

CELL, ORGANIZATION OF

A method of organization for terrorists, guerrillas, bandits, secret societies, and conspiracies, cells are compact "action groups."

For a criminal or terrorist organization—hunted by the immense power of the state—the cellular structure is probably the only way to survive.

The Irish Republican Army--the Irish terrorist group--originally saw itself as an army. It had a hierarchical structure with a chain of command. It had rules, handbooks, court-marshals, and orders.

But hierarchical structures, as the IRA quickly discovered, are vulnerable to infiltration and betrayal. And so, to protect itself from informants and the confessions of captured members, the IRA, like all modern terror organizations, had to resort to the cellular structure of organization.

The cellular structure is designed to protect the entire organization from penetration. If one cell is destroyed, the whole organization is not compromised.

The individual cell consists of between five and eight members. Fewer than five, personalities become too dominant. When the cell has more than eight members, it tends to split into factions.

Ideally, the leader of a cell recruits his own subagents. They are people he knows and trusts through family or friendship.

The subagents have no knowledge of the existence of other cells or their members. The subagents have no link to rest of the organization except through their cell leader.

Curiously, subagents may be unaware of the true affiliation of organization for which they work. One American, who was a subagent in a cell spying on the United States for the U.S.S.R., actually thought that he was spying on the U.S.A. for Israeli intelligence!

Members of the cell operate on "a need to know basis." If a subagent of a cell has an order to destroy a bridge, for example, he may not know that his action is actually a cover for a bank robbery that will be conducted by other operatives.

In the best cells, subagents never meet. Information is passed within the cell via a courier (called a cut-out) whom cell members never actually see. The courier leaves and collects messages at a prearranged location, a so-called "dead letter box" or "dead drop."

Communications between the leaders of different cells are also indirect. (Every level is protected by cut-outs.) Couriers deliver instructions or materials between dead letter boxes or between members operating under assumed identities.

Tactically, not all cells have the same functions. Some, of course, are operational cells that plan and execute actions.

Other cells conduct intelligence. They spy and gather information on targets.

Still other cells are support groups. They forge documents and keep safe houses. They will know nothing about the identities and activities of the operatives they assist.

Finally, there will be an overt propaganda cell that stays within the law. It writes and distributes literature, disinformation, and propaganda to inspire supporters and paralyze opponents.