

**Tradecraft Primer: A Framework for Aspiring Interrogators. By  
Paul Charles Topalian. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016.**

Mark J. Roberts  
*Subject Matter Expert*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss>  
pp. 139-141

---

**Recommended Citation**

Roberts, Mark J.. "Tradecraft Primer: A Framework for Aspiring Interrogators. By Paul Charles Topalian. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016.." *Journal of Strategic Security* 9, no. 4 (2016) : 139-141.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.9.4.1576>  
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol9/iss4/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Strategic Security by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

---

**Tradecraft Primer: A Framework for Aspiring Interrogators. By Paul Charles Topalian. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016.**

***Tradecraft Primer: A Framework for Aspiring Interrogators.***  
**By Paul Charles Topalian. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016.**  
**ISBN 978-1-4987-5114-8. Photographs. Figures. Sources cited.**  
**Index. Pp. xv, 140. \$59.95.**

Interrogation is a word fraught with many inferences and implications. Revelations of waterboarding, incidents in Abu Graib and Guantanamo, and allegations of police impropriety in obtaining confessions have all cast the topic in a negative light in recent years. Paul Charles Topalian's book seeks to hit a "reset" button to openly and objectively provide a framework for how present and future interrogators pursue their vocation. The author worked for nearly three decades in intelligence, security, and law enforcement and brings multiple perspectives to bear on a way ahead.

His opening section defines difference of how law enforcement and intelligence define and use the term interrogation. This includes how the individual being questioned is treated and their rights, as well as the sense of urgency. Most criminal interrogations are based on the longstanding Reid Technique, whereas most military and intelligence interrogations are based on an Army Field Manual. These approaches differ in intent and technique. The law enforcement interrogation, undertaken according to legal parameters, seeks to divine what occurred in a criminal context and may or may not have a sense of urgency. The military or intelligence interrogation, undertaken according to Law of Armed Conflict/Geneva Convention parameters, seeks to divine what may occur in the future and may have a sense of urgency if a terror attack or military action is imminent.

The author then provides a history of how interrogation has evolved through the ages. Tracing its development through the ancient Near East, the Roman Empire, the Dark Ages, and the Salem witch trials, he shows that torture was the norm for many centuries. Napoleon forbade torture, calling it "barbarous" and "useless." (12). In the law enforcement realm, case law led to more rights for suspects (e.g. Miranda vs. Arizona led to mandatory rights advisements). Treatment and interrogation of POWs in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam led to more humane treatment of detainees among countries that adhered to the Geneva Conventions. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. entered a Global War on Terror (GWOT) with an enemy that did not adhere to or respect its values. As the U.S. began to collect detainees in Afghanistan and Iraq, it had to decide how to treat them as their opponents were not signatories to the Geneva Conventions. With the advent of "black sites" and enhanced interrogation techniques, public outcry led to inquiries of

how these developments were consistent (or not) with U.S. values. These developments, along with incidents at Guantanamo and Abu Graib, led to revisions in the Army Field Manual for intelligence interrogation using a more humane approach to detainee interrogation.

Topalian examines the rights of persons in custody. In the law enforcement arena, the Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution gave more rights to criminal suspects under the law. In the intelligence field, multiple international treaties and covenants, along with new U.S. laws and Executive Orders, changed interrogation practices to reflect a greater respect for human rights and existing laws. These changes have been codified in the Army Field Manual for intelligence interrogation to guide detention and interrogation activities of military intelligence entities.

The author wades into the psychological aspects of interrogation from the viewpoint of the interrogator and the detainee. One aspect is how the human mind works in remembering information. An interrogator may plant an idea in the detainee's mind that elicits an incorrect answer. Sometimes failure to remember a specific event may be interpreted as deception when in fact the detainee does not remember. Other factors include stress levels, decay of memory of time, susceptibility to suggestion, emotional state, fear, cultural factors such as guilt and shame, perceptions, the physical setting of the interrogation room, biases on the part of the interrogator and detainee, and fear of the unknown. Topalian outlines how studies have shown that "soft skill" factors such as rapport building, word choice and tone, trust, respect, and reciprocity produce more information with less of value to the interrogator and less stress for the detainee.

For both law enforcement and intelligence interrogations, there are distinct cycles peculiar to each discipline. For the law enforcement framework, what occurred during the crime drives the interrogation to determine if a given act in fact took place, and there may or may not be a sense of urgency. For the intelligence framework, what the interrogator knows, what they don't know, and what they need to know in order to prevent an opponent's hostile action drive the interrogation, usually with a sense of urgency in case of impending hostile action. In both types, throughout the interrogation cycle, the interrogator continuously evaluates the information for reliability and truthfulness to help determine its validity.

A confession is influenced by the strength of the evidence (real or perceived), the length of the interrogation (a longer session is more likely to lead to a

confession than a shorter one), and the number of tactics the interrogator uses (the more tactics used, the greater the likelihood of a confession). The principal factors governing why detainees lie are fear, shame, the desire to obtain a favor, or a desire to protect someone or something.

Topalian closes the book with a call for a code of ethics to govern an interrogator's operating parameters to ensure ethical, humane, and legally sound treatment of detainees. His credo is "do no harm; respect human rights."

This book, as the title suggest, is a primer for those who aspire to practice interrogation as a vocation. It is a solid reference for any interrogator. The books and articles referenced are outstanding for further study and suited for in depth study accompanied by practical experience.

*Mark Roberts, Subject Matter Expert*