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Psychological Characteristics of Rising Generations and the Relationship between HUMINT

Abstract

Today's security challenges have intensified the need for reliable and verifiable information, which the national security services along with police organisations traditionally satisfy from human sources. This brought with it the so-called renaissance of HUMINT. At the same time, however, the psychological characteristics of the younger generations, as well as the developing trends of mobile telecommunications and social media, have also generated challenges and brought new contradictions to the surface. This paper presents some of these – of course the most obvious ones, such as time management, sharing location and images, re-evaluating personal meetings – and formulates some suggestions for dealing with the challenges (e.g. avoiding generational gaps among sources and handling personnel) also emphasising the importance of the training of human sources.

Keywords: HUMINT, younger generations, psychology, challenges, solutions

Introduction

The present article examines the relationship between one of the oldest branches of clandestine intelligence, the secret information from human sources, and the rising generations, points out some contradictions and makes a proposal to resolve them. The paper focuses on the highest level of clandestine intelligence from human sources, the handling of secret sources. Under secret source we mean the special cooperation

when a natural person undertakes to act secretly in the long term in the interest of the organisation under the direction of a national security service or law enforcement agency, primarily, but not exclusively, for the purpose of obtaining information.

The first part of the study presents some relevant characteristics of secret source handling. The second part covers the well-observable behavioural characteristics of the younger generations, which are in contrast to the established good practice of secret source handling. After that, the third part formulates suggestions for resolving these contradictions.

Certain important features of secret source handling

Secret sources are used by both the defensive and offensive branches of intelligence, i.e. foreign intelligence and domestic counter intelligence (SCHOLTENS 2023; KÁROLY et al. 2019; BODA et al. 2014). Foreign intelligence employs a smaller but higher-quality, higher-level secret source contingent suitable for obtaining better protected information, while domestic counterintelligence seeks to involve a relatively larger number of secret sources. The individual secret sources form a specific network under the control of the service. The creation of a secret relationship is a structured process, the phases of which are regulated by the internal standards of the given national security service or law enforcement agency, which meet the requirements of legality and rely heavily on the results of psychology.

In the course of secret cooperation, personal meetings are regularly held between the secret source and the employee of the national security or law enforcement agency, i.e. the source running officer, during which the secret source reports on the execution of the previous task, and the running officer specifies the details of the report and determines further tasks to perform for the secret cooperation. A real and accurate appearance at the meeting is a moment of critical importance. In an ideal case, the meetings are planned in advance without special consultation, since every consultation or postponement increases the risk of an unauthorised third party becoming aware of the meeting. In addition to face-to-face meetings, impersonal contact is also possible and necessary, which nowadays takes place mainly in the virtual space, using information technologies, i.e. it has an internet footprint.

The next prominent characteristic of secret cooperation is, obviously, secrecy itself. The fact of maintaining contact, actual cooperation with a national security or law enforcement agency, any formal or substantive element thereof, or any related knowledge

must not be shared with third parties under any circumstances. The cooperating parties consciously do everything to ensure that this knowledge, or the moments referring to it, remain secret. In particular, the secret cooperation and the identity of the involved source, as well as any related data, such as the name, identity photo, address, etc. of the running officer, can be classified as secret.

The secret source can perform the tasks of the secret relationship only with above-average interpersonal skills. In other words, it is essential that his/her communication skills, including persuasive communication skills, are outstanding. He/she must be able to quickly reinvent himself in a new environment, he/she must be able to establish a deep acquaintance with new people relatively quickly and win their trust. Naturally, the running officer must also have these skills as well.

Last but not least among the qualities expected of a secret source is good memory. The secret source can be expected to accurately remember images, numbers, longer texts written or spoken on a topic unknown to the secret source and even in a foreign language, names and faces over a longer period of time, even years later, without any aids or targeted learning.

General impressions about rising generations

At the outset, we consider it important to state that differences and disputes between generations are by no means new. Furthermore, possible differences, existing skills in certain areas or their absence do not and cannot in any way represent a value judgment. However, in order to effectively collect secret information, it is absolutely necessary to name them in order to eliminate possible difficulties and to find solutions (MYERS-SADAGHIANI 2010; BANNON et al. 2011).

In anticipation of the above, it can be said that the importance of pre-arranged meetings is greatly reduced for the younger generations. In their private lives, the rising generations are constantly shaping their planned programs, the time and place of pre-arranged meetings. In doing so, of course, as in other areas of life, they heavily rely on the tools and possibilities of mobile telecommunications. In this way, of course, they also increase their internet footprint, which is not desirable for intelligence and counterintelligence services. If the meeting takes place, delays are the order of the day, which is again detrimental to the secrecy of the meetings.

For the younger generations, the culture of sharing is natural and can even be said to be part of their existence. Members of the young generation reflexively share the

important events of their lives and the people involved in them immediately on the world wide web, on various social media platforms that change according to fashion. Another important feature is that the sharing is carried out preferably with a picture or by using and publishing the geolocation data of the mobile telecommunications device.

What you didn't share didn't happen, and it can't result in positive feedback and "likes", the importance of which is outstanding for the younger generations. Sharing geolocation data with a parent, sibling, or friend is a sign of trust, the failure to do so raises questions. It is a real nightmare for a Generation X running officer that the location of the source meeting, or perhaps the person or photo of the running officer, is shared on social media. Is it possible that in the future this will become inevitable and part of everyday life?

In many cases, the younger generations have grown up in small families, in long-lasting and excessive parental anxiety, without peer groups or relegated to a virtual space. It follows that for them the physical proximity of other people and groups and direct communication with them is a challenge and stress. The phenomenon of voluntary withdrawal from society is becoming more and more common. Of course, these trends were also enhanced by the 2020–2021 Covid-19 pandemic. It is surprising, but it is at the same time a fact that the younger generations prefer to get their information from internet interfaces than from conversations between people. Communication skills and the ability to make easy connections therefore seem to be significantly reduced.

The memory of the younger generations also works differently than usual. The key combinations and system commands required to operate the computer can be memorised with childlike ease, while the previously mentioned texts, images and data cannot, or only barely. It is obvious that various easily searchable databases, such as Wikipedia, and the increasingly effective artificial intelligence-based internet search engines play a key role in this phenomenon. This is not a problem in everyday life, but it is a serious challenge to recall the content of a meeting or document where taking photographs – which is another shocking habit – is not possible. It is clear that if taking photos becomes a generally accepted habit, and it seems that we are moving in this direction, the criticality of the situation mentioned above will also decrease significantly. However, the really important conversations and texts will probably still belong to this narrow but all the more important circle.

Challenges and opportunities

It is easy to see that the situation outlined above is quite contradictory. In the last part, we look for the answer to whether it is possible to resolve the contradictions, and if so, how.

The first point is that what is lacking in the skillset of secret sources must be present to a greater extent in the toolbox of running officers. Here, we mainly focus on interpersonal skills, easy, yet precise and convincing oral communication. Staying with the person of the running officer, I think it is important and desirable that the running officer and secret sources belong to the same generation, or at least the generation gap should be as small as possible. This is somewhat contradicted by the following idea, according to which it is important that the running officer fulfils his role with appropriate training and accumulated experience in other national security fields. Of course, these processes are time- and cost-consuming. Returning to the person of the secret source, his/her training is also enhanced.

It is likely that the proportion of face-to-face meetings will decrease in the future, and in parallel, exchanges of ideas conducted on telecommunication and infocommunication interfaces will become more frequent. Which will lead to an increase in the already mentioned internet footprint. Taking into account that the internet does not forget, in addition to technical solutions, it is important that conditions and forms of behaviour suitable for concealing the reality are applied as widely and in a better developed manner as possible. It can be expected that simple secrecy will be replaced by cover-up, or in a related technical term, the application of legend.

In summary, it can be said that the resolution of the contradictions seems to be possible by raising the quality and standard of secret cooperation, partly by technicising it, and by involving the younger generations. Since their investment requirements are also greater, it is expected that HUMINT will be a tool for acquiring qualitative knowledge instead of quantitative, it is expected that the quantitative network will be replaced by the qualitative network domestically as well, and with this, counterintelligence services will also, at least in relation to some specialist areas, act as specific internal intelligence services.

We can therefore be confident that we are not witnessing the disappearance of HUMINT, but its survival and transformation at a higher level, even becoming more secret.

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