

Why Do People Spy?



Motivated by M.I.C.E.

Espionage is illegal and generally carries consequences ranging from termination of employment to the death penalty, so why do people do it? The motives vary, but generally fall into specific categories. These categories are money, ideology, coercion and ego. They are easily remembered by the acronym M.I.C.E.

Money

Historically, money has been the most common reason for people to spy on their nation or company. They have access to information of great value and seek out a buyer, or the buyer comes to them with an offer in the form of monetary instruments. These may be one-time exchanges or go on repeatedly for years, decades even.

People who spy (known as agents) for money are often caught because they begin visibly living above their means. For example, an engineer making \$80,000 a year suddenly arrives to work in a Ferrari and buys a new million-dollar home. This may be noticed by friends and business colleagues, tax auditors, or in the process of a periodically scheduled security interview.

Ideology

Edward Snowden is an example of someone that committed espionage for ideological reasons. Snowden disagreed with the intelligence collection practices of the U.S. government and claims to have felt a duty to inform the public at large. There may have been other reasons why Snowden did what he did, but this is the reason he chose to publicize.

People may also spy because of their heritage. Heritage includes race, religion, and national origin. Heritage does not necessarily have to be actual, but only perceived or felt. An individual can simply feel a sense of connection with another culture and be more motivated to spy on its behalf. For this reason, intelligence agencies are very cautious when recruiting those who were not born in the country which they are attempting to work for.

False flag operations, defined by Wikipedia as "operations that are designed to deceive in such a way that activities appear as though they are being carried out by entities, groups, or nations other than those who actually planned and executed them", often exploit ideology and heritage. For example, if CIA is attempting to recruit a Yemen-born Sunni Muslim living in Lebanon to report information on his local community, the handlers may operate under a false identity such as agents of the Saudi government. This may prevent an ideological heritage conflict that could arise if the agent was asked to work for CIA, an American intelligence agency.

Coercion

Coercion comes in many forms, but is generally similar to extortion. The act of coercion may start with an attractive woman seducing a married man that has access to desired information. The woman may not get the information herself, but rather ensures an affair during which incriminating video is recorded. The man, not wanting his wife to find out what he has done, then submits to the information collection demands of the handlers.

Coercion may not always be an initial motivator, but is often a long-term cost saving strategy for the handlers. If the handler can motivate an agent to commit an initial act of espionage through financial persuasion, they put themselves in a position to obtain future information at a significant discount. Once the agent has committed a serious criminal offense, the

handler can continue motivating the agent to perform through coercion. He can simply advise the agent that payments for future acts of espionage will be in the form of not turning him over to the authorities. The agent, knowing he is guilty and fearing the legal consequences often continues to do as the handler asks.

Ego

The final category of motivating reasons for why people spy is ego. A broad category, ego encompasses revenge, adventure, and social-proof. For example, some people will commit espionage without being coerced, and without monetary compensation. They are simply looking for the thrill and the satisfaction in calling themselves a spy. These types of people are likely to have "loose lips" and brag about their acts, making them highly susceptible to discovery.

Another way that handlers exploit ego is by instilling in the agent a desire to obtain revenge. The handler may create a situation where the agent feels a strong emotional desire to impart retribution against the target. The target could be a specific person, nation, or society. Those motivated by revenge will often completely disregard consequences in the process of meeting their goals. Revenge is generally the strongest motivator for people to spy due to the high levels of emotion involved.

Conclusion

This article wasn't written with the intention of teaching people how to recruit agents of espionage. Rather, it is to educate the protectors of information on how to look out for potential spies, and how to not become spies themselves. The next time a member of the opposite sex offers to buy you a drink at the hotel bar, ask yourself, "are they after me, or my information?".

This article and more are available on the [EP-INTEL website](#).

About EP-INTEL

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