Crime Knows No Borders: The Necessity of International Police Cooperation

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the evolution of international police cooperation, examining its origins, challenges, and significance in addressing transnational crime. The study highlights the influence of globalization, technological advancements, and increased international travel on criminal activities, which have necessitated more sophisticated and coordinated policing efforts across borders. The discussion traces the development of police cooperation from the 19th century, where crime was initially viewed through a moral lens, to the present day, where a more scientific and international approach to policing has emerged. The article underscores the complexities of multilateral and bilateral cooperation, each with its advantages and limitations. Multilateral efforts, exemplified by organizations like INTERPOL, promote accountability and transparency but are often hindered by bureaucratic challenges. Conversely, bilateral cooperation offers agility and direct engagement but faces issues of trust and accountability. The study concludes by advocating for the continuous refinement of international policing strategies, emphasizing the importance of tailored approaches to specific operational needs. Through effective collaboration, law enforcement agencies can better combat global crime networks and enhance international security in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Introduction

The contemporary landscape of security threats is characterized by a myriad of challenges with varying motives, contingent upon the economic, social, and political contexts of different regions (Jamieson, 2001; Lemieux, 2010). The growth of free trade zones and the rise of transnational crime and terrorism are factors that have necessitated increased cooperation among various public and private actors at multiple jurisdictional levels (Lemieux, 2018).

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Police cooperation encompasses intentional or unintentional interactions among police entities aimed at sharing criminal intelligence, conducting investigations, and apprehending suspects. International police cooperation, specifically, entails the sharing of criminal intelligence across borders (Lemieux, 2010, p. 1).

In the 19th Century the phenomenon of globalization, stemming from technological developments and economic integration since the 1850s, has transformed the world into an interconnected global village (Baylis, 2023, p. 16). While this has spurred progress in various domains, it has also provided fertile ground for criminal activities (Bergeron, 2013). Market deregulation increased international travel, and advancements in technology have facilitated and enhanced criminal collaboration (UNODC, 2023; Sheptycki, 2002). Finally, the convergence of globalization and technological advancements has engendered both opportunities and challenges in the realm of security (Deflem, 2002b).

Advancements in transportation and communication have empowered criminals to operate with enhanced efficiency, paralleling the capabilities of the general population, (Ristau *et al.*, 1996). Combatting these crimes necessitates cooperation, a challenge often underscored by the difficulty of achieving international consensus (Anderson, 1989, p. 34).

For the purpose of understanding the cooperative crime combat and the evolution of policing, we have to emphasize primarily the importance of protecting life and property as central to public security. This concept, dating back to Patrick Colquhoun's 1796 publication "On the Police of the Metropolis," suggests that an effective police force contributes significantly to the state's security and the protection of individual lives and property. Initially, crime was viewed through a moral lens, with deviant behavior attributed to moral instability.

As criminology developed throughout the 19th century, the study of crime became more specialized and scientific. There emerged a recognition of a "professional criminal class"—individuals who were seen as belonging to the lower strata of society, often influenced by unstable social environments. This period marked the beginning of a shift from experience-based to scientifically informed policing (Becker, 2002).

The professionalization of police forces accompanied this shift, leading to greater reliance on empirical knowledge and international expertise. The need for policing to adapt to changing environments and incorporate scientific knowledge became evident, especially as rapid technological advances, such as in transportation and communication, made combating crime more challenging (Emsley, 2007).

The 19th century also saw the emergence of the concept of "international criminals," who were mobile, professional, and adept at exploiting new technologies. These criminals were difficult to detect as they blended into society and crossed national borders. The international aspect of crime led to early attempts at cross-border police cooperation, although these efforts were initially limited and often complicated by legal and diplomatic barriers (Deflem, 2002).

Despite these challenges, there was a growing recognition of the need for international police collaboration, particularly in dealing with professional criminals who posed significant threats to society. This culminated in the gradual establishment of direct communication channels between police forces across borders, laying the groundwork for modern international police cooperation (Gerspacher, 2008).

In the early 20th century, the idea of "international criminals" became more entrenched, with these criminals being perceived as targeting society's upper and middle classes and reaping substantial profits. By the 1920s, the notion that the elite among professional criminals were "international" was widely accepted. The development of policing practices and techniques during this time became inextricably linked to scientific advances and the collaboration between criminologists and police.

The evolution from a morally driven understanding of crime to a more scientific and international approach to policing, highlights the increasing importance of international cooperation in addressing crime across borders.

Globalization, crime, and international cooperation

The evolution of international police cooperation, starting with Raymond B. Fosdick's 1913 observation that crime is not just a national issue but an international one. After studying European police forces, Fosdick concluded that efforts to prevent crime needed to be transnational, a view that was shared by European police at the time (Fosdick, 1915). However, the term "international crime" during that period had a more localized meaning, referring mainly to transnational or organized crimes rather than the broader, more global understanding of international crime today.

International police cooperation began in the mid-19th century, primarily in response to transnational crime through multilateral initiatives. These early efforts were largely driven by European governments' anti-anarchist policies aimed at maintaining the status quo. Although cooperation diminished during the World Wars, the second half of the 20th century saw a resurgence in international police collaboration as states recognized the importance of multilateral action against transnational crime (Gerspacher, 2008).

The complexity of transnational crime discourse in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was significant, with discussions occurring in Europe as well as in North and South America. Conferences on the subject began in South America in 1905. The complexity of the issue was attributed to several factors: the modernization and expansion of communication networks, the development of international travel, advancements in security systems, the evolution of criminal and political policing, and the emergence of crime as a measurable concept. Additionally, the increasing recognition of international cooperation as a viable problem-solving tool brought police collaboration to the forefront, all of which were connected to the broader concept of globalization during the period from 1870 to 1920 (Jäger, 2019).

Although the concept of "international crime" was discussed during this period, it differed from today's understanding. In the early 20th century, international crime primarily referred to crimes committed across national borders, such as pickpocketing and hotel thefts by criminals traveling between countries. These were considered serious crimes against society, and local authorities often found it difficult to combat them without international assistance. This led to the perception that such crimes had an "international" nature, requiring cooperative efforts.

The idea of international police cooperation was motivated by a shared humanitarian goal to combat widespread crime. However, the effectiveness and acceptance of these cooperative efforts were sometimes questioned.

Towards a multilateral police cooperation

Another significant debate during this period centered around the creation of a specialized international institution for police cooperation. Although there were differing opinions on the nature and authority of such an institution, there was consensus on certain aspects. The proposed institution was intended to be run by police officers and experts, focusing primarily on information exchange and coordination rather than having executive powers. High-ranking police officials were not inclined to delegate executive powers to a distant international body, preferring instead to support the ideal of international cooperation while retaining control over their operations. However, implementing such a structure was not feasible at that time (Deflem, 2002a, p. 26).

The early development of international police cooperation, the challenges and debates surrounding it, and the gradual recognition of the need for transnational efforts to address crime in an increasingly interconnected world (Greener, 2012).

The challenges posed by urbanization, rapid transportation, and globalization in the 19th century highlighted the inadequacy of unilateral state-centered policing in combating crimes that transcend borders (Bowling & Sheptycki, 2018). Consequently, the imperative for cooperation among nations became evident, albeit challenging to achieve (Das & Kratcoski, 1999). Various forms of police cooperation emerged, including information exchange, coordinated surveillance, and joint training programs to address technological advancements and evolving criminal methods (Anderson, 1989).

The concept of creating an international police organization first emerged at the inaugural International Criminal Police Congress held in Monaco in April 1914. Organized at the invitation of Prince Albert I of Monaco, this congress brought together lawyers and police officials from 24 countries to discuss potential collaboration on solving crimes, extraditing criminals, and sharing identification techniques. Although the meeting was successful, the outbreak of World War I delayed the implementation of its outcomes (Anderson, 1989).

The idea of an international police organization was revived by Dr. Johannes Schober, the head of the Vienna Police, who convened the International Criminal Police Congress in Vienna on September 7, 1923. This congress led to the establishment of the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC). Representatives from 20 countries — including Austria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United States, and Yugoslavia — participated in the congress (Fooner, 1989). It is important to note that the 1923 congress was not a continuation of the 1914 Monaco meeting but rather the start of a new initiative (Deflem, 2002a p. 102).

The ICPC's primary goal was to facilitate mutual assistance among police forces across different countries. Several key principles were outlined in the organization's foundational documents, which included direct communication between police forces, operation on arrests and extradition, stablishing common languages for communication, creating offices to combat counterfeiting, check fraud, and passport forgery and developing and sharing fingerprinting techniques and records (Deflem, 2002a, p. 128).

At its inception, the ICPC's headquarters were located in Vienna, Austria, and the organization was funded by the Austrian government. Johannes Schober served as the Chairman of the Executive Committee, while Dr. Oskar Dressler, a lawyer, and the head of

the Austrian Federal Police, was appointed as the organization's secretary (Gerspacher, 2008).

By the 1930s, the ICPC had implemented many practices that continue to be relevant in modern policing. However, in 1938, the organization came under Nazi control, and its headquarters shared a building with the Gestapo, severely limiting its effectiveness until the end of World War II (Deflem, 2002a, p. 202).

In 1946, following the conclusion of World War II, the organization was reactivated as the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO) by officials from Belgium, France, Scandinavia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. The new headquarters was established in Paris, later moving to the suburb of Saint-Cloud from 1967 to 1989, before finally relocating to its current location in (Lyon Calcara, 2020).

International Criminal Police Commission (INTERPOL), marked a pivotal moment in international policing, emphasizing multilateral cooperation based on mutual interests (Bowling & Sheptycki, 2018; Stock, 2023). While historical collaborations among police officers primarily focused on state security, the post-World War II era witnessed an expansion of international criminal activities, necessitating a shift in policing paradigms (Anderson, 1989). Globalization and technological advancements further underscored the inevitability of modern international policing cooperation (Hills, 2009).

Types of International Police Cooperation

Benyon (1996) presents a comprehensive framework for understanding international police cooperation, delineating it into three distinct levels. At the macro level, the focus lies on standardizing and harmonizing national laws and regulations, ensuring consistency and compatibility across borders. This macro-level cooperation aims to establish a cohesive legal framework that facilitates collaboration among law enforcement agencies globally. Moving to the meso level, operational standards, practices, and procedures of police and other enforcement agencies come into focus. Here, the emphasis is on streamlining operational protocols to enable effective coordination and execution of law enforcement activities across jurisdictions. Finally, at the micro level, attention shifts to the investigation of specific offenses and the prevention and control of particular forms of crime. This micro-level cooperation involves targeted efforts aimed at addressing specific criminal activities and enhancing security measures to combat them effectively (Benyon, 1996).

Brodeur (1982) contributes further to this understanding by classifying police cooperation into high and low policing categories. High policing, aligned with the macro level described by Benyon, involves intelligence gathering and strategic planning to combat transnational crime threats. Conversely, low policing corresponds to the micro level, focusing on operational execution and the day-to-day activities of law enforcement personnel (Brodeur, 1982).

The discussion also encompasses two primary types of cooperation: multilateral and bilateral. Multilateral agreements, exemplified by organizations like INTERPOL, facilitate reciprocal cooperation, service provision, and the exchange of information among multiple countries as it has been discussed earlier (Das & Kratcoski, 1999; Gyamfi, 2019). INTERPOL, with its extensive membership base of 195 countries, serves as a prime example of multilateral cooperation, providing a global communication system for police forces and fostering collaboration through secure databases and operational support (Cameron-

Waller, 2008; Barnett & Coleman, 2005). This form of cooperation is characterized by consolidated legal responses that prioritize accountability and transparency (Lemieux, 2010). INTERPOL's foundational principles of neutrality, trust, and operational security have been central to its mission since its establishment in 1923.

Since the 1970s, INTERPOL has concentrated on international terrorism as well by adopting numerous resolutions to improve collaboration in terrorism-related crimes, including hostage-taking. In the 1990s, the organization expanded its focus to address terrorism more thoroughly as an international crime. Following the events of September 11, INTERPOL's headquarters introduced several new counterterrorism tools, including a specialized INTERPOL Terrorism division (Deflem, 2006, 2020)

However, scholars note a reduced focus on counterterrorism due to external preferences for unilateral actions or smaller coalitions and internal challenges like membership growth and leadership issues, leading to decreased emphasis on this area despite the need for global cooperation (Deflem, 2024).

In contrast, bilateral agreements entail formal or informal arrangements between two countries to address shared law enforcement objectives. Originating from collaborations between border police forces, bilateral cooperation relies heavily on trust-based relationships and direct exchanges of information between officers (Anderson, 1989; Block 2011)). While initially challenging due to differences in legal systems and international law standards, bilateral cooperation has evolved with globalization and standardization, fostering greater collaboration between nations (Baylis, 2023, p. 29).

Despite their respective merits, both multilateral and bilateral cooperation face challenges and criticisms. Multilateral cooperation may encounter issues related to information sharing and bureaucracy, leading some countries to prefer bilateral mechanisms for their perceived efficiency and effectiveness (Guille, 2013). Moreover, the effectiveness of multilateral systems may be hindered by disparities in resources, technology, and political stability among member countries (Das & Kratcoski, 1999). Bilateral cooperation, while more agile and direct, is constrained by differences in legislation, procedures, and principles between participating nations (Lemieux, 2010, p. 17). Additionally, political tensions between countries can impede bilateral cooperation, limiting its effectiveness in addressing shared law enforcement objectives (Anderson, 1989, p. 31). Understanding the complexities of international police cooperation requires consideration of multiple levels, ranging from macro legal frameworks to micro-level operational tactics. Both multilateral and bilateral cooperation play crucial roles in addressing transnational crime threats, each offering distinct advantages and facing unique challenges. By navigating these complexities and fostering collaboration at all levels, law enforcement agencies can work together more effectively to combat global crime networks and enhance international security (Benyon, 1996; Brodeur, 1982).

Multilateral cooperation in international policing faces several challenges, as highlighted by Guille (2013). One major concern is the perceived opacity of information exchange, leading some countries to distrust the multilateral mechanism. There is a fear that shared information may be mishandled or lost within bureaucratic structures, hindering its effective utilization. Consequently, some nations opt to withhold critical information, prioritizing national interests and security concerns. Moreover, the macro-level nature of multilateral cooperation introduces significant political and bureaucratic hurdles, resulting in delays in information dissemination to field-level law enforcement officers. This

sluggishness prompts a preference for bilateral cooperation mechanisms, which are deemed faster and more efficient (Guille, 2013).

Lack of uniformity in resource allocation among member countries further complicates multilateral systems. Disparities in resources, funding, and technological capabilities limit the equitable utilization of shared information, undermining the effectiveness of collaborative efforts (Lemieux, 2010). Additionally, the presence of corrupt or politically unstable member states within multilateral frameworks hampers cooperation, as internal issues impede their ability to engage effectively (Das & Kratcoski, 1999). These challenges render multilateral cooperation less effective at the micro-level, where timely and agile responses are crucial. The root of these challenges lies in the bureaucratic nature of multilateral cooperation agreements. Signed at the highest political levels, these treaties often prioritize legal and structural considerations over the operational needs of law enforcement agencies. Policymakers, detached from the realities of policing, establish rules that hinder rather than facilitate effective cooperation (Guille, 2013). Consequently, there exists a significant gap between the macro-level objectives of multilateral cooperation and the micro-level requirements of police forces.

To address these shortcomings, Guille (2013) advocates for greater emphasis on bilateral cooperation, where police officers directly engage with counterparts in other countries. This approach allows for more practical problem-solving, as officers navigate language, cultural, and procedural differences to achieve shared objectives. Bilateral cooperation, historically rooted in informal understandings between neighboring countries, has evolved into formal treaties aimed at addressing specific law enforcement challenges (Anderson, 1989, p. 148). Despite its criticism, bilateral cooperation remains a vital component of international policing, offering a more responsive and adaptable alternative to the bureaucratic constraints of multilateral frameworks.

Bilateral police cooperation operates within the framework of international conventions and agreements, respecting the principle of sovereignty (Lemieux, 2010, p. 8). Its primary functions include the exchange of information, coordination of police operations across borders, and joint observation and information collection through mutual visits. However, significant challenges arise due to differences in legislation, procedures, and principles among participating countries, hindering seamless collaboration (Das & Kratcoski, 1999). Despite these challenges, bilateral cooperation thrives in environments where historical and cultural similarities exist between nations (Deflem, 2002). Police officers, particularly in Europe, cultivate informal contacts through capacity-building activities and shared programs, fostering trust and goodwill. While bilateral cooperation is most prevalent among neighboring countries facing high levels of criminal activity and border traffic, political tensions can impede collaboration, as seen in conflicts like that between the USA and Mexico (Anderson, 1989, p. 153).

Bilateral treaties typically involve two distinct stages: information sharing and active investigation. The former involves direct police involvement, while the latter necessitates the engagement of judicial authorities. Compared to multilateral cooperation, bilateral arrangements tend to address specific cases such as organized crime, illegal drug trafficking, and terrorism, while multilateral efforts focus on broader issues. Despite this distinction, bilateral and multilateral cooperation often intersect, with initiatives originating as bilateral efforts evolving into multilateral endeavors and vice versa (Anderson, 1989, p. 167).

One significant issue in bilateral police cooperation is the challenge of ensuring accountability. Unlike multilateral frameworks, where agreements are often subject to oversight by multiple parties, bilateral arrangements typically involve only two countries. This limited scope can lead to accountability gaps and challenges in ensuring that actions taken under bilateral agreements align with established norms and standards. Addressing the accountability problem in bilateral police cooperation requires a multifaceted approach. This may include establishing clear guidelines and protocols for cooperation, implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability within law enforcement agencies, and promoting dialogue and collaboration between countries to address challenges and resolve disputes effectively. By addressing these issues, bilateral cooperation can become more effective and accountable in addressing shared law enforcement objectives while upholding principles of justice and human rights (Guille, 2013).

Best Practices in Bilateral Cooperation

Bilateral cooperation in international policing takes various forms, each tailored to address specific operational needs and challenges. One example is the European Liaison Unit (ELU), unique to the UK, which coordinates policing services between Kent and mainland Europe, primarily France. Situated within a special branch under the intelligence department, ELU personnel include customs police, immigration border workers, and pension workers, focusing on issues within the Channel Tunnel Area. Centers for Police and Customs Cooperation (CPCC) in border regions facilitate bilateral cooperation between neighboring countries' police and customs officials (Sheptycki, 1998; De Bolle, 2023). These centers promote productive communication, overcoming differences in legislations, and fostering trust through daily interactions. The Schengen Information System, established in 1990, allows European countries to track movements of suspicious individuals, functioning bilaterally within a multilateral framework. Despite compatibility and language challenges, it enhances bilateral cooperation on security matters. Professionally, police worldwide share common fundamentals, facilitating transnational cooperation driven by a shared interest in efficiently completing tasks. While bilateral cooperation is less bureaucratic and faster than multilateral approaches, it faces challenges such as language barriers and reliance on informal contacts, leading to potential disruptions when personnel change (Das & Kratcoski, 1999).

Despite drawbacks such as limited scope and lack of legal basis, bilateral cooperation is preferred due to its effectiveness in addressing specific issues. However, the tension between police and bureaucrats, along with concerns about accountability and transparency, underscores the need for careful consideration and improvement in bilateral cooperation mechanisms.

Conclusion

The contemporary security landscape is marked by a complex array of challenges, influenced by economic, social, and political dynamics across different regions. Transnational criminal activities, ranging from drug trafficking to cybercrimes, underscore the imperative for international police cooperation beyond traditional national security

paradigms. EUROPOL's identification of various organized crime threats in Europe the multifaceted nature of these challenges, exacerbated by interconnectedness of globalized societies. Advancements in transportation and communication have empowered criminals to operate across borders with unprecedented efficiency, necessitating collaboration among law enforcement agencies. While initiatives like INTERPOL exemplify milestones in multilateral police cooperation, bilateral arrangements offer more direct and agile mechanisms for addressing specific law enforcement objectives. The phenomenon of globalization has further heightened security risks, facilitating the proliferation of organized crime through market deregulation, increased international travel, and technological advancements. This globalization of insecurity necessitates innovative policing strategies and ongoing collaboration among nations to effectively combat transnational crime networks. Understanding the various levels of police cooperation, from macro legal frameworks to micro-level operational tactics, is crucial in navigating the complexities of international policing. Both multilateral and bilateral cooperation play essential roles in addressing global security threats, each offering distinct advantages and facing unique challenges. Multilateral cooperation fosters accountability and transparency but may encounter bureaucratic hurdles, while bilateral arrangements offer agility but require careful management of trust and accountability issues.

While INTERPOL was founded in 1923 represents a milestone in multilateral police cooperation, bilateral cooperation, although less bureaucratic, grapples with issues of accountability and trust.

International police cooperation confronts the complexity of aligning diverse legal systems, jurisdictional boundaries, resource allocation, and procedural differences among countries. These challenges include ensuring effective communication, safeguarding data privacy, and navigating political and diplomatic tensions. Advocates for bilateral cooperation argue that such targeted partnerships can streamline processes, foster trust, and develop tailored agreements that address specific jurisdictional and procedural discrepancies, ultimately leading to more efficient and effective collaboration between two nations.

In addressing these challenges, best practices in bilateral cooperation, such as the European Liaison Unit and Centers for Police and Customs Cooperation, demonstrate the importance of tailored approaches to specific operational needs. Despite limitations, bilateral cooperation remains a preferred mechanism for addressing specific issues, emphasizing the need for continuous improvement and refinement in international policing strategies. By fostering collaboration and innovation, law enforcement agencies can effectively combat global crime networks and enhance international security in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Sotirios Kalfoğlu contributed to conceptualization and design as well as the data collection of the article. He prepared the original draft and the final material. Emel Hülya Yükseloğlu contributed to reviewing and editing the manuscript and she supervised the whole activity.

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