

Cyber Bobbies on the Beat: Policing in the Digital Age

BY MISHA GLENNY

The dramatic rise in cybercrime poses major challenges to law enforcement agencies worldwide. As star author Misha Glenny (Mc Mafia) explains, the upcoming Brexit could further aggravate the security situation in Great Britain.



For decades after the Second World War, the Conservative Party was known as the natural 'law and order party'. Successive leaders and prime ministers promised to shovel more public money into policing, build more prisons and stand firm against liberal demands to reform the criminal justice system.

This reputation even survived the exposure of several monumental miscarriages of justice from the wrongful prosecutions in the cases of the Birmingham and Guildford bombings by the IRA to the appalling coverup of the Hillsborough Stadium disaster when 96 Liverpool fans died in April 1989.

In the last eight years, however, austerity measures have broken that relationship between the Tories and the police. Together with the disruptive aspects of Brexit to European security, the cuts to law enforcement budgets across the UK, especially in England and Wales,

have led to mistrust characterizing the relationship between government and the police.

In short, police are finding it hard to cope with the combined challenges of digitalization and aus-

terity and increasingly they are demanding policy changes.

This breakdown between government and police could not have come at a worse time. In the short term, it underlines the growth of mistrust between public and politicians. In the mid-term, it represents one of the greatest challenges of Brexit. But the biggest problem is a long-term issue—how do you police in the age of digital transformation?

For reasons still unclear (although not difficult to guess), most Western governments responded to the banking crisis of 2008 as if it were a fiscal crisis. Essentially this meant that tax payers would pick up

the tab for the speculative orgy of mainstream banks. The United Kingdom was saddled with an especially large problem in the shape of the Royal Bank of Scotland which it *de facto* nationalised for several years.

To pay for this, the government in London embarked on one of the toughest austerity programs in history. The impact has been greatest in two areas: local government (the primary mechanism for providing

public services) and policing. At the moment, the government is suffering significant reputational damage because of the surge in knife crime and associated murder rates, especially in London. On average, the

budgets of England and Wales's 43 regional police forces have been cut by 19% leading to a reduction in police numbers of almost 50,000 officers and workers to a current level of 198,000.

In consequence, police chiefs around the country have been compelled to reduce the services offered to the public. This month, Ian Hopkins, the Chief of Police in Manchester, admitted that his officers

were 'screening out' 60% of reported crimes due to budget constraints. Around the country, the number of criminal investigations closed without identifying a suspect has risen from 1.9 million in 2015 to 2.14 million last year.

So police are now setting their own priorities, sometimes in clear disregard of official government policy. The West Midlands police, for example, have admitted that they routinely ignore small-scale cannabis offences. 'What would you prefer our officers to do?' asked a West Midlands police spokesman rhetorically, 'Help an old lady who has been burgled? Or arrest a teenager for £20 worth of marijuana and then spend the rest of the day processing the offence? Because those are the choices we have to make.'

Behind this, however, lies a still greater challenge. Crime is moving onto the Internet at great speed. According to Britain's latest figures, cyber-related crime now accounts for a

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quarter of victims every year. Fraud accounts for most of those crime but identity theft and child pornography offences are also a significant issue. This does not take into account targeted attacks against business, such as DDOS attacks, the theft of data and copyright violations.

The police cannot cope. Citizens argue vocally for an increase in 'bobbies on the beat.' But what police forces really need is a new breed of officer who is technically literate to the level of a computer engineer. Pete O'Doherty, the head of cybercrime at the City of London, put it bluntly at a security conference last year. 'I have been a detective my whole career and the training I have been given has not equipped me with the skills and techniques that I need,' he said, 'to investigate cybercrimes involving multiple actors in multiple countries.'

Brexit and cyber security

Brexit has made this aspect of life notably more difficult. In the past five years, under a British director, Europol has become a much more useful tool in law enforcement, largely because of the creation of a specialist computer department, EC3. Officers here are now able to exchange information in real time (something hitherto impossible) to combat the increasingly international and technically aware organized crime groups.

If the UK ceases to be a member of the EU, its officers must clear their desks from Europol—it is an EU only operation. Given Chief Superintendent O'Doherty's observation, this is a particularly damaging consequence of Brexit but one which has not featured at all in the debate here in Britain.

The longer-term issue concerns the dearth of computer and cyber security engineers on the job market. As a consequence, competent engineers have no interest in joining the police. Their average salary in the UK private sector is €75,000 while even in the two highest paying forces, the Met and the City of London police, a cyber security specialist can expect to earn between €25–32,000 per annum. No contest.

Beyond fraud, the introduction of cyber into the global criminal economy has had the greatest impact in the illegal drugs market. Huge shifts in the global narcotics economy are provoking rapid and profound societal change that is placing immense stress on Western law enforcement capacity.

First there is the relationship between North America and marijuana. 9 US States and the District of Columbia have already legalized marijuana while it is available for medicinal use in a further 29 States. Were New York to join California in legalizing, as seems quite possible, then over a quarter of the US population will enjoy unfettered access to weed.

But the real game changer came last October when smoke shops opened their doors to customers across all Canada. The official Statistics Canada estimates turnover at over \$8.2 billions but analysts agree the figure was arrived assuming the low price of \$7.15 a gram. Pension funds, banks, venture capital-

ists and entrepreneurs are punching and kicking to secure a place in the starting grid of investment into the new industry.

And with good reason. On sales of over \$2 billions, Colorado, one of the earliest US adopters, collected \$120 millions in tax from marijuana last year, twice as much as it derives from booze. An intense fiscal addiction like that becomes almost impossible to kick. Many other states are eyeing the extra cash enviously.

In the UK, an ever greater number of police chiefs are also now convinced that marijuana legalization is the most sensible path to take. Part of the reason for this is that more marijuana consumed in the UK is home grown and not imported.

This is a paradigm shift. Until now, Western law enforcement agencies engaged in the broader War on Drugs had two priorities: first, prevent the retail distribution of drugs; and second, arrest individual users. What they did not have to do is police the production of illegal narcotics. This usually took place in countries like Afghanistan or Columbia (where the levels of bloodshed associated with the policy were correspondingly much higher).

But with marijuana now easily grown across the Western world and the social harm caused by the drug considered much milder than that of alcohol consumption, many police officers feel it is both counter-productive and a waste of resources to continue to prosecute this.

Dealing the dark

Much more serious than this is the shift of drug distribution away from old networks to the darknet. In the UK, academic papers estimate that between 25–30% of all drugs consumed are now purchased online. You can buy any narcotic you care to imagine on darknet sites (by far the biggest ones are cater for the European markets) but the most popular is not heroin, cocaine or marijuana but mdma (or ecstasy as it is also known). The center of mdma manufacture is North Brabant in the southern Netherlands. Dutch police are fighting a losing battle against this trade which in some towns and cities have led to organized crime groups issuing death threats against mayors, police officers and journalists.

As the private sector steams ahead with technical innovation and digital transformation, the police is deprived of resources and unable to attract the requisite skills to deal with its evolving challenges. Underneath the devastating but short-term political crises like Brexit, social change is unfolding at a dramatic pace. Law enforcement agencies are barely able to map what is happening, let alone create effective measures to combat the new threats. <

Misha Glenn is a speaker, author and journalist. A former Digital Security Journalist of the Year, Glenn is an author and journalist with a rich background in cyber security, geopolitics, criminology and broadcasting. His best-selling non-fiction book *McMafia* has been adapted into a major TV drama series. In January he was a guest at the IWM.

Geopolitical Talks

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February 26

Robert John Sawers Changing Politics and Geopolitics: What does it mean for Europe?

Robert John Sawers is Chairman and Partner of Macro Advisory Partners. Sawers was Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), the UK's Ambassador to the United Nations (2007–2009), Political Director of the Foreign Office (2003–2007), Special Representative in Iraq (2003), Ambassador to Cairo (2001–2003), and Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister Tony Blair (1999–2001). He is a Non-Executive Director of BP, a Visiting Professor at King's College London, a Senior Fellow of the Royal United Services Institute, and a Governor of the Ditchley Foundation.



March 19

Ahmet Davutoğlu Systemic Earthquake: National, Regional and the Global Dimensions

Ahmet Davutoğlu was the Prime Minister of Turkey and leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) from August 2014 to May 2016. He previously served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2014 and as chief advisor to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from 2003 to 2009. He was elected as an AKP Member of Parliament for Konya in the 2011 general election and was re-elected as an MP in both the June and November 2015 general elections.

April 29

Shivshankar Menon The New Asian Geopolitics

Shivshankar Menon served as national security advisor to the Prime Minister of India from January 2010 to May 2014, and previously as Foreign Secretary of India from October 2006 to August 2009. A career diplomat, he has served as Ambassador and High Commissioner of India to Israel (1995–1997), Sri Lanka (1997–2000), China (2000–2003), and Pakistan (2003–2006). Currently he is chairman of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Chinese Studies in New Delhi, and is a Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Washington.



The series will be continued on **June 6** with American policy analyst and government official **Wess Mitchell** as well as **William Joseph Burns**, former career Foreign Service Officer and President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in **September 2019** (further details on: www.iwm.at/events).