

An Analysis of Interpol

As modern states began to develop their current forms and methods of governing, so too did international crime begin to develop and transform from its previous incarnations. A solution to combat this problem emerged in its current form after World War II, known as Interpol. Many people's ideas of Interpol have it as a supranational crime fighting organization, but that is far from the truth. While Interpol may try its best to combat international crime and terrorism, the sovereignty of nations and its own founding charter restrict it from acting out key elements in being the end all organization of international law enforcement. The paper will cover the history and purpose of Interpol, comparisons to other organizations, and flaws seen within the organization and potential solutions.

History of Interpol

The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed a need for an official channel for the police of the different states of Europe to share information and techniques to counter the new methods of transnational crime. A major precursor to modern Interpol was when the International Criminal Police Congress was held in 1914 created many founding tenets that Interpol would later follow, and a second congress held in 1923 created the International Criminal Police Commission with founding members from across Europe, Asia, and North Africa. The United States was conspicuously absent from the organization until 1938.

The ICPC lost much of its international recognition when it fell under the control of Nazi Germany in 1938 and saw numerous SS generals become presidents of the organization. Due to the Nazi influence, many countries chose to leave the organization while the world was dragged

into the Second World War. The organization would then be formed into today's variation in 1946 as the International Criminal Police Organization headquartered in Paris.

Summary of Interpol's Workings

Interpol does not fall under the UN's variety of branches and is independent of any single state's control. The membership of Interpol is open to any states willing to work with the organization with most of the world's countries opting into the organization. The scope of the organization is to help police organizations of different countries cooperate with each other and host databases and evidence that member states can access. Interpol is unable to conduct investigations or police actions themselves, but serve to help "grease the wheels" of cooperation of different state's police organizations. Interpol is run by a general assembly of member countries that elect the acting president and executive committee. A founding tenet of the organization is that they are unable to intervene in issues dealing with political, military, religious, or racial problems. These restrictions leave the jurisdiction of the IO to focus mainly on transnational crime rather than interfering with state's internal affairs.

The average work for Interpol involves greasing the wheels of communication for law enforcement agencies that belong to different countries. The way that this is performed is by setting up translators and databases of information. An example would be if the FBI tracked a criminal to Italy, Interpol would be able to set up communications and possibly provide experts to allow the Italian federal police and FBI to collaborate more effectively. A newer focus of Interpol is combating terrorism, especially due to the international focus found in many terrorist organizations. A way that Interpol combats terrorism is through using their databases in allowing local police forces to have access to a wide amount of information and potential suspects. An

example is Interpol's MIND/FIND program allowing quick access to a database of suspects allowing the arrests of terrorist suspects (Gardeazabal and Sandler).

Similar Organizations

Interpol is far from the only international law enforcement agency. Many other agencies are stricter in scope in what kind of crime they seek to dismantle when compared to Interpol's wide scope. One of the few organizations similar to function to Interpol is the similarly named Europol, which membership is significantly smaller than the world wide Interpol. The following section will help showcase how Interpol is different from regional law enforcement agencies.

Europol is a much younger organization when compared to Interpol, with its origins only going back to a conference in the 1970s. The agency itself was only founded in 1998 and is headquartered at The Hague. Europol's idea at conception was to serve a similar purpose to the FBI for the European Union. Europol answers to the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union.

Europol and Interpol are different in scope, with Interpol being an international organization with loose restrictions on membership and Europol focused on intercountry European crime. Both organizations have large databases and have the ability to help local police forces cooperate, yet Europol have more investigative power in comparison to Interpol in conducting investigations.

Although these organizations have similar goals and names, their methodology is different. It seems that in exchange of being able to do more "Police Work" Europol sacrifices the scope and access to information that Interpol has in building its databases. The efficacy of the

different scopes could be a source of debate. The debate is whether the grand scope of global access to data is worth the sacrifice of having less operational scope and enforcement capabilities in preventing international crime.

Possible Changes to Interpol

While Interpol has done significant work in fighting international crime and terrorism, it is limited in what kind of cases it can tackle. The founding tenets of Interpol prevents the organization from pursuing crimes related to political, religious, and ethnic related issues which limit the types of crimes that Interpol can pursue. A purpose of these tenets is to keep Interpol an apolitical agency in order to have a wider reach in most countries. The problem of these restrictions is that it may prove an issue when the crimes in question are political, such as a situation of a state held hostage by criminal organizations or when a state is a sponsor for terrorism. If the founding restrictions were removed, the tradeoff would be that Interpol may have less access to data for certain crimes, but may become more efficient in combating terrorism and narcoterrorism.

A way that Interpol has seen its services abused in recent years is when countries abuse Interpol's warrant capabilities in the harassment or arrests of political opponents or political criminals under authoritarian regimes. The ability for a state to harass political opponents by placing an arrest or extradition warrant goes against Interpol's founding purpose of being an apolitical law enforcement organization. The article "Weaponizing Interpol," by Edward Lemon, discusses this exact issue where autocratic regimes abuse Interpol's Red Notice arrest warrants to

harass political dissidents. The Red Notices would make it difficult for the targets to cross borders and open lines of credit even when their host country does not view them as criminal or refuses to extradite (Lemon). A possible solution would be to put greater restriction on what type of criminal would qualify as requiring an Interpol warrant and possibly limiting what states could request such services. The solution provided also runs into the issue of Interpol having to remain an apolitical organization and the argument could become heated on where the line is drawn in the type of criminals and criminal activity that Interpol should combat.

Conclusion

Interpol is far from a perfect organization and has its fair share of poor history and prior mistakes. The positives of the organization heavily outweigh the negatives, especially when it comes to its databases and how they have been applied in counter terrorism contexts. The facial recognition and international database helps to keep track of terrorist movements across countries and helps states to apprehend networks that function over state borders.

As time goes on and crime becomes more detached from those countries where they began, the necessity of organizations like Interpol only becomes more apparent. In order for Interpol to continue to combat evolving crime, it must be able to stay above political conflict between states in order to ensure a safer tomorrow.

Works Cited

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