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Psychopolitics of International Crime: An Introduction

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Abstract. This paper posits psychological consequences of international organized crime.

In our era of globalization, the concept of international crime is spoken and written about more frequently by (1) descriptive and inferential journalists; (2) academics in areas such as criminal justice, criminology, domestic politics, international studies, and international and national security affairs; (3) executive, legislative, and judicial personnel from civilian and military bureaucracies affecting criminal justice systems through policy, programs, operations, intelligence, research and development, and administration; and (4) alleged and actual criminals. (A difficulty in analysis is that any particular individual may be a member of one or more of the above groupings. In fact, the true expert may be a member of all four.)

What are the most salient features of international crime? Is it participation by nationals from more than one country? Do they have to all be in different countries as they plan and implement the crime? Do the victims or consequences have to be or occur in different countries? How organized must perpetrator or perpetrators be? Is the most important aspect the challenge to various bureaucracies and their representatives--whether "cops" or "robbers"--of having to work through mine fields of different policies, regulations, programs, operating procedures, and priorities? Of coveting or arrogating to themselves the identical turf? Do the "cops" and "robbers" of international crime--perhaps like their domestic relations--need each other to make a living and to construct identities, much like sadists and masochists need each other to feel alive? Does international crime pose some unique or more dangerous threat than domestic crime? And if so, to what?

As to the last question, there are a number of psychological possibilities. (1) With international crime comes the psychological exploitation of recurring international political issues to facilitate crime and hinder countercrime techniques. Issues bearing special vulnerability include (a) sovereignty; (b) extradition treaties; and (c) various political, cultural, and social values--e.g., differential valuing of [1] the behavioral nodes of crime such as developing versus distributing versus consuming illicit psychoactive substances or [2] tough law enforcement techniques versus weighting of individual freedom and the collective welfare.

(2) International crime also can psychologically exploit issues of the moment. For example, burning anti-immigrant fervor in the United States (US) or France can increase the pool of foreign nationals inside and outside these countries willing to behaviorally comply with, identify with, and even internalize the desires of international criminals. Desires of the US Government to trumpet the virtues of the North American Free Trade Agreement can be exploited by traffickers of illegal assets or other international criminals who know they have more political leeway to exploit an agreement that "is not supposed to" be politically wrong. That is, there's a higher tolerance of crime before "the law" attempts to effectively "come down" on them.

(3) International crime also can psychologically exploit politicians who are using an international political issue at least partially to further their own careers or ideologies regardless of the validity of their issue

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position. Illicit weapons traffickers would seemingly support politicians who seek rigid bans on weapons transfers as a means of looking tough on proliferation, crime, and war. In contrast, the lack of bans would be bad for criminal business, especially the black-market mark-ups which bans allow.

(4) Just as political revolutionaries and insurgents can psychologically exploit pockets of socioeconomic poverty, so can so-called "apolitical" international criminals. Governments then find it more difficult to wean their citizens off growing coca in Peru, arms trafficking in Albania, or money laundering in storefronts throughout the world.

(5) International crime often depends on a shifting threshold of what is deemed at least minimally acceptable by those legitimate business representatives and politicians who require financial assets to invest and grow, to run for office and maintain a political organization between elections. In a variant of difference threshold theory in sensation and perception, as the need for money increases, the threshold of what is acceptable behavior often decreases. (This applies analogously to (2) above.)

(6) Even international criminal funds invested in purely legitimate businesses skew the playing field against other legitimate businesses without access to huge, ill-begotten funds. This, in turn, may have significant consequences for perceptions of investment risk and opportunity affecting international profits, stock markets, currency values, and, ultimately, who are the winners and losers in the international quasi-market.

(7) With international crime comes an internationalization of assets against national, regional, and local criminal justice systems. With this often comes corruption of the latter which, in turn, leads to strengthening of the former in a criminally vicious circle. Noncriminals become even less likely to even attempt to use remaining legitimate criminal justice components to fight crime.

(8) Just as there are fears that, with the growth of licit multinational corporations and other global business entities, the power of national governments is decreasing, the same case can be made for illicit businesses. As described in a previous IBPP article ("Political Psychology and Globalization" Vol. 1, No. 13, February 21, 1997), the perception of a government's reduced power may mean an intensification among citizens throughout the world of the political belief that there is little that can be done by their representatives and little of value in attending to them--thereby subverting government authority, hindering representative democracy, and facilitating authoritarian and totalitarian structures, at least in the short term until some new Leviathan of some strange new breed surfaces.

(9) A number of individual psychological tendencies may be reinforced as crime--even local crime--is perceived as somehow bigger than it is, as part of some ever-expanding conspiracy, like some Big Bang theory. These tendencies comprise external locus of control, learned helplessness, paranoid-like or actual paranoid phenomena, difficulties in trust, even denial or destruction of some authentic self-core, and the continual construction of different models of false consciousness through compliance, identification, and internalization phenomena induced from without and above the individual.

(10) Given that most psychological theories of motivation are founded on some vehicle of seeking pleasure, expression of instincts, or utilitarian calculation of costs and benefits, eventually (9) may be considered a transition stage on the way to maximizing each individual's so-called psychopathic tendencies. (There would be the inducement and nourishment of antisocial tendencies related to an Escape from Learning--a more dramatic ascription for learning dysfunction.) What to call a world when

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so-called criminal behaviors are engaged in, supported or tolerated by a clear majority of those who have the ability? And what to call criminal behavior at this point?

Of course, most of the above occurs to some degree within domestic crime. However, with globalization, the very term domestic crime is becoming internationalized or rendered moot or obsolete.

Now there are possible counters to this line of analysis. One might posit that history already has seen globalization in the guise of empires. With the rise and fall of each empire has come the rise and fall of globalization. And there does not seem to have been a congruent waxing and waning of the events described above. A counter to this counter might be that never before has there been such a revolution in information technology. The counter to the counter of this counter might be that each era of globalization has had significant technological revolutions or devolutions.

One might also posit that with every revolution comes counterrevolution, with every action a reaction. That throughout history into the present, there seem to be have been cycles of *apres moi, le deluge*. And relative to international crime, with the psychological threats described above will soon come irresistible, psychological threats to these threats. Unfortunately, both threats and threats to threats can be imbued with evil, be it the freedom to be exploited, to fully exploit others, or the highly rigid meting out of justice for violations of impossible commands in a return of the highly repressed--thanatos more than eros.

Along with the crime-fighting threat of international crime comes the threat to who we are, who we think we are, perhaps whether we are indeed born into sin and whether so-called good works gets us anywhere. The most egregious crime of international crime may be forcing us to confront the criminal in the mirror. (See Ebbe, O.N. I. (1996.) *Comparative and international criminal justice systems: Policing, judiciary, and corrections*. Butterworth-Heinemann (ISBN 0-7506-9688-5); United States House Committee on International Relations. (January 31, 1996.) *Global organized crime: Hearing*. (104th Congress, 2d session.) (ISBN 0-16-052620-5.); Williams, P., & Savona, E.U. (1996.) (Eds.) *The United Nations and transnational organized crime*. Cass (ISBN 0-7146-4283-5). (Keywords: Globalization, International Crime, Organization.)