



## **INTERNATIONAL POLICE COOPERATION: REDUCING GLOBAL CRIME AND HARM**

**Date:** November 14, 2023

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On November 14, 2023, Assistant Commissioner Bruce O'Brien, New Zealand Police, presented *International Police Cooperation: Reducing Global Crime and Harm* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The key points discussed were the advantages and challenges of collaborative international policing, upcoming challenges due to technological advancements, and the significance of advancing through consent, legitimacy, and evidence-based global policing practices.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

The discussion covered the landscape of international policing, focusing on key themes such as operational challenges, current threats from a New Zealand perspective, priorities in global policing, recent successes, and future challenges. The main problem addressed was the evolving nature of global crime, amplified by technological advancements, and the necessity for law enforcement to adapt and combat these emerging challenges. This discussion is crucial as it sheds light on the complexities faced by law enforcement agencies globally, emphasizing the need for collaboration, technological upgrades, and proactive measures to tackle modern criminal activities.

### **BACKGROUND**

Assistant Commissioner O'Brien's presentation focused on four key topics: how international policing operates and the collaboration among partners to reduce global harm; the challenges encountered in international policing; current priorities and threats; and the future of global policing.

Global policing, guided by organizations such as Europol and Interpol, aims to connect law enforcement agencies worldwide, facilitating investigations and setting ethical and legal standards for information sharing to ensure a safer world. Protocols for sharing information exist, but for judicial processes, legal agreements are often required based on crime types and the jurisdiction involved. The approach varies depending on the crime under investigation and how best to navigate legal proceedings in different countries; however, the shared mission is universal: creating a safer global environment by combating various threats such as illicit drugs, firearms, terrorism, child exploitation, and other harmful activities exploited by individuals. Utilizing partnerships within a substantial global network, countries like New Zealand rely on alliances for crucial assistance when direct presence is lacking. Agencies like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) participate in this global collaboration, ensuring mutual aid and cooperation among jurisdictions. As the senior liaison officer, Assistant Commissioner O'Brien acts as the conduit to their agencies, supporting investigations involving New Zealand citizens abroad or those within New Zealand who are involved in offenses or victimization overseas. Enhancing partnerships with agencies and countries requires the cultivation of trust and respect which is fostered through various means such as physical presence, conferences, and developing a deep understanding of different jurisdictions and their geopolitical contexts.

Assistant Commissioner O'Brien outlined the challenges of navigating time zones, diverse legal systems, establishing sustainable partnerships, aligning priorities, and managing the substantial cost of maintaining a global presence in international operations, noting that these complexities arise particularly outside the Five Eyes community, where varying security classifications and operating contexts hinder partnership development. Understanding diverse geographical and geopolitical nuances becomes crucial when overseeing expansive areas, posing difficulties in attaining comprehensive on-the-ground understanding.

From a New Zealand standpoint, current threats encompass a spectrum of challenges including terrorism facilitated by encrypted communication, the prevalence of illicit drugs like methamphetamine causing social harm, organized crime by well-connected gangs, online fraud inflicting substantial financial losses, and emerging risks from AI and digital crime. Additionally, Assistant Commissioner O'Brien noted the amplified global scrutiny of policing post the George Floyd murder in 2020, emphasizing the imperative of re-establishing policing legitimacy.

Assistant Commissioner Bruce O'Brien highlighted two primary international policing priorities: countering terrorism threats and disrupting illicit international trade, including human trafficking, drugs, firearms, and combating digital crime through collaborative efforts. This encompasses both traditional firearms and the emerging challenge of illegal 3D printing of firearms, an area of global focus for combatting and disrupting this illicit practice. Collaboration is also essential in combating digital crime, wherein nations coordinate and mutually support each other.

New Zealand policing has witnessed notable successes in drug seizures and international arrests exemplify the effectiveness of joint efforts—for instance, a recent seizure of harvesters sent from Pakistan constituted a significant interception contributing to law enforcement efforts, and a recent collaboration with Turkish partners resulted in the arrest of approximately 54 individuals, including Australian and New Zealand nationals involved in an international illicit drug network. Additionally, New Zealand plays an active role globally in combating child exploitation, demonstrating proactive international cooperation to address such issues across various regions.

Assistant Commissioner Bruce O'Brien highlighted that policing faces challenges that shift public expectations toward police responsiveness to virtual spaces, and these are underscored by rapid technological advancements that pose a threat to global policing. Legislation and policies must evolve to tackle digital crime effectively. Increasing capacity in digital units is vital, demanding new recruitment approaches. Recognizing policing limitations, he suggested that partnerships with NGOs and tech companies are crucial for preventive measures, and that prevention strategies should take center stage as reliance solely on law enforcement is not enough. However, technological upgrades pose financial burdens, requiring collaborative solutions domestically and internationally to manage costs and acquire necessary tech for cybercrime prevention.

### KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- There are significant operational hurdles, legal complexities, difficulties in aligning priorities, and high costs associated with maintaining a global policing presence.
- New Zealand faces diverse threats including terrorism, illicit drugs, organized crime, online fraud, and the impact of AI and digital crimes, underlining the importance of proactive preventive measures and policing legitimacy.

- Two key priorities emphasized were countering terrorism and disrupting illicit international trade (trafficking drugs, firearms), including the emerging challenge of illegal 3D printing of firearms, alongside a strong focus on continuous improvement in policing practices.
- Future challenges entail grappling with rapid technological advancements, the need for legislative evolution, boosting digital capacity, addressing evolving crime types, adapting to public expectations in virtual spaces, and managing the financial demands of technological upgrades for effective cybercrime prevention.



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