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Organized Crime - The Dumbing of Discourse

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Abstract

The term 'organized crime' can be used in two very different senses. It can simply mean systematic and illegal activity for power or profit. Today, however, the term is usually used in a second sense, and has become virtually synonymous with gangsters in general or the 'Mafia' or mafia-type organisations, in particular. The implied or stated answer to the problem of organized crime understood in this sense involves increasing the law enforcement power of every individual nation state and, because these organisations are now known to operate globally, increasing the collective power of the internationally community. The threat posed by organized crime in other words must be met by nations committing more resources towards increasing the effectiveness of policing efforts at home and collaborative efforts between nations.

This paper draws attention to the defects in current conceptualisations of organized crime by presenting an outline of American and international efforts to conceptualise and combat the problem. This problem, however, is rarely so structured and never so separate from society and legitimate institutions as the conventional use of the term implies.

Introduction

The term 'organized crime' can be used in two very different senses. It can simply mean systematic and illegal activity for power or profit. Today, however, the term is usually used in a second sense, and has become virtually synonymous with gangsters in general or the 'Mafia' or mafia-type organisations, in particular. It is usually implied or stated by those using the term in this sense that gangster organisations have gained an unacceptable level of power through violence and the ability to corrupt weak, greedy and therefore passive public officials; organized crime in this sense is a threat to rather than part of the rest of society. The implied or stated answer to the problem of organized crime understood in this sense involves increasing the law enforcement power of every individual nation state and, because these organisations are now known to operate globally, increasing the collective power of the internationally community. The threat posed by organized crime in other words must be met by nations committing more resources towards increasing the effectiveness of policing efforts at home and collaborative efforts between nations.

This paper draws attention to the defects in current conceptualisations of organized crime.

Organized Crime as an American Problem

Serious efforts to define and discuss organized crime began in the 1920s and 1930s. The phrase 'organized crime' was used in several different senses but only rarely limited to signify separate associations of gangsters. To most academics and professionals concerned with the subject, organized crime usually referred to certain types of criminal *activity* and was virtually synonymous with racketeering. The word 'racket' was by then well established as meaning an illegal business or fraudulent scheme and, it followed that racketeering was understood to refer to such activities as dealing in stolen property, insurance frauds, fraudulent bankruptcies, securities frauds, credit frauds, forgery, counterfeiting, illegal gambling, trafficking in drugs or liquor, or various forms of extortion. It was also generally understood that criminal networks could and often did include the active involvement of police, politicians, judges, lawyers and ostensibly legitimate businessmen.

All efforts to understand organized crime from the 1920s and early 1930s were constrained by limits to knowledge and understanding shared by most middle class Americans at this time. Systematic and profitable crimes against native Americans and African Americans, and, since the end of early twentieth century 'muckraking' journalism, crimes committed by big business were not thought to be aspects of the problem. Most early efforts to describe and analyse organized crime were also constrained by the class bias of liberal reformers and the widely-held assumption that it was a problem mainly confined to city slums. Despite these limits, many early efforts to analyse or portray organized crime did have the important merit of asking questions about American laws and institutions.

No serious commentator writing about the problem of organized crime before the 1940s suggested that conspirators amongst Italians, Jews or any other group actually controlled or dominated urban crime. To explain immigrant involvement as opposed to domination of racketeering and other types of crime, some academics pointed to the process of assimilation. 'The overwhelming mass' of foreigners according to James Thurlow Adams, were 'law-abiding in their own lands. If they become lawless here it must be largely due to the American atmosphere and conditions' (Tyler, 1967, p. 110).

Most serious commentators saw organized crime as much less static and hierarchical than current orthodox thinking on the problem. In a 1926 article, for example, Professor Raymond Moley suggested that the conception of organized crime as a vast underworld organisation, led by a 'master mind' with workers, lieutenants, captains, was melodramatic nonsense' (Moley, 1926). Frederic Thrasher in *The Gang* (1960, p. 416) made it clear that '... organized crime must not be visualized as a vast edifice of hard and fast structures'. Frank Tannenbaum in *Crime and the Community* (1936, p. 115) noted that 'while crime is organized, it is not unified.' Edwin Sutherland in *The Professional Thief* (1937, p. 209) stated that, organized crime was 'not organized in the journalistic sense, for no dictator or central office directs the work of the members of the profession.'

Sutherland's later work went beyond the class bias of most early criminologists and located the most significant organised criminal activity amongst the respectable and powerful in society. In *White Collar Crime* (1949) Sutherland found that the criminality of the corporations, like that of professional thieves was persistent, extensive, usually unpunished, most often deliberate and, involved the connivance of government officials or legislators. It was, in sum, organized.

Thrasher noted the importance of 'certain specialised persons or groups, who perform certain indispensable functions' for professional criminals. These included doctors, political manipulators, professional or obligated bondsmen, criminal lawyers, and corrupt officials.

Even when he was focusing on the community of career criminals itself, Thrasher emphasised its fluidity.

While there is considerable definite organization, largely of the feudal type, there is no hard and fast structure of a permanent character. The ease of new alliances and alignments is surprising. Certain persons of certain groups may combine for some criminal exploit or business, but shortly they may be bitter enemies and killing each other. One gang may stick closely together for a long period under favourable conditions; yet if cause for real dissension arises, it may readily split into two or more bitter factions, each of which may eventually become a separate gang. Members may desert to the enemy on occasion. Leaders come and go easily; sometimes with more or less violence, but without much disturbance to the usual activities of the gangs. There is always a new crop coming on - of younger fellows from whom

emerge men to fill the shoes of the old 'barons' when they are slain or 'put away...' (Thrasher, 1960, p. 414-5).

Moley, Thrasher and other commentators also followed in the progressive urban reform tradition and emphasised that certain political conditions were essential for successful organized crime. Moley's experience in organising the major Cleveland and Missouri crime surveys had brought him to the conclusion that was similar to progressive era perspectives - machine politics was in effect a form of organized crime.

Other commentators pointed to the active complicity of lawyers in the organisation of crime. 'In every racket is a lawyer,' according to Henry Barrett Chamberlin of the Chicago Crime Commission:

This lawyer has studied in a law school; he is an associate of most of the lawyers of the community; he has a decent appearing home; ... he is a member of his bar association; he is invariably a lawyer who is in politics; he is so strong in all sorts of activities that he can't be disbarred. (Chamberlin, 1931-2, p. 668).

Towards the end of the 1920s more commentators began to see Prohibition and other aspects of America's moral reform programme as exacerbating the problem of organized crime. According to E. W. Burgess in the Illinois Crime Survey of 1929, there was 'no blinking the fact that liquor prohibition has introduced the most difficult problems of law enforcement in the field of organized crime' (Friedman, 1993, p. 340).

Others extended the point to cover other prohibitions such as the anti-gambling, drugs, and prostitution laws. Tannenbaum, for example, argued:

The number of unenforceable laws increased the field of criminal activity and nurtured the criminals who profited by these laws to the point of creating a system definitely outside of the law and beyond the police power... The profit-making aspect made such organization possible, and played an important role in paralyzing law-enforcing agencies through political manipulation and direct corruption. (Tannenbaum, 1936, p. 46).

The connection between unworkable laws and successful organized crime was made explicit by Chamberlin. He wrote in 1931 that:

Organized crime is today a great, unmanageable threatening fact in the lives of our communities. It is not enough to ask whether the machinery of law enforcement is good, we must go further, call in question the wisdom of the laws themselves and discover whether or not some of our experiments are not as menacing in their effect as criminal activities. It may be found that some of the very best intentions of our idealists have supplied the pavement for the hell of organized crime.' (Chamberlin, 1931-2, p. 669)

No expert suggested that prison was the answer to organized crime. Some made it very clear that prison was part of the problem of organized crime. As the sociologist Fred Haynes put it 'Our prisons probably train more criminals than they deter or reform.' (Calder, 1993, p. 69).

The Wickersham Commission

The first federal government attempt to study organized crime was conducted under the auspices of the Wickersham Commission between 1929 and 1931 and a genuine effort was made to come to an objective understanding of the nature and extent of organized crime.

As Dwight Smith has shown in his analysis of the development of an 'official' definition for organized crime, The commission's consultants, Goldthwaite H. Dorr and Sidney Simpson, 'organized their data around categories based on criminal law, not categories based on criminals. *What* was more important than *Who*.' 'Once Dorr and Simpson focused on events not people', Smith continued, 'the logic by which the business man was linked to the gangster was simple. Given that business men and gangsters behaved like each other what was the sense in having two categories that, by definition, were not mutually exclusive?' Researchers, according to Smith, could have used Dorr and Simpson's statements 'as the basis of testable propositions by which a body of theory about organized crime could have been assembled' (Smith, 1991, p.142).

The Wickersham Commission published, in all, 14 reports on US law enforcement, criminal justice and penal systems and these exposed numerous patterns of brutality, corruption and inefficiency. The conclusion was inescapable that as one report put it, something was fundamentally wrong in 'the very heart of ... government and social policy in America' (Friedman, 1993, p. 274).

Dorr and Simpson would have agreed with every other serious commentator during the 1920s and 1930s that American organized crime had developed from distinctively American conditions. They all looked at different aspects of the problem but they shared a sense that organized crime was an unfortunate and avoidable part of the nation's political, economic, social and legal structures rather than a threat to these structures. Politicians, public officials, professionals and other representatives of the 'respectable' classes were clearly part of the problem of organized crime, not passive victims or tools of distinct gangster-dominated entities.

Organized Crime as a Foreign Threat

Unfortunately for Americans, the Wickersham Commission's call for a comprehensive, and scientific nation-wide inquiry into organized crime was ignored, and no intelligent plan for its control was formed. Most of its other recommendations to address the many flaws in American crime control were similarly ignored. In the decades that followed the phrase 'organized crime' acquired a meaning that excluded or at least de-emphasised the part played by representatives of the 'respectable' classes in the problem. Reversing Dorr and Simpson's approach, evidence related to organized crime was organised around categories of criminals rather than around categories of criminal law. *Who* would increasingly become more important than *What*. The body of professional theory about organized crime became locked in an analysis that whitewashed a flawed system and justified endless recommendations for more misdirected effort at local, national and eventually international levels. As we shall see the American approach to organized crime based as it was on a limited understanding of the problem has failed to address many problems associated with systematic criminal activity and has actually succeeded in perpetuating many others.

The perception of organized crime as systematic illegal activity and part of the social, economic and political systems began to be supplanted in the post-Prohibition era by one that involved unobvious shifts of grammar and image. Among other things this new understanding of the problem of organized crime shifted attention away from defects in the system and towards the perception that organized crime was a separate association of gangsters and thereby constituted a threat to the nation's institutions. Journalists gave the illusion of historical and contemporary substance to the newly redefined problem and film-makers provided its imagery. The consensus of opinion that emerged amongst politicians, law enforcement officials and the press changed the perception of organized crime from one that questioned the workability of certain laws and demanded honest and effective local law enforcement to one that demanded much more nationally co-ordinated action to enforce existing laws.

In the Cold War years, the Mafia conspiracy theory gave an ethnic identification to the newly reconceptualised problem at a time when fear of 'un-American' thinking and behaviour was at its peak and new limits were added to the range of permissible discussion. The problem of organized crime now simply boiled down to groups of bad people who corrupted government and business. Understood in such terms, the problem of organized crime had a very simple solution: give the government more power to get the bad guys (Woodiwiss, 1988, pp. 103-163).

According to President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in 1967:

the core of organized crime in the United States consists of 24 groups operating criminal cartels in large cities across the nation. Their membership is exclusively Italian, they are in frequent communication with each other, and their smooth functioning is insured by a national body of overseers.

The Commission's report emphasised that gambling was the greatest source of revenue for organized crime, followed by loan sharking, narcotics, 'and other forms of vice.' But, the report added, 'organized crime is also extensively and deeply involved in legitimate business and in labor unions'

The Commission definition which still serves as a template for more recent attempts reads as follows:

Organized crime is a society that seeks to operate outside the control of the American people and their governments. It involves thousands of criminals, working within structures as complex as those of any large corporation, subject to laws more rigidly enforced than those of

legitimate governments. Its actions are not impulsive but rather the result of intricate conspiracies, carried on over many years and aimed at gaining control over whole fields of activity in order to amass huge profits...

The Commission recommended a complete package of laws to combat the Cosa Nostra's subversion of 'the very decency and integrity that are the most cherished attributes of a free society' (President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, 1967, pp. 187-209).

The phrase organized crime had thus become a common noun by the 1960s signifying a hierarchically organised criminal conspiracy with a meaning far removed from its early use. It now threatened the integrity of local government. It corrupted police officers and lawyers. It infiltrated legitimate business. It subverted the decency and integrity of a free society. Organized crime was now seen as a criminal army far away from earlier perspectives that emphasised the involvement and responsibility of 'respectable' society for the pervasive problem of organized crime activity in the United States.

A definition had finally been found that most important groups in American society could accept. Local politicians and officials found the new understanding of organized crime a convenient way of explaining their failure to check vice-related or industry-related racketeering in their cities. Nationally ambitious politicians found organized crime a useful vehicle to raise their profiles. National agency officials, including J. Edgar Hoover from the 1960s, found it a useful vehicle to raise their budgets and increase their powers. Legal experts and bar association reports used references to organized crime to help explain away the 'few unworthy members' of the bar who were 'of the criminal type' (Ploscowe, 1952, p. 242). And American business could assert its basic integrity by claiming that it was threatened by organized crime. Despite this wholesale evasion of responsibility, 'respectable' society and institutions remained part of the problem of organized crime and laws such as those that tried to prohibit gambling, narcotics and 'other forms of vice' remained as easily exploitable as when they were first enacted.

By the 1980s it was clear that gangsters from every racial and ethnic origin were involved in systematic criminal activity and that making organized crime synonymous with Mafia was no longer viable. In 1983 President Reagan appointed a commission to investigate organized crime - The commission's stated intention was to investigate the power and activities of 'traditional organized crime' and 'emerging organized crime groups.'

After three years' investigation of its identified problem areas of drugs, labor racketeering, money laundering, and gambling, the commission adapted Mafia mythology to a new age. It did so by repeated claims that although the Mafia had once been dominant force in US organized crime, it was now being challenged by several crime 'cartels', 'emerging' amongst Asian, Latin American and other groups. As Gary Potter argues in *Criminal Organizations* (1994), this was an adaptation of the alien conspiracy interpretation rather than an overhaul in official thinking about organized crime. The argument remained the same: forces outside of mainstream American culture threaten otherwise morally sound American institutions. Potter describes the new official consensus as the 'Pluralist' revision of the alien conspiracy interpretation.

Despite the evidence of continuing failure, the commission did not challenge the essential correctness of the law enforcement approach to organized crime control - based, as it was, on long-term investigation, undercover operations, informants, wiretaps and asset forfeiture. It's a strategy best described as a 'rat-trap' strategy - criminal justice becomes like those 1930s experiments where psychologists built labyrinthine traps for rats, to learn whether or how soon they can get out of them (Strolberg, 1940).

Throughout the hearings successes against the Mafia and the need to 'stay in front' of the emerging 'cartels' were emphasised. In sum, the commission concluded that the government's basic approach to the problem was sound but needed a harder line on all fronts: more wiretaps, informants, undercover agents in order to get more convictions which would require more prisons. Witnesses who might have pointed out the deficiencies of this approach were not consulted.

By the 1980s, however, Americans saw organized crime as groups of separate and distinct gangsters rather than organized crime as the more fluid, varied and integrated phenomenon portrayed by the earlier commentators. The commission therefore did not consider corruption within the system or unworkable laws as part of the problem of organized crime and by the 1980s they did not have to - people had been conditioned to ask the wrong questions.

By highlighting the Mafia and other supercriminal organisations, American opinion makers ensured that people's perception of organized crime was as limited as their own. The constant speculation, hyperbole, preaching and mythmaking had served to confuse and distract attention away from failed policies, institutional corruption and much systematic criminal activity that was more damaging and destructive than 'Mafia' crimes.

Organized Crime and the Dumbing of Global Discourse

US influence has helped ensure that most countries have come into step with an international prohibition-based drug control regime built around the framework established by UN conventions, beginning with the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (Bewley-Taylor, 1999).

But the war on drugs, according to the UN's own admission, has failed. According to recent UN estimates, coca cultivation has doubled since 1985, and drug prices generally have fallen (Tran, 1998). And, as several money laundering scandals have shown, the massive profits available from the distribution as well as production of illegal drugs has encouraged the development of significant international criminal associations and networks amongst professionals, such as lawyers and accountants, corrupt officials, career criminals and simple opportunists (Beare, 1996; Truell and Gurwin, 1992).

The violence and corruption that has accompanied the global proliferation of networks involved in the drug trade since the 1961 UN Convention brings to mind Chamberlin's 1931 warning that the intentions of American idealists may have supplied 'the pavement for the hell of organized crime.' By the post-Cold War era, however, American idealists were setting the international agenda and could not countenance conceptualisations of organized crime that implied a critique of American laws and institutions. On the contrary they needed the international community to accept a conceptualisation of organized crime that both excused the failure of national and international efforts against drugs and justified the expansion of these efforts. American politicians, government officials, journalists and academics thus sought ways to reduce the world's complexities to the same type of good versus evil propositions that served so well during the Cold War. The menace of transnational or global organized crime not only helped explain away the failure in the drug war but was as easy-to-communicate as the Cold War policy of containing the world-wide spread of communism.

A Washington DC conference of high level American law enforcement and intelligence community personnel led the way in September 1994 by internationalising America's pluralist revision of the Mafia conspiracy theory. They began to propagate a very simple idea. Because forces outside of mainstream national cultures now threatened national institutions everywhere, American organized crime control techniques should be employed everywhere. These techniques were necessary to combat what the conference title referred to as *Global Organized Crime: The New Empire of Evil*.

According to the executive summary of the conference,

The dimensions of global organized crime present a greater international security challenge than anything Western democracies had to cope with during the cold war. Worldwide alliances are being forged in every criminal field from money laundering and currency counterfeiting to trafficking in drugs and nuclear materials. Global organized crime is the world's fastest growing business, with profits estimated at \$1 trillion.

The keynote speaker at the conference, FBI Director Louis Freeh, stressed that "the ravages of transnational crime" were the greatest long-term threat to the security of the United States' and warned that the very fabric of democratic society was at risk everywhere. He was followed by CIA Director R. James Woolsey, who noted that "the threats from organized crime transcend traditional law enforcement concerns. They affect critical national security interests ... some governments find their authority besieged at home and their foreign policy interests imperilled abroad" (Raine and Cilluffo, 1994). This new global threat of organized crime required a tougher and more collaborative international response, more specifically it required more thorough information sharing between police and intelligence officials in different countries and improved methods of transcending jurisdictional frontiers in pursuing and prosecuting criminals (Naylor, 1995).

Two months after the Washington conference, the United Nations held the World Ministerial Conference on Organized Transnational Crime and provided an international forum for the global pluralist theory of organized crime. The conference was held in Naples and attended by high level governmental representatives from 138 countries. The rhetoric and analysis was essentially the same as that employed by Freeh and Woolsey. According to the UN's press release, participants at the conference recognised the growing threat of organized crime, with its 'highly destabilizing and corrupting influence on fundamental social, economic and political institutions.' This represented a challenge demanding increased and more effective international cooperation. 'The challenge posed by transnational organized crime,' the document continued, 'can only be met if law enforcement authorities are able to display the same ingenuity and innovation, organizational flexibility and cooperation that characterize the criminal organizations themselves' (United Nations, 17 November 1994). Essentially, the same line as articulated by American politicians from the 1950s onwards.

All the speakers including United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, echoed the same themes: the threat posed by organized crime to societies and governmental institutions across the globe and the need for more international cooperation to meet this threat. The seriousness of the perceived threat was emphasised in the language of many of the speeches. For example, Elias Jassan, Secretary of Justice in Argentina, described organized crime as "a new monster... the Anti-State" and Silvio Berlusconi, Prime Minister of Italy, described crime organisations as "armies of evil" who could be defeated "only by international collaboration" (United Nations, 22 November 1994).

US-approved organized crime control strategies were emphasised by most speakers and this deferential consensus was most clearly reflected in another background document for this conference which singled out the 1970 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute as an example of 'dynamic' legislation able to 'adapt itself to ... developments.' The document then elaborated,

... In the United States, the RICO statute is generally considered to be the starting point of a new process of awareness of organized crime by the United States Government and its criminal justice system. Its effectiveness has been demonstrated in the many indictments and convictions of members of organized crime groups that have resulted since the legislation was passed. United Nations Economic and Social Council, 19 September 1994).

Western governments had been clearly moving towards the American organized crime control model even before the conference. To those that were lagging behind President Bill Clinton issued this warning in October 1995:

Nations should work together to bring their banks and financial systems into conformity with the international money laundering standards. We will work to help them do so. And, if they refuse, we will consider appropriate sanctions.

He called for a joint declaration on international crime, including a 'no sanctuary' clause to facilitate extradition, "so that we could say together to organized criminals, terrorists, drug-traffickers and smugglers: You have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide" (*The Guardian*, 23 October, 1995). Clinton was clearly demanding that the global organized crime control model come into line with the American organized crime model as soon as possible.

Problems with the Global Pluralist Theory of Organized Crime

As in the case of the Mafia conspiracy theory and its American pluralist offspring, some evidence does support the global pluralist theory articulated at the Washington and Naples conferences. No one disputes the existence of gangster groups all over the world. Enough serious research has been conducted in the United States and elsewhere to reveal at least some of the ways various Triads, Mafiosi, Camorrista and other groups have survived and adapted to enforcement efforts and more frequent periods of competitive bloodletting. More recent groupings of Colombian and Mexican drug traffickers and outlaw bikers have proved just as likely to use violence and intimidation in the pursuit of business activities that are often in themselves damaging and destructive (Beare, 1996; Guillermprieto, 2000; Paoli, 1998).

There are, however, two main problems with the global pluralist theory of organized crime. The first is that Mafia-type groups only participate in illegal markets, despite countless claims to the contrary, they rarely, if ever, control them. Instead, as most conscientious researchers have noted, fragmentation and competition characterise drug and other illegal markets, not monopolisation (Reuter, 1984; Ruggiero and South, 1995).

Governments, whether individually or jointly, would have few problems combating organized crime if it really was dominated by a relatively small number of supercriminal organisations. They would eliminate the leadership of these organisations and that would be the end of the problem. However, as the Americans have found, orchestrating the downfalls of Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, Tony Salerno, John Gotti and the rest did not see the end of the messy reality of American gangsterism let alone the much more pervasive and multifaceted problem of organized crime.

The second problem with the global pluralist theory is that, like the Mafia conspiracy theory, it uses semantics to camouflage the involvement of respectable institutions in organized criminal activity. Throughout Boutros-Ghali's speech in Naples, for example, the implication was always that respectable institutions were threatened by organized crime. Organized crime, he said, 'poisons the business climate', it 'corrupts political leaders', it 'infiltrates the State apparatus.' Understood in this way, the only response to the organized crime 'forces of darkness' is a harmonised international effort on behalf of 'legitimate society' (United Nations, 22 November, 1994). However, as a great deal of historical and contemporary research shows, government agencies and key institutions, such as corporations, have frequently gained from and sometimes helped to sustain organized crime (Block and Chambliss, 1981; Chambliss, 1978; Gardiner, 1970; McCoy, 1991; Pearce, 1976; Rawlinson, 1998; Ruggiero, 1996).

The history of US organized crime itself demonstrates the inadequacy of global pluralist analysis as doubtless could the history of organized crime in any of the 138 countries represented at the UN conference. Organized criminal *activity* was never a serious threat to established or evolving economic and political power structures in the United States but more often a fluid, variable and open-ended phenomenon that complemented rather than conflicted with those structures. Seen in this light, the wisdom of using the pretext of organized crime control to give extra powers to the officialdom that supports these structures should at least be questioned.

At the Naples conference, every speaker represented a nation with a great deal of dirty linen to conceal. The American concept of organized crime as a threat to legitimate society gave all of them a way of formulating organized crime control policy without examining past and current evidence of government, corporate or professional involvement in systematic criminal activity. And so they were happy to go along with the construction of a giant labyrinthine trap for criminal rats, to learn whether or how soon they can get out of it.

The US 'rat-trap' organized crime control strategy of targeting and immobilising specific criminals or criminal networks has already been successfully exported to many parts of the world and will continue to provide successes for diligent policing and prosecuting agencies. This will certainly ensure sensational arrests and convictions of major international crime figures. The 'rat-trap' strategy will, however, be as inadequate in addressing the problems of international organized crime in the 21st century as it has been in the United States during the 20th century.

When it comes to organized crime control, the United States can claim no legitimacy. The nation-state that has set the organized crime control agenda has a long history of protecting and sometimes encouraging organized criminal activity. This included the frequently criminal

exploitation of African American and other working peoples, the enactment of prohibition laws that fostered corruption and criminal enterprise, the involvement of intelligence agencies in drug trafficking operations, and the construction of a regulatory system for business that, at least until recently, did not consider safety and other corporate violations to be crimes. Until the unlikely event of a change in this situation American organized crime will continue to damage and devastate many lives. Unless other countries and the international community wish to continue down this dangerous road they would do well to develop alternative organized crime control strategies based on resourcing efforts that reduce the damage done by systematic criminal activity. These might, for example, cut down the international traffic in humans for labour or sexual exploitation, or lead towards a less polluted environment and safer workplaces. The international community is, however, unlikely to make any progress towards reducing the destructive impact of organized crime in all its many and varied forms while its understanding of the problem is based on an analytical framework that only serves to justify unworkable laws and whitewash flawed systems.

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