



## **JOINT INTEROPERABILITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC COORDINATION GROUPS**

**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, Liam Price, Director General for International Policing with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), presented *Joint Interoperability and the Importance of Strategic Coordination Groups* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The key message was that as criminality evolves to increasingly encompass cross-border, technologically adept, and highly adaptable strategies, policing organizations must advance and expand their tactics, strategies and training to keep pace with the threat. This involves creating common legal frameworks, emphasizing shared policing values and enhancing information sharing capabilities.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

Joint interoperability allows law enforcement organizations across the country and world to keep up with a continuously evolving threat environment. As criminality accelerates and becomes more integrated across state and national borders, it's imperative that policing cooperation continues to progress. While Canada and its allies have several of these organizations, continually updating our training, information sharing and policing tactics will allow us to better tackle the threat of complex crime. Policing organizations should focus on common approaches, frameworks, and values to create collective strategies to global problems.

### **BACKGROUND**

Joint interoperability in a policing context can look different than it does in the intelligence world, and this further emphasizes the need for strategic coordination between these groups. The RCMP has three major operational functions: contract

and indigenous policing in hundreds of communities; the provision of specialized policing services such as forensics and maintaining the Canadian Police Information Centre on behalf of the Canadian law enforcement community; and upholding the federal policing mandate. RCMP priorities include tackling cybercrime, serious and organized crime, financial crime and national security. Within national security, foreign actor interference and terrorism and violent extremism are top priorities, while within serious and organized crime, the opioid epidemic, firearms trafficking, and criminal use of encryption technology are areas of focus. In terms of cybercrime, the RCMP prioritizes high-end attacks against important infrastructure. Finally, within the umbrella of financial crime, the organization targets professional money launderers and their enablers.

By maintaining an international network of information and intelligence sharing, such as INTERPOL and EUROPOL, and by assisting other police forces with peace operations and capacity-building, the RCMP is part of a robust system that protects the security of Canada and its allied countries. As part of the RCMP's INTERPOL operations, it works with policing and agencies around the world to gain information about the whereabouts of Canada's most-wanted. DG Price noted that one of the priorities in his role is to expand the reach, visibility, and influence of the RCMP's international capabilities, allowing the organization to be current and forward minded. Investments in long-term relationships, strategic coordination groups, and strategic centres enable the organization to better tackle criminality.

When discussing crime on a global scale, we must keep in mind the hybrid nature of violence and criminality within the world; the global, borderless nature of transnational crime and political violence is a major consideration for many law enforcement organizations throughout the world. Citing a speech made by the director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), DG Price noted that transnational threats are coming toward Canadians at an unprecedented speed and scale. Some would say these phenomena are accelerating, synchronizing, and converging in ways that make addressing them all the more challenging.

When discussing these cross-border threats, DG Price stated that it is inaccurate to call them all post-pandemic trends, as many of these trends have been progressing for some time—for example, organized crime groups being poly-commodity, crossing multiple jurisdictions, and using high-end technologies to evade capture have long been the case. Further, the idea that there are zones of risk and instability and that demographics and population movements have been shaping the security landscape were true pre-pandemic.

We are in a timeline where responses to these threats necessitate an integrated and global response, and require police to think across forces, across silos, and across skill sets. This presents a challenge as this is not how many policing organizations are built—the origins of Peelian policing are fundamentally based around the Constable as the unit of action, while community policing is based around individual officers and the communities they serve. This model, although believed by DG Price to be one of the best in the world, is under pressure due to the current threat environment.

DG Price suggested that joint interoperability harkens back to military doctrine, which espouses a common set of tactics, training, and approaches that exist across organizations in allied nations in a way that allows them to work effectively as a single unit in times of crisis. In policing, however, there is no luxury of peacetime and wartime—police are constantly engaging with the communities that they serve. Additionally, unlike the military, which is a national force, there are 240 policing agencies located throughout Canada and many have organically built up their own approaches to complex crime problems in their areas. Complicating matters is the reality that these approaches often manifest themselves in discrete criminal investigations that are, to a certain extent, necessarily built to be self-contained projects in order to survive the rigors of judicial scrutiny. This does not mean that there is not cooperation between police forces; in fact, there is a long history of integration, cooperation, and common training. At a tactical level, police forces across provinces, countries, and the world have been able to act together in a variety of impressive ways. The public order actions in Ottawa to find a peaceful end to the Freedom Convoy is one example of this. At a more sustained level, multi-agency integrated approaches such as Combined Forces Special Enforcement Units (CFSEUs) and Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams (INSETs) have a long history.

Although Canada's policing agencies do evidently have operational and tactical interoperability, the term does not carry the same meaning for policing organizations as it does in the military context. Whereas in a military context, intelligence roles within NATO countries are likely to be quite similar, based on common doctrine and standardization of tactics and training, the same cannot necessarily be said (with exceptions) for intelligence roles within the RCMP let alone across forces. This challenges our collective approaches to global problems. From a tactical and operational sense, the RCMP is an active contributor to deconfliction centers, fusion centers, and dedicated specialized units working all over the world—for over a decade, the organization has been a part of the Joint Narcotics Analysis Centre, which although based in the UK,

focuses on narcotics coming out of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. The Marine Security Operations Centres in Canada, INTERPOL, and the Prince Albert Hub model to community policing are examples of interoperability between organizations.

DG Price suggested a workaround to the complexity of organizational structures, doctrines, and approaches to community safety comes from higher-level interoperability and strategic coordination, and mechanisms such as the Canadian Integrated Response to Organized Crime and the Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada are examples of this. Bodies like these that develop, address, and compare collective strategies are critical and vibrant within Canadian policing. At an international level, DG Price noted the remarkability of the Five Eyes group, which a number of communities of practice have grown from. He also pointed to EUROPOL, which has become a force multiplier for policing across Europe and its partner countries, and the organization has been integral in enabling efforts to disrupt criminality at its highest levels.

There remain several challenges, including legal frameworks, to making international cooperation function smoothly—for example, within Canada it is sometimes difficult to make strategies translate across provincial borders. One of the largest groups addressing this at present on a global scale is the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), which seeks to shape the future of the global policing profession and as the threat landscape continues to evolve. Full disclosure: DG Price currently serves in a volunteer capacity on the Executive Board of the IACP as its International Vice-President. The organization shares a large library of best practices, research and training to help prepare police leaders tackle challenges in the communities they serve from a common foundation.

Synchronizing policing approaches with one another will help organizations respond to a growing list of issues that are no longer solely confined to policing as a response mechanism. Synchronizing current methods with common values and goals, such as sustainable development goals of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, will allow law enforcement organizations to collaborate more effectively and build trust in the communities they serve.

### **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

- The nature of criminality is evolving to increasingly encompass cross-border, technologically adept and highly adaptable strategies.

- Policing organizations must advance and expand their tactics and training to create effective solutions.
- This involves creating common legal frameworks, emphasizing shared values and enhancing information sharing capabilities.



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