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## **Elite Interviews**

### **Ruth Blakeley**

#### CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter shows how elite interviewing can provide insights that cannot be gleaned from documentary analysis alone. It draws on the author's own experience of interviewing dozens of US Department of Defense officials, as well as individuals from high profile human rights organisations, about the impact that US training of Latin American military forces had on human rights during the Cold War and afterwards. The training, much of which took place at the School of Americas (SOA), now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), gained notoriety in the 1990s, when training manuals were leaked that showed the US had advocated methods tantamount to torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The chapter introduces readers to some of the challenges of elite interviewing, it discusses some of the thorny ethical questions that need to be considered, and it provides guidance on conducting interviews.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion, readers should be able to:

- Explain the benefits of undertaking focused interviews in the field of Critical Security Studies and the various challenges involved in undertaking elite interviews, relating to research ethics, power relations, and the influence of the researcher on the interview process

- Evaluate the ways in which carrying out focused interviews can be further enhanced by ethnographic methods and the relative benefits and costs of undertaking non-ethnographic and ethnographic interviews; and
- Reflect critically on the different methods for recording interview data.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is informed by research undertaken to evaluate the ways that powerful Western states have sponsored state terrorism<sup>1</sup> in efforts to secure access to and control over resources and markets in the Global South, from European colonialism to the present day (Blakeley 2009). Historical materialist theory underpins this analysis. Historical materialism shares some of the same commitments of other critical theories (Herring 2010). It is a particular form of Marxism which contends that states and systems of interstate power relations are embedded in and produced through systems of relations which encompass the social organisation of production (Rupert 2008). Many historical materialists understand imperialism to be the context in which states such as the US have pursued their foreign policy objectives. They draw on the work of Robert Cox, whose analysis of the global political economy demonstrated the relationships between class, the state and world order. Imperialism, as Cox argues, ‘adds a vertical dimension of power to the horizontal dimension of rivalry among powerful states’, a dimension which is ‘the dominance and subordination of metropole over hinterland, center over periphery, in a world political economy’ (Cox 1986: 215-16). For historical materialists, detailed empirical analysis is indispensable, both as a means of analysing the specific facts of an issue, but also as a means of developing an understanding of entire phases of world history (Herring 2010).

In the case of the US, one significant aspect of its support for state terrorism has been the political, financial and military support it gave to repressive regimes in Latin America throughout the Cold War. This included extensive military training in counter-insurgency techniques, through which the US encouraged human rights violations (see Figure 13.1). These were intended to terrorise a wider population than their immediate victims in the hope of quashing support for progressive political movements that posed a threat to US strategic and material interests (Blakeley 2009).

[<insert Figure 13.1 here. Caption: Figure 13.1: The US sponsorship of state terrorism and the School of the Americas.>](#)

In 2004, the opportunity arose for the author to undertake a period of field work in the US. It included four weeks in Washington DC to interview human rights activists that campaign against SOA/WHINCEC, as well as serving and retired Pentagon officials that had been involved in US training of Latin American military forces since the end of World War II. I could thereby draw on the experience of several generations of US military personnel who had been present throughout the ‘American century’. That century saw the ascendancy of the US to super-power status, and its eventual unrivalled dominance of world politics and the international political economy. The fieldwork also included a two-month ethnographic study at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly the School of the Americas (SOA), in Fort Benning, Georgia. Throughout those two months, I spent four days per week at WHINSEC. I was free to observe any class of my choosing, unannounced, attend key events, including meetings of the Board of Visitors (an oversight body established to

hold WHINSEC to account), and interview any member of staff or the student body as many times as I wished. This period of focused, ethnographic interviewing provided insights into US training of Latin American military personnel over an entire period of history, from the end of World War II to the present day. The remainder of this chapter introduces some of the challenges involved in elite interviewing.

## CONDUCTING ELITE INTERVIEWS

### **The value of focused interviews**

The emphasis in this chapter is on focused interviews, since this is considered to be the richest form of interview for the study of the social world. Social scientists tend to differentiate between three types of interview (Fielding and Thomas 2001): standardised or structured interviews; semi-standardised or semi-structured interviews; and non-standardised, unstructured, or focused interviews (see Figure 13.2).

<insert Figure 13.2 here. Caption: Types of Interview>

Focused interviews not only provide the best possibility for gathering rich data from interviewees, but they also allow the researcher to undertake interviews that are appropriate to the background, experience, level, rank and interests of the interviewee. For example, themes had to be explored in different ways with human rights NGOs than they were with US military personnel. One of the puzzles at the heart of the research on SOA/WHINSEC was whether training at WHINSEC continued to present a risk to the human rights in the home countries of the Latin American military staff receiving

training, as human rights activists claim. To explore this, my focus when interviewing human rights campaigners was on asking them to tell me more about the evidence they had uncovered of on-going threats to human rights from WHINSEC. By contrast, a rather different approach was needed with military personnel. Department of Defense staff who have had anything to do with SOA/WHINSEC are familiar with the human rights critiques of the institution. My first interviews took place at the Pentagon, well before I had stepped through the doors of WHINSEC for the first time. To explore the nature of the training with US military personnel at that stage in the research, therefore, my questions were aimed at exploring the purposes of the training, and the forms it took. I would ask open questions about what the purposes of the training had been in the Cold War, whether there had been any changes in those purposes since the end of the Cold War, and what impact the closing of SOA and the opening of WHINSEC had had on the nature of the training. I would proceed with questions relating to how they explained the existence of the SOA training manuals which advocated human rights abuses, and whether they considered these to be typical of US military training and US military practice. These questions emphasised the strength of focused interviews as a means of developing a rich understanding, not simply of how individuals perceive an issue, but as a means of identifying the culture of an institution, its evolution, its shared history, its collective memory. These insights could not be gained from any of the documentary research I had previously completed, which involved reading the leaked training manuals, reading secondary sources about SOA as an institution, and reading the public statements that had been issued by the Pentagon and the Office of Public Accounting, following their investigations into the manuals. Most importantly, the focused interviews helped tease out important contradictions in thinking that at first had been concealed by the party-line offered by my interviewees in their initial responses.

Repeatedly, US Department of Defense staff, when asked about the revelations that SOA had encouraged human rights violations, trotted out a well-rehearsed story that reflected the official version of events that emanated from the Pentagon in the immediate aftermath of the leaking of the manuals. This narrative asserted that the manuals had only been used among a small minority of students, that the nefarious content had ended up in the manuals through a series of oversight errors, but that these were not reflective of US military policy. My interviews at the Pentagon took place just a few months after the photographs depicting prisoner abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison had been widely published. In response to the official narrative on SOA by my interviewees, therefore, I would follow up with questions relating to the relationship between the manuals and the more recent abuses. All were quick to condemn them. Several made the argument that the Abu Ghraib abuses were the work of ‘a few bad apples’ that had been poorly trained. Others candidly revealed that there was now considerable confusion about what was acceptable. They explained that confusion had arisen following mixed messages from the US Department of Justice, under the Bush administration, which had sanctioned a number of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ (CIA 2004), a euphemism for torture, for use by the CIA in the ‘War on Terror’ against suspected members of Al Qaida (see Figure 13.3). This, they argued, had filtered through the ranks. Some even wondered aloud whether this confusion had contributed to the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuses. The responses on Abu Ghraib, particularly from older military personnel who had been involved in the Cold War training, revealed much more accurately their true personal perspectives on Cold War counter-insurgency methods than their responses to direct questions about SOA had. A number argued that Abu Ghraib was completely different from SOA, since the SOA manuals were part of a

broader, legitimate US counter-insurgency strategy that was necessary for fighting a really dangerous enemy in a different era, where they argued certain things were more permissible than they are now. Wanton sexual brutality as occurred at Abu Ghraib, they argued, was totally unacceptable, but counter-insurgency methods aimed at securing intelligence from terrorised relatives was necessary in the face of a huge threat.

Interestingly, very similar arguments have been made more recently by the Bush administration about the legitimacy of ‘enhanced interrogation techniques’ and water boarding (BBC 2010). These methods, which bear a striking resemblance to those describe in the SOA manuals, have been used against detainees in the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, and sanctioned at the highest levels of the US administration.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration condemned the perpetrators of the Abu Ghraib abuses.

[<insert Figure 13.3 here. Caption: Figure 13.3: ‘Enhanced Interrogation Techniques’](#)

Documentary research had revealed nothing of the contradictions in the attitudes of personnel that I encountered through these interviews. Documents had given me important insights into the content of the training, and the various official claims made about the training. The interviews helped uncover a much more complex picture.

Individuals within the Pentagon, while recounting the party-line that torture was not acceptable, indicated that they thought the methods used in the Cold War were somehow acceptable, because they were being deployed in the face of what they perceived to be an enormous threat. Furthermore, they had distinguished in their own minds between methods used as part of what they considered to be a legitimate counter-



insurgency campaign and what they saw as the unregulated, unsanctioned abuses by a few deviants.

### **The added value of ethnographic interviews**

The interviews with Pentagon staff provoked a range of new questions that I had not previously considered before commencing the field work. Exploring these was possible during the second phase of fieldwork at WHINSEC. Until then, my interviews had all been non-ethnographic. In other words, they were one-off and unconnected events where I had little opportunity to gain any insights into the daily lives of the interviewees. At WHINSEC, the ethnographic interviews provided an even richer set of data from which to draw conclusions.

[<insert Figure 13.4 here. Caption: Figure 13.4: Ethnographic research at WHINSEC, Fort Benning, Columbus, Georgia>](#)

The research at WHINSEC had a rather different character to the interviews undertaken at the Pentagon. They were fairly formal in the first instance. In nearly every case, I also had at least one, if not several, opportunities to follow-up on these interviews in person. This meant that I could return with questions that had arisen, either through interviews with others, or through my observations of the training observed at WHINSEC. These ‘interviews’ in fact amounted to on-going conversations over a longer period of time, which allowed interviewees to expand on their comments and provide a more complete set of reflections. Such a conversation unfolded with the Judge Advocate who oversaw the Human Rights training at WHINSEC. Our conversations focused on the place of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the training. He

had a very different attitude to those I had encountered among Pentagon staff. He had no tolerance for arguments that violations of human rights had any place in the treatment of individuals detained by the military, and he was alarmed that such thinking was emanating from the Executive, the CIA, and certain quarters in the Pentagon. We discussed the various methods he was using to ensure that WHINSEC wasn't simply reminding trainees of their obligations under international law, but rather, that they were fully understood with reference to the actual scenarios they were likely to face. He had developed a series of case studies and simulations that were used to great effect in the officer training I observed. I was also able to follow up with questions on the training as I observed it.

Through these conversations, along with my own observations of the training, I was able to develop a clearer sense of the character of the institution and its place within the US military than could be gleaned through documentary research alone. Indeed, most of the secondary source material available about WHINSEC emanated from people associated with the SOA Watch movement, and was not grounded in any serious engagement with the institution. It tended to assert that nefarious training continued. I encountered a very different institution to that described in the literature. There was considerable transparency, largely encouraged through the Board of Visitors, established after the transition from SOA to WHINSEC, to offer regular scrutiny of the institution by independent academics, human rights lawyers and various representatives from NGOs. A much more rigorous human rights training programme was in place than in any other US military institution for either its own or foreign forces.

These were important findings. When I put these points to Roy Bourgeois, founder of SOA Watch, towards the end of my time in Columbus, his response surprised me. He stated that he knew WHINSEC was not training people to torture, and that considerable changes had been made with new methods for oversight and transparency. He argued, however, that SOA/WHINSEC had become an important symbol for what he saw as wider problems with US foreign policy, and it would continue to be important for mobilising activists against US interventions overseas, as well as the use of torture, US imperialism generally. I was then able to ask whether he and his team at SOA Watch thought it was legitimate to continue arguing that WHINSEC trains people to torture, when they know this to be untrue. He argued that this was necessary in the wider fight against US imperialism. I had previously found nothing in SOA Watch's published materials, its website, and its campaigning efforts to show that there was an appreciation among its leaders or membership of the fairly substantive changes that had been implemented when SOA was closed and WHINSEC was opened in its place. Without also undertaking ethnographic research and interviews at WHINSEC, I would have had little understanding myself of the degree of change. In particular, I would have had no perspective on the very thorough job undertaken by the Board of Visitors to hold every aspect of the training to account. Gaining these insights was a painstaking process of interviewing and re-interviewing, observing training, weighing up contradictions and anomalies between the accounts of different interviewees, and reaching judgements based on the extensive body of evidence eventually gathered from months of documentary research, and subsequently during the three months of interviewing and ethnography. Early on in the process, I made some costly mistakes. These taught me important lessons about the risks we run if we do not treat interviewees with the utmost respect. These had a significant effect on how I proceeded with the fieldwork thereafter.

### **The importance of trust**

Social scientists that work within a post-positivist framework, as critical security scholars do, share the view that we can never free ourselves from the effects of the ideological commitments we hold, or the many experiences that shape our thinking. They nevertheless argue that we have a responsibility to approach research with as much objectivity as possible. This is particularly important for researchers seeking to carry out focused interviews. Interviewees need to be able to trust that the researcher is going to listen carefully to the things that they say, that they will accurately record the information provided, and the material be used in a manner that accurately reflects the perspective of the interviewee as communicated during the interview. Throughout the interview, the researcher is involved in process of demonstrating to the interviewee that they are a trustworthy vehicle for the recording and wider communication of the interviewee's experiences. To this end, I received a very sound piece of advice before I embarked on my fieldwork, which was to never argue with the interviewee. If the interviewer does argue back, they are suggesting to the interviewee that the experience they are sharing is being treated with contempt by the researcher. On two occasions, among the first few interviews I carried out, I broke this rule.

The first time I argued with an interviewee was during a telephone interview. My interviewee was making an argument in defence of torture as a tool for securing intelligence in the face of terrorist threats. I could not contain my own ideological commitment to the absolute prohibition of torture, and expressed my disgust at the interviewee's position. The interviewee ended the interview almost immediately. I had offended him, and worse, had allowed myself to be judgemental towards him, which

served to undermine my objectivity, my preparedness to listen to his perspective, and in turn, his belief that I would treat his interview material with respect. I should have remained quiet, and listened to what he had to say, before proceeding to gently question him about how he squared his position with US and international law. Most of all I should have remained measured and calm. This would have elicited much more useful data than I acquired in the event. While this occurred on the telephone, its effect – to result in the hasty termination of the interview – alerted me to how risky such an approach is, and to the fact that in person, even a facial expression betraying contempt for the interviewee's position could have the same effect. This taught me early on that the interviewer has to learn to be very aware of their own body language, because this, too, can have profound effects on the trust that the interviewee is willing to place in the researcher.

The second time I broke the 'do not argue' rule less overtly, but I nevertheless overstepped the fine line between probing further and denigrating the interviewee. In one of the early interviews with a permanent staff member of SOA Watch, I asked the interviewee what evidence SOA Watch had that WHINSEC was still encouraging the abuse of human rights. When the interviewee pointed to a study that I considered to be fundamentally flawed, I failed to hide my frustration, asserting that this was a pretty poor response. The interviewee was, quite rightly, offended, and again, the interview was soon over. I was insensitive to the fact that I was speaking to a fulltime member of the SOA Watch team, and that before me was someone who had devoted their career to the work of SOA Watch, because they were deeply committed to promoting human rights. I had trampled over the choices they had made, with little thought. A much more appropriate line of questioning would have involved discussing the study, by asking the

interviewee to clarify aspects of the study that I found problematic, and asking the interviewee to explain if I had misunderstood the issues presented. In other words, what was needed was a more humble and in some respects naïve approach in my questioning, so that the interviewee felt emboldened to share their, rather than feeling that I was judging them and showing contempt for their work and their experiences. While I would not recommend that researchers test this for themselves, I only really saw the significance of the need to avoid arguing with or denigrating an interviewee when I saw the consequences of this for myself. This was by far the most important lesson I learned in my early days of fieldwork, and it speaks explicitly to the ethical principle of doing no harm in the pursuit of knowledge.

## ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Researchers have a responsibility to carry out research ethically (see also Chapter 20). Generally speaking, research councils (such as the UK's Economic and Social Research Council, the Australian Research Council and the Social Science Research Council in the USA) will only fund research where a full review of the ethical implications of the work has been undertaken. Funding bodies expect research to comply with six key principles, outlined in Figure 13.5.

[<insert Figure 13.5 here. Caption: General Principles of Ethical Research, from the UK Economic and Social Research Council.](#)

In many respects, Principle 5, which stipulates that harm to research participants must be avoided in all instances, encapsulates the various other ethical principles that

researchers must abide by. While the principles are clear, they are nevertheless open to interpretation, and researchers will need to make judgements about how to abide by these principles. Where vulnerable groups are involved in the research, extra care needs to be taken, and research councils often offer important guidelines on the questions that need to be considered. For the purposes of this chapter, the focus will be on three specific areas that are most pertinent to elite interviewing. The first relates to the protection of interviewees from harm. The second relates to the anonymity of respondents. The third relates to the nature of the relationship between researcher and interviewee.

### **Protecting interviewees**

Elites tend not to be considered particularly vulnerable groups. Certainly officials that I encountered in the Pentagon were very experienced interviewees, had received public relations training, and were well versed in how to conduct themselves when interviewed by academics and other outsiders. Staff members of NGOs are also members of the elite. They tend to be university educated, they are often from middle class backgrounds, and sometimes they have the capacity to exert influence at the government level. But they are also vulnerable. Those I interviewed tended to have less experience of being interviewed, and had not necessarily received training in this area. I had a responsibility to take special care with regard to their data. I recognised a vulnerability that I had a responsibility to protect that they may not have even been aware of. Even though they spoke on the record and were willing to be named personally in anything I published, I took the deliberate decision not to refer to any of the interviews I had undertaken among the Human Rights community in subsequent interviews I undertook with US military personnel. This was because their work often involved being highly critical of government, and even engaging in direct action against

the US military, particularly at the annual protests at Fort Benning. I had a duty to ensure that I did not pass on any information about their activities or their identities, deliberately or inadvertently, to my interviewees associated with the US Department of Defense.

### **Establishing levels of attribution**

The above example points to a second area where the researcher has to consider the specific circumstances of their interviewees. Researchers are encouraged to secure consent from research participants, preferably in writing, prior to undertaking the research (see Chapter 20, Figure 20.1, for an example of a Participant Information Sheet). It is sometimes argued that researchers should also establish levels of attribution before any interview takes place. Establishing levels of attribution means determining whether the individual is happy to be named in any publications stemming from the research, whether the individual would prefer only to be identified by their membership of a particular group, whether they want to be totally anonymised, or whether the interview is entirely off the record. Others argue that in some cases, there is an argument for not establishing levels of attribution at the outset, since interviewees may want to vary the levels of attribution, and will indicate these at different stages during the interview. A further reason for establishing levels of attribution at the end is that interviewees might talk more freely if the question is not raised at the outset. Reaching a judgement on this will depend on the degree of vulnerability of the research participant. I found that US Department of Defense officials familiar with being interviewed would often volunteer the level of attribution without any prompt for me. They would indicate at the outset that everything they said was on the record. Occasionally, during the interview, they would indicate to me that a particular statement was off the record, or



that they would rather not be named if I referred to a specific point in any published work. Since some of the first officials I interviewed established this pattern with me, I took the decision not to establish levels of attribution among officials at the beginning, but that if they had not indicated a preference by the end of the interview, I would then ask them to clarify. With interviewees that I perceived as being more vulnerable, I tended to establish levels of attribution at the outset. Regardless of our perceptions of the degree to which our interviewees are vulnerable, we nevertheless must ensure that all interviewees are afforded total integrity in how we handle their data. Their data must be held securely. If they indicate that they are expressing something off the record, we have a responsibility to protect their anonymity. If they indicate that a portion of the interview must not be published in any form, their wishes must be respected. Apart from anything else, if we do not expect the wishes of interviewees, they are far less likely to be willing to be interviewed in future, so we have a duty to ensure the best possible opportunities for researchers that follow us.

### **The nature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship**

As well as giving careful thought to how we protect interviewees from harm, we also need to think about the ethical questions that arise from the decisions we make about our interactions with interviewees. In exceptional circumstances, researchers may conceal their true research motives, and they may even take on a false identity, as a means of gaining access to communities that they otherwise could not reach. In *Methods, Sex and Madness*, O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1994) describe some examples of this. In one case, a researcher posed as a receptionist in a brothel, to undertake covert ethnographic research on the habits and behaviours of men that pay for sex. Most researchers will not be faced with the many difficult ethical dilemmas such

research poses. But questions about how we conduct ourselves with our interviewees are no less important. I noticed early on in interviewees among the largely male, military officials within the Pentagon, that my gender, appearance and nationality shaped the way these interviewees responded to me. Responses to me ranged from overtly flattering spoken references to my appearance, flirtatious or charming behaviour, and spoken appreciation of my 'Queen's English' accent, to paternalistic or even patronising comments implying that interviewees did not consider me to be serious or knowledgeable, and even that I should not be troubling myself with these serious matters. I had a steep learning curve in developing strategies to respond to this range of responses. This including thinking through the ethics of the options open to me (see also Chapter 1 on positionality). What would be the implications of playing along with the slightly flirtatious tone, or over-emphasising my femininity? Would this help or hinder my efforts to elicit frank and candid responses from interviewees? Would playing on the perception that I was naïve and unaware elicit more or less useful material? What would be the effect of a more hard-line and serious approach? I experimented with a range of responses, and tended to find that a friendly and open approach was effective, without allowing myself to be distracted from the serious questions I wanted to ask.

Each researcher will have to make a series of judgements about what protecting their research participants means in practice, and what impact their own behaviour will have on participants. This will be based on the specifics of the communities they are engaging with. The most important thing is to be sure that researchers have complied with key ethical principles and that they are comfortable with and can defend the decisions they take.

## RECORDING AND ANALYSING INTERVIEW DATA

There is a significant body of literature on the various methods that can be used to record and analyse interview data (Good examples are: Arksey and Knight 1999; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Different researchers have different preferences, and these often relate to the nature of the research being carried out. One of the first challenges is whether to make digital/tape recordings of interviews, or to take hand written notes. There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods. Permission to record the interview must always be secured from the interviewee. A recording will provide a verbatim record of the interview. In some cases, though, the presence of the recording device may make some interviewees nervous, or more reserved in their responses. By contrast, taking handwritten notes can be less threatening to the interviewee, but the interviewer risks missing key bits of information, and will have to be a fairly rapid writer with a considerable aptitude for multi-tasking. If a researcher chooses to take handwritten notes, it is good practice to leave time immediately following each individual interview to go through the notes, and make any corrections and additions while the memory of the interview is fresh. If interviews are recorded, transcripts of the interview should be produced. This is time-consuming, although there are now software options available for this, or the researcher may employ a professional transcription service. The advantage of the researcher transcribing the interview her/himself is that it facilitates familiarisation with the interview material.

Methods for analysing data vary considerably, but the main principle is to develop a system for comparing material across interviews, without losing the context of each one.

Many researchers develop coding systems to identify key themes in each transcript or set of notes, so that data can be easily compared. Rubin and Rubin's (1995) work is extremely helpful in outlining the different methods for doing this. It is a good idea to try to devise themes and codes that speak directly to the broader research questions that the project is seeking to address. That way, the researcher can be sure that only material relevant to the project is included in the analysis.

Researchers identifying with critical approaches to security do not tend to see the interview data as a series of facts. Rather, the interview is understood as a social event based on the interactions between interviewer and interviewee. This is consistent with the approach adopted by those undertaking focused or ethnographic interviews, where the interview is given as much space as possible to freely speak, reflect and discuss an issue at some length. Therefore, when analysing interview data, the researcher will not simply be paying attention to the statements of the interviewee, but their tone, their body language, and their general demeanour. The researcher will also reflect on their own impact on the interview. Therefore, even where interviews are recorded, it can be very helpful for the researcher to also take notes during the interview, to try and capture some of the complexity of what is a complex, relational human interaction.

#### SEMINAR EXERCISE

This exercise involves pairing up with a partner, developing a short interview and then conducting it. Partners will take it in turns to interview each other. Each partner in the pair should select a particular topic that they are both reasonably familiar with within the field of security studies, and choose roles for the interviewee, e.g. an arms trader, the

NATO commander in charge of the coalition forces in Afghanistan, or a politician that has advocated the use of torture. They each have 10 minutes to develop 3-4 reasonably open questions. The first 'interviewer' will then have 10 minutes to interview the first 'interviewee'. 'The interviewer' should try to take some notes based on the responses of the 'interviewee'. Once the interview is complete, the pair should have a de-briefing session for 10 minutes, reflecting on how well the interview was conducted. The pairs should then swap roles and repeat the exercise. At the end, the pairs should take 10 minutes to discuss their experience of interviewing. What was challenging? How easy was it to simply listen, without expressing any kind of emotion in response to the interviewee's views? What did you notice about each other's body language? In what ways might you both improve your interview technique?

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEBATE

1. In what ways might focused interviews enhance the data gathered through documentary research in the field of security studies?
2. Can you think of particular actors in the international security arena who might be put at risk by agreeing to be interviewed by academic researchers? Why? How might these risks be minimised?
3. How important is it for the interviewer to establish a relationship of trust with the interviewee? What might cause a break down in trust?
4. Can you think of any instances when it might be legitimate for the researcher to conceal their identity, or to conceal the true purposes of the research? What are the risks associated with this?
5. Is it legitimate for the interviewer to use certain behaviours, or to play on particular personal characteristics, during interviews?

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<sup>1</sup> State terrorism is defined as any threat or act of violence by agents of the state that is intended to induce extreme fear in a target audience beyond the direct victim of the violence, so that they are forced to consider changing their behaviour in some way.