, saving the most time and money for the taxpayer. The point is made that specialized counterintelligence gathering and analysis cannot be performed initially, and that it takes time and energy to see things in a completely new way [Olson, J. M].

Counterintelligence is a conglomeration of many skills and disciplines, and the best approach towards handling a variety of missions is to subcategorize them into specializations such as on-the-ground HUMINT, data analysis and decryption of SIGINT, among other sub-fields of CI.

Likewise, veteran officers should not become complacent in their routines, and should be rotated where reasonable in order to offer a fresh mindset to each mission in nature and scope. Training should also accommodate this approach [FBI Counterintelligence].

VIII. Do Not Be Shoved Aside

Maintaining and striking a balance of urgency and zealousness in one's treatment of intel data is valuable to any mission, and is of course hard to achieve. The environment that a typical counterintelligence operator may encounter, both in Washington and in Langley, Virginia, may be full of red tape, obstacles towards the goal of resolution for a mission, or can simply be a misunderstanding or misinterpretation by senior management for what needs to get done.

Counterintuitive to current efforts in the field, managers do not want their efforts compromised by second guesses, offered to them by third party reviewers. A natural human tendency to resist differing viewpoints must be overcome, and as soon as possible [FBI Counterintelligence].

There is also a value placed to the ethics and internal whistleblowing that may take place as a direct or indirect result of a mission. "Successes" in CI operations are often invisible

and are therefore hard to quantify, but what would help the profession more is to learn from mistakes, rather than to punish those who generate heat from within [Olson, J. M].

IX. Do Not Stay So Long

Professional burnout is another concern to observe and combat. Veteran operators will differ from the freshman in ways that are hard to quantify, but are marked by a long standing fear and paranoia in daily routines, an overzealousness in one's analysis, and a hesitation in one's activities.

To combat this, it is suggested to spend some time in another role, so that time is spent on other aspects of the CI role, in order to learn a fresh perspective from the protectees or those who are "in the trenches" on a daily basis [Olson, J. M].

Time off, rewards of the job in terms of nonfinancial materials (cars, vacations, etc) may give a break to seasoned professional operators, but what really adds value in the mind of Mr. Olson is a fresh perspective from within, precisely because not all is as it seems, nor should we think that it is, especially after so many years of CI work.

X. Never Give Up

The CI would do very well to maintain a culture of persistence and endurance when it comes to daily activities performed in service to the American public. As noted in Mr. Olson's commentary, he is most proud when he sees the results of a public espionage caught and prosecuted if not only for the quiet commitment of the officers involved in the investigation and prosecution, including the collection of evidence and freshly gathered intelligence based on tips generated, surveillance activities performed, and the like [FBI Counterintelligence].

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

The United States Government, as the largest public employer of personnel, is of course made of many parts which must operate well together, lest the entire assembled machine fall apart at the seams and gears. In its central role of counterintelligence gathering, the CIA plays an integral part in interagency operations, and certainly fulfills its professional mandate of covert operations for the greater good of our citizenry.

These ten steps as outlined herein are not meant as a destructive criticism of outlandish observations, but come from within, and are intended with the best possible outcome for the integrity of the agency, moving forward.

RESOURCES

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