



NEW AND EMERGING FORMS OF CRIME: THREATS THE WORLD MUST RECKON WITH

The speed of technological advancement, increasing globalization, and the exponential growth of global markets have created opportunities for criminal activities, often with a low risk of detection and using new forms of anonymity. Preventing and combating new and emerging crimes is a challenging task.

Crime is continually evolving and adapting. While organized crime, illicit drug trafficking and terrorism have been of major concern for the past two decades, other forms of criminal activity are now coming to the fore, such as cybercrime, sexual exploitation of children, environmental crime and trafficking in cultural property along with piracy, an old form of crime which has re-emerged.

These crimes may not necessarily affect all countries at the same rate or with equal severity. What they have in common, however, is that by the time they are recognized as a transnational threat, they may already be too extensive to tackle.

Factors in the emergence of these crimes include globalization, the proximity of poverty, conflict and weak rule of law to high value markets, and the rapid appearance of new forms of modern technology and global connectivity.

Today, local problems can easily become global. The free movement of people, goods and finance around the world has progressed faster than the abilities of States to keep track and regulate such movements. Criminals have exploited fragmented regulatory regimes and the reduction of trade barriers. In some regions, the high demand for basic medicines combined with struggling health-care systems and national control mechanisms contributes to the significant transnational market for fraudulent medicines.

The proximity of high-value shipping routes to areas of conflict with weak governance has been a major

factor behind the modern-day piracy off the Horn of Africa. The large illicit financial flows foster other kinds of organized crime and contribute to destabilization, with funds diverted to groups engaged in internal armed conflict. Efforts have been successful in curbing the piracy business model in that region, but there has been a recent increase in piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea off West Africa.

Modern vs. traditional

Almost one billion people use the Internet; it allows connections between individuals across a wide geographic area, bringing many socioeconomic benefits. However, that global reach is also being used effectively for criminal activities.

New criminal trends have emerged, with people committing crimes in cyberspace that they would not otherwise commit: the anonymity of the Internet and the possibility of adopting flexible identities can be incentives for criminal behaviour.

Criminals can gain access to large numbers of targets through online services such as banking, shopping and social networking. Global connectivity also means criminals can learn from each other, even if they never meet. Online criminal “social networking” can provide forms of criminal “outreach” and links between criminal groups. A false impression of social acceptability of criminal acts such as child sexual exploitation can be created by online communities.

There are many ways information and communication technologies are driving new and emerging crimes. Consumer financial fraud has become transnational with the now-commonplace use of online payments. Global incitement to violence and terrorism through social media has widened the reach and influence of

previously localized radical and terrorist groups. Illicit drugs and other products can be bought online, paid for with anonymous virtual currencies.

Criminal groups operate in new ways, hiring specialists to perform tasks not covered by their existing knowledge and skills. This trend of a more transient and less structured organization may be how serious crime will be perpetrated in the future.

Use of modern technology in criminal activity is doubtless increasing, but established methods such as bribery and corruption continue to be important in the way these new crimes are carried out, particularly for illicit cross-border trafficking and movement.

Turning the tables: using technology for law enforcement

Technological advances can help investigators too. For example, there is a wealth of information available publicly from social networking sites and chat forums as well as stored on electronic devices such as smartphones, which can be seized during law enforcement operations. This information is often a crucial starting point for criminal investigations.

Prevention

Raising awareness among potential victims is a vital part of preventing these emerging crimes. For example,

the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations World Tourism Organization and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization are warning international travellers to recognize possible trafficking in people, wildlife, cultural artefacts, illicit drugs and counterfeit goods, and urging them to make responsible consumer choices.

Equally important is the need to address the vulnerabilities of people at risk of becoming involved in new forms of crime. In Somalia, for example, prevention initiatives have reached out to youth to dissuade them from becoming involved in piracy, with the support of community leaders, politicians and religious leaders, alongside efforts to develop sustainable alternative livelihoods.

The next generation of emerging crimes

The level of sophistication of emerging crimes challenges well-equipped States, let alone developing countries with limited resources. Globally harmonizing legislation will help to prevent and combat emerging crimes and there may be a need to devise innovative ways of increasing global electronic connectivity for investigative purposes.

Globalization and new technological developments will drive criminal innovation forward. Meeting this challenge will require consistent efforts to prevent and reduce corruption, to provide sustainable livelihoods, and to address poverty and inequality. ■