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Governing the Crime- Development Nexus: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This chapter traces the history of global crime governance from the final decades of the 19th Century to today, with particular attention paid to the United Nations and its crime programme after World War II. It highlights how there have been significant changes to the structure and mandate of the UN crime programme over the last seventy-years and how UN agencies have helped shape the international crime policy agenda and its focus on development. The chapter then illustrates how vestiges of prevailing beliefs about development and crime and the global political economy that gave rise to them continue to influence the work of the UN system and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) today. In this regard, our analysis highlights some institutional and structural challenges inherent to containing the ‘dark side of globalization’ together with the ways in which the UN’s efforts to do so privilege the interests and understandings Northern countries. We conclude that these power asymmetries represent an obstacle to the UN’s custodianship of criminological targets that feature in the SDGs, but stop short of suggesting that the governance of the crime-development nexus should be viewed as a coherent, neo-colonial project given the institutional weaknesses within the UN system, the ‘Rise of the South’ and the potential for civil society to contest its priorities and agendas.

Key Words

Global crime governance, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Modernization, Sustainable Development Goals, Development, Political Economy

Introduction

The legacy of the Second World War together with the aspiration to achieve a sustainable peace between nations is reflected in the United Nations’ (UN) mandate, which centres on ‘maintain[ing] international peace and security’, ‘develop[ing] friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination’, ‘achiev[ing] international co-operation in solving international problems...and encourag[ing] respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all’ and ‘be[ing] a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends’ (United Nations, 1945: Article 1).¹ The architects of the UN thus

perceived ‘the creation of conditions of stability and well-being’ as ‘necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations’ with the effect that the UN Charter called for the establishment of a number of ‘specialized agencies’ to promote ‘higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development’ amongst Member States (United Nations, 1945: Article 55). A bureaucratic apparatus in the form of the UN Secretariat was created to function as a global conduit through which Northern expertise relating to various aspects of economic and social development, specifically that of the capitalist variety, could be channelled to what were then referred to as ‘underdeveloped’ nations. To this effect, President Harry Truman used his 1949 Inaugural Address to emphasise the United States’ ‘unflinching support to the United Nations and related agencies’ along with his belief that:

‘For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of these people [whose] economic life is primitive and stagnant [and therefore a] threat both to them and to more prosperous areas’ (Truman, 1949).

Truman’s comments hint at a more cynical interpretation of both the historical origins and the design of the UN system (Murphy, 1994). For starters, they suggest that UN’s role in promoting economic and social development was conceived as an extension of colonial thinking rather than an enlightened rejection of the ‘White Man’s burden’ (Kipling, 1899). In this respect, Western aid and technical assistance were seen as the recipe for stimulating accelerated economic and social development in newly decolonised nations of the Global South. The imperative to alleviate poverty and advance the ‘Modernization project’ (McMichael, 2016) was driven by concerns of Western political and economic elites at the time that such conditions were conducive to communist uprisings around the world. It was against this historical and ideological backdrop then that the UN’s crime programme within the Secretariat was established in 1946.

In this chapter, we argue that although there have been significant changes to the structure and mandate of this programme over the last seventy-years, vestiges of these beliefs and the global political economy that gave rise to them continue to influence the work of the UN system and its contributions to the governance of the crime-development nexus today. This legacy ensures that the work of the UN’s crime programme and that of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) inadvertently privilege the interests and understandings Northern countries above those of the world’s most vulnerable. We conclude that these power asymmetries

represent a significant institutional obstacle to the UN's custodianship of criminological targets that feature in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and one that its guardians must be aware of.

From 'modernization' to 'globalization'

Global crime governance refers to 'the attempt to govern crime not only via national regulations, but the successive establishment of worldwide regulations targeted at the criminalization, prosecution, and punishment of specific activities' (Jakobi, 2013: 3). The origins of the phenomenon have been traced back to the final decades of the 19th Century when the problem of 'international crime' was 'invented' by major European powers of the 'metropole' (Knepper, 2010). This was triggered by a variety of factors including: concerns about the transnational, criminogenic consequences of economic and technological changes, imperial relations with the periphery, anti-Semitism, and 'anarchist outrage'. In response to these concerns, European governments organised and attended various ad hoc international meetings and conferences such as the 1898 Anti-Anarchist Conference but as Deflem (2000: 747) reflects, 'these efforts yielded few practical results'. This is at least partially attributable to the fact that it was primarily the bureaucratic interests of European police organizations that drove this push for greater cooperation rather than the cooperative efforts of their political masters. Reflecting on the global governance literature, another factor that likely impeded international cooperation in this area was the absence of a suitable global intergovernmental organization (IGO) that would provide an infrastructure that would allow governments to build consensus and sustain a consensus about the nature of these problems and means of addressing them.² The implication was that during this period, international efforts to regulate emergent issues or problems relating to crime occurred through disparate nodes that aligned with wider liberal agendas relating to inter-state security, health and human rights (Murphy, 1994).

In the early 20th Century, international crime prevention did feature prominently on the policy agenda of the League of Nations (1919-1938) and as Walters (2001: 209) notes, its social and humanitarian committees provided important institutional forums for collectively governing a range of criminological issues and problems including 'drugs, child exploitation, the unification of criminal laws and penal and penitentiary issues relating to the treatment of prisoners'. The status accorded to crime on the League of Nations' policy agenda can be attributed to the fact that it was one of the few non-contentious issues amongst leading European colonial powers at the time, perhaps because international crime prevention and criminal justice reform were

primarily approached as technical activities of mutual benefit, as opposed to competing ideological projects (Knepper 2011). To this effect, the League of Nations 'had several technical organisations which had to do with aspects of crime' (Knepper 2011: 2) but it must be stressed that the criminological consequences of development was not a significant international concern in this context.

It was only in the late 1940s, following the establishment of the UN, that the international community began to take an interest in the relationship between crime and development. As Walters (2001: 213) notes, this shift from international crime prevention to what became known as 'social defence' ³ reflected the wider ideological aims and agenda of the UN in the post-war context where 'criminological research was an element of reconstruction' in Europe following the Second World War. Accordingly, we can see the first documented reference to a possible link between social development and crime a report for a meeting of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1953 which commissioned an empirical study on 'the prevention of types of criminality resulting from social changes and accompanying economic development in less developed countries' (see United Nations, 1960: 1). The study described the criminogenic consequences of various processes and changes associated with Modernization, including rapid industrialization and urbanization (see Panakal and Khalifa, 1960). It is important to emphasise however that the geographic focus of the study was not the industrialised European nations undergoing reconstruction but rather, the 'less developed' nations of the Global South that had recently gained their independence. Accordingly, the work of the UN's dedicated Social Defence Section throughout the 1950s and 1960s must be understood as a component of the liberal aspiration to use 'knowledge and skill' developed in the capitalist West 'to relieve the suffering of these people' in 'underdeveloped areas' 'through the United Nations and its specialized agencies' (Truman 1949). To this effect, the 1954 UN Yearbook described how '[t]he social defence programme was increasingly directed towards assisting the underdeveloped countries through making available to them the experience of countries more advanced in the prevention of crime and the treatment of offenders' (United Nations, 1954: 262).

This mentality is attributable to the ideological and geopolitical landscape together with the influence of dominant Western theories of socioeconomic development and crime at the time. The prevailing theory of socioeconomic development underpinning this study was the Modernization thesis which postulated that economic and social development in recently decolonized nations would follow the trajectories of their former colonizers in the industrialized West (Rostow, 1960). The concern was that in

the industrialised West, this trajectory of capitalist development was widely understood to generate social instabilities as government policies stimulating industrialization led to rapid urbanization, as people migrated from rural to urban areas in search of work. Prominent American and British criminologists of the era, some of whom served as expert advisors to the Social Defence Section (see Clark, 1994: 19-23), argued that these transformations resulted in social instabilities and anomie that were in-turn conducive to rising levels of urban criminality. Given the broader Cold War context, it was feared that such criminality would foster instability and undermine social cohesion, opening the door for a 'communist takeover' (Blaustein, Pino and Ellison 2018).

Development was a major focus of the UN's crime policy agenda throughout the 1950s and 1960s however it must be stressed that social defence was never a major policy priority for the UN's wider development portfolio. As a consequence, by the late 1960s, the Social Defence Section struggled to access the financial resources it required to establish and develop a global network of expertise (Clifford 1979: 17). Concerns about sustainability thus prompted the UN to broaden the focus of the UN's crime programme during the 1970s and 1980s and accord greater significance to the importance of international cooperation in response to emerging and previously neglected transnational criminal threats and problems (see United Nations 1970: 40). This process coincided with the first signs of globalisation, as transnational corporations were beginning to integrate the developing world into the global economy, thus connecting it to criminal problems that spanned across borders (McMichael 2017). It also contributed to an important shift in terms of how the relationship between crime and development would henceforth be framed within the UN's crime policy agenda. Henceforth, greater emphasis was placed on the importance of understanding and addressing 'the serious threat that criminality presents to the quality of economic and social development and to the wholesomeness of economic and social progress and change' (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1971).

It is important to stress that amidst these transformations, the UN never wholly abandoned the idea that structural changes associated with economic and social development are criminogenic. Rather, it adopted a more nuanced stance regarding the potential for international cooperation to 'foster balanced development, through restructuring of the international economic system, with due emphasis on crime prevention and the proper functioning of criminal justice systems' (United Nations, 1985a: 8). This is evident from the language of the Milan Plan of Action which was

adopted at the Seventh UN Crime Congress in 1985.⁴ Here it was agreed that '[d]evelopment is not criminogenic per se' but rather, 'unbalanced or inadequately planned development contributes to an increase in criminality' (United Nations, 1985b: 3, original emphasis). The implication was that the root of the problem was not development itself, but rather the inequality resulting from inappropriate or poorly implemented development models. Although clearly influenced by Third Worldism and the New International Economic Order (NIEO) movement a decade earlier, this shift of rhetoric was also consistent with theoretical advances during the late 1970s when inequality emerged as a major focus for macro-structural criminological research (e.g. Blau, 1977; Krohn, 1976; Messner, 1982). The 1985 report of the Secretariat echoed the findings of many of these studies in stating, 'increasing poverty and economic deprivation will push growing numbers of people, ordinarily respectful of law and order, into trying to satisfy their basic needs through criminal or deviant behavior' (United Nations, 1985c: 27). This sentiment also reflected the growing realisation of the 'lost decade' by much of the Global South, as the impacts of the 1982 Debt Crisis and subsequent structural adjustment plunged many developing countries, particularly those in Latin America, into deep economic crises which led to political instabilities, frayed their social orders, and contributed to growing poverty, instability and insecurity (Remmer 1991).

A final contextual factor to consider is that these coincided with the gradual and uneven spread of neoliberal ideas and development policies throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Harvey, 2007; McMichael, 2016). The UN's crime programme never used its influence to exclusively promote neoclassical crime control policies, nor does it appear that its expert advisors or Secretariat staff actively sought to promote this global political project. Nevertheless, elements of the UN's framing of the relationship between crime and development was clearly compatible with core neoliberal doxa. For example, a 1980 Secretariat working paper suggested:

'...[a] state of uncertainty about life and property, induced by high rates of criminality or a lack of suitable efforts to control it, will result in considerable direct and indirect costs to the national economy and the society as a whole. It will also encourage an unwillingness to take risks, a rise in interest rates and insurance premiums, and an inflation spiral that will seriously impair the quality of life for citizens.' (United Nations, 1980: 6)

This excerpt implies that the well-being of individuals is inherently linked to the health of the national economy and that the absence of social stability and order constitutes a

risk for prospective international lenders and investors. The point to stress then is that the reorientation of the UN's crime policy agenda was at least indirectly responsive to wider ideological shifts that influenced the global political economy and survival, from an institutional standpoint, necessitated at least some degree of conformity and adaptation. This was especially the case following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and in the context of the global liberal hegemony that this geopolitical shift gave rise to.

'Transnational organized crime' and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention

In the wake of the Cold War, transnational organized crime became the dominant focus of the UN's crime policy agenda. The issues of transnational and organized crime had previously gained some recognition amongst UN crime policy insiders and Member States during the 1980s (United Nations, 1985c) but the end of the Cold War sparked heightened global awareness of the linkages between these problems and their economic causes and consequences. Perceptive of both the threats and opportunities posed by neoliberal globalization as the emergent economic paradigm (McMichael, 2016), the international community adopted an ambivalent understanding of the relationship between crime and development. Economic globalization was understood to create new opportunities for transnational organized crime to flourish and it was believed that the impact of this trend was likely to be greatest in the post-Soviet republics and the Global South. Accordingly, a 1995 working paper prepared by the UN Secretariat asserted '[t]aking advantage of the dominant economic trends of the 1990s - globalization and liberalization - transnational crime is now a major force in world finance, able to alter the destinies of countries at critical stages of their economic and social development' (United Nations, 1995: 1). At the same time, the working paper went on to describe 'the tendency of transnational crime to subvert the benefits of globalization and liberalization, on which industrialized as well as developing countries are pinning their hopes on economic growth' (United Nations, 1995: 1). This suggests that economic globalization was simultaneously recognised as a driver and a casualty of transnational organized crime. As the purported benefits of neoliberal globalisation failed to materialise in many developing countries, its proponents begun focusing on the potential obstacles to their realisation in order to counter a brewing backlash against the whole project. It is against this backdrop that the problem of crime became increasingly 'universalized' within UN policy discourse from the 1990s onwards, creating an additional impetus to develop new normative

instruments to support cooperation and the harmonisation of domestic legislation of crime control practices (Findlay, 1999; see also United Nations, 1995).

During the late 1990s, members of the UN's crime programme actively worked with member states to develop an international legal order to address this problem. These efforts culminated in the adoption of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocols (UNTOC) in 2000 and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2003.⁵ To facilitate these negotiations and ultimately support the implementation of these normative instruments, the UN also decided to establish a new bureaucratic entity within the Secretariat through a merger between the UN Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the Centre for Crime Prevention (CCP). Thus, the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNODCCP) was established in 1997 as 'the centre of the United Nations fight against uncivil society, i.e. those elements which take advantage of the benefits of globalization by trafficking human beings and illegal drugs, laundering money, and engaging with terrorism' (quoting Redo 2012: 153, original emphasis).

From its inception, UNODCCP faced a number of significant challenges. From an organizational standpoint, UNODCCP lacked a coherent identity or sense of purpose given that staff from UNDCP and the CCP had previously worked in separate silos, albeit silos based in the same office in Vienna. More significantly, UNODCCP's mandate and portfolio set it apart from other UN entities who had a clearer role to play in supporting the UN's efforts to promote security, development and human rights. In other words, crime was clearly a security issue but UNODCCP was not instilled with a policing or law enforcement mandate as evident from the fact that it forms part of the Secretariat and therefore reports to the Secretary General, as opposed to the Security Council. At the same time, the organisation's mandate to combat what was widely perceived to represent the dark side of globalization also set it apart from more progressive UN entities with clearer development and human rights oriented mandates. Finally, UNODCCP's isolation was compounded by its location at the UN office in Vienna, which limited its contact with other UN entities, the Secretary General, and the UN General Assembly (UNGA), all of which are based in New York. The consequence was that UNODCCP was established on the fringes of the UN system at the time when the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) were being negotiated and the organization was unsuccessful in its reportedly limited efforts to ensure that elements of its portfolio were formally included in this agenda (see Arlacchi 2000; for a

detailed account of UNODCCP's advocacy in the lead-up to the adoption of the MDGs see Blaustein, Chodor and Pino 2019).

'Developmentalising' the UN's crime policy agenda

While UNODCCP failed to link its work to the MDGs under Arlacchi's leadership, there was a recognition that such a link was necessary, if the organisation's future within the UN system was to be secured. Key was the appointment of Antonio Maria Costa as Executive Director in 2002. Costa, who previously worked at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, was an unorthodox choice, having never worked in the areas of crime or drugs before. However, as an economist, he was well attuned to the developmental consequences of crime, and also had a keen eye for the funding opportunities that would come from a developmental focus (Blaustein, Pino and Chodor 2020). Accordingly, he was determined that UNODCCP would make up for the 'missed opportunity' of the MDGs. One of his first moves was to restructure UNODCCP itself, merging the CCP and UNDCP into a single, more coherent structure, and renaming it the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). This aimed to overcome the persistence of the siloes between UNDCP and CCP, and give the organisation a more cohesive purpose and identity, which became firmly fixed on constructing the case for the crime-development nexus.

As part of this process, Costa became the organisation's chief advocate, delivering speeches, appearing in the media, lobbying member states, and constructing alliances within and outside of the UN with likeminded actors, to build up momentum for action on the issue. In doing so, he identified issues such as 'honest and open markets, absence of corruption [and] human safety' as the 'software' of development, necessary to complement the 'hardware' such as infrastructure, if sustainable development was to be achieved (Costa 2002). This enabled him to frame his arguments as part of a larger discourse regarding the importance of 'rule of law' and 'good governance' for securing the benefits of neoliberal globalisation. These concepts were becoming increasingly central to the thinking of global governance institutions from the late 1990s, as they struggled to come to terms with the disappointing results of neoliberal restructuring in the Global South and the resulting societal backlash against globalisation. Such disappointments, the thinking went, were the result of the failure of many states in the developing world to provide stability, transparency and accountability, not only for their own citizens but also global investors. This failure not only eroded support for democracy from frustrated citizens, but also scared away the

investment necessary to facilitate integration with the global economy (Carothers 1998). Accordingly, promoting 'good governance' and the 'rule of law' was not just a legalistic and technocratic agenda, but rather a 'noble' goal according to one UNODC insider, which positioned the organisation as standing 'for' rather than 'against' something. The desire to frame UNODC's fight against crime and corruption in a positive light was also behind the invocation of Amartya Sen's ideas of human development. As a 2005 report on crime and development in Africa stated, 'freedom from crime and violence are key components of development. Freedom from fear is as important as freedom from want. It is impossible to enjoy one of these rights without the other' (UNODC 2005). This link was especially important as human development became mainstreamed throughout the UN under Kofi Annan's leadership, who sought to differentiate the institution from the narrow definitions of freedom and security promoted by the Bush administration as part of the global war on terror. Linking UNODC to this 'developmentalisation' of the UN sought to secure its position within the UN hierarchy and secure access to donor funds.

Two factors were key to UNODC's success in this process. Firstly, its network of field offices provided impressive amounts of data on criminological problems in the South, which was then interpreted by its research department to illustrate how crime impeded development. A particular milestone was a 2003 UNODC report titled *The Opium Economy in Afghanistan*, which explored the link between the country's opium production and international terrorism and violence. The Report went on to argue that rule of law and the creation of licit economic opportunities was crucial for addressing these issues. This was very well received within the UN system and amongst developmental organisations like the World Bank, and positioned UNODC as a credible actor on the issue. As a result, the organisation produced follow-up reports that explored the relationship between crime and development in other areas of the Global South, including Africa, Latin and Central America and the Caribbean (UNODC 2005, 2007; UNODC and World Bank 2007). These were funded by donors from the Global North, highlighting the second reason for UNODC's success in constructing the crime-development link. Put simply, a narrative linking crime and social instability and the lack of development was appealing to Northern interests concerned with making the world safe for neoliberal globalisation and confronting the brewing backlash against it. A focus on 'rule of law' and 'good governance' fit very well with the broader shift towards the 'post-Washington Consensus' in Northern capitals and the IFIs, seeking to overcome the limitations of the original Washington Consensus model of development which had delivered such disappointing results. To the extent that UNODC could

provide an explanation for such failures, and offer technocratic solutions to them, it found receptive listeners – and more importantly, donors – in the North. In doing so, it continued the historic tendency of the UN to privilege the interests and understandings of the Global North over those of the Global South.

Thus, to an extent, UNODC was pushing at an open door when it came to constructing the crime-development nexus, but nevertheless, it still took considerable skill and activism to embed it in the UN system. The chance to do so came once the negotiations for the replacement for the MDGs began in 2011. By this time, Costa had been succeeded as Executive Director by Yuri Fedotov, as his freelancing and entrepreneurialism began to grate member states and the UN leadership. Fedotov, a career diplomat with strong administrative skills and a strict adherence to diplomatic protocol, was in many ways Costa's polar opposite, and under his leadership the organisation became much more diplomatically safe and lost some of its strategic activism and initiative (Interview, Participant 6). Nevertheless, UNODC's course had been well set by then, and it threw itself into the drafting of what would become the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The negotiations behind the SDGs have been explored elsewhere (see for example: Browne and Weiss 2015; Dodds, Donoghue and Roesch 2017; and also Blaustein, Chodor and Pino 2020), but two factors crucial to the emergence of SDG16 should be noted here. Firstly, thanks in no small part to its advocacy, the crime-development nexus was well recognised within the UN system by this time, meaning that UNODC wasn't the only actor with a stake in ensuring crime was recognised as a development issue. This included not only the UNDP, which foresaw the strategic and funding opportunities in the area, but also numerous other actors within the broader UN bureaucracy, who understood the significance of combating crime to securing development, and campaigned for its inclusion in the 2030 Agenda. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the crime-development nexus aligned with the interests of major donors in the Global North, not only in relation to the backlash against globalisation, but also due to concerns about the efficiency of aid. As austerity cut into aid budgets, major donors were concerned about money lost to corruption at the receiving end, and thus incorporating the fight against corruption into the SDGs was seen as playing an important part in making their funds go further. Such support was crucial to securing SDG16, even in the face of at best lukewarm support and at times resistance from developing countries (Blaustein, Chodor & Pino 2020, 67-68). Once the SDGs were agreed in 2015, the 'developmentalisation' of the UN's crime policy agenda was complete, positioning UNODC as an important actor in the UN's efforts to promote development.

UNODC and the Sustainable Development Goals

Issues relating to crime and the rule of law are now recognised components of the UN's global development agenda and UNODC has implemented various organizational measures to align its work with the Post-2015 Development Agenda. SDG 16 is the organisation's main strategic focus but the Strategic Planning and Interagency Affairs unit (SPIA) has also identified various other targets that align with issues addressed in the Conventions and UNODC's increasingly diverse portfolio of operational activities. Examples include targets addressing modern slavery and human trafficking (SDG 8.7), gender equality (SDG 5.2) and environmental conservation (e.g. SDGs 14.4 and 15.7) (see UNODC, 2016). In principle, the fact that issues relating to crime and to a lesser extent drugs (e.g. SDG 3.5) are embedded throughout the SDGs means that there is scope for UNODC to collaborate closely with other UN agencies. At the same time, the prospect of UNODC playing a key role in supporting the delivery of the SDGs is hampered by a variety of structural and cultural factors within the organization.

UNODC, along with the entire UN system, remains financially dependent on voluntary contributions from Member States that have declining international aid budgets (Murphy, 2006). This is problematic for two reasons. First, it means that UNODC's operational activities will remain primarily responsive to the interests of Northern donors. In most cases, donor interests may broadly align with SDGs given their breadth of scope, but this does not mean that they will reflect the issues that are most pressing to recipient countries in the South (Blaustein, 2015; Ellison and Pino, 2012). Second, the UN's dependency on voluntary contributions means that different UN entities which are meant to be cooperating with each other are also competitors because they are increasingly reliant on the same donors for funding. The adoption of SDG 16 and other associated targets risks exacerbating this competitive dynamic as it affords other UN agencies including UNDP, the International Labour Organization and even UN Women with greater scope to 'securitize' their portfolios in the name of criminal threats or the rule of law. This suggests that the crime-development nexus, much like the 'security-development nexus', is a two-way street. Whilst UNODC may be the UN agency best positioned to support Member State's efforts to address criminal threats or implement justice reforms, other UN agencies like UNDP may be better positioned to access donor money for social and economic initiatives to address the underlying causes of crime. Reflecting on the history of the crime-development nexus, this point is rather ironic because domestic, development-driven approaches to preventing crime had initially been the focus of UNODC's predecessor the Social Defence Section during the 1960s.

Heightened competition may not be a welcomed development for UNODC staff, but it remains to be seen whether this problem will be mitigated or exacerbated by ongoing efforts to reform the UN's development system. Most notably, in May 2018 the General Assembly adopted a resolution separating the Resident Coordinator role from UNDP's resident representative role at the country-level. This is significant because in the past, other UN entities were essentially forced to compete with UNDP for funding that it administered (Murphy, 2006). During this reform process, the UN established various multi-donor trust funds to support SDG-related activities but described these as 'very difficult to work with' because the 'trust funds are managed out of New York' whereas UNODC is based in Vienna (Interview, senior UN crime policy insider).⁶ This suggests that the geographical divide remains an important obstacle for the organization.

Finally, it is worth considering whether the adoption of the SDGs has had a significant impact on UNODC's work or identity. As of 2018, the answer appears to be no. This is not to say that the SDGs are not a priority for UNODC or are undervalued by its staff. Rather, much of what UNODC does is already reflected in the SDGs so the organization's efforts to mainstream the SDGs have focused primarily on reframing how staff communicate the importance of their work as opposed to changing its actual substance. For example, the SDGs are continuously referenced by former Executive Director Yuri Fedotov in his speeches and press releases, while social media provides the organization and staff with a new platform for showcasing their development credentials. At the same time, the organization continues to emphasise its role as both a security and human right actor. This suggests that development does not serve as UNODC's primary identity but one of many identities it can draw upon. It appears then that the UN's crime policy agenda has not been fully 'developmentalised', much like the work of international development actors was never fully 'securitized' (Jespersen, 2016)

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to historicise the role of crime in the global governance system, and its relationship with development. As we have indicated, the history of crime as a 'global' issue in need of international cooperation goes back to the 19th century, and its relationship to development has been part of the global agenda since the 1940s. It is interesting to note that during this time, the relationship between the two phenomena has reversed. Whereas initially, crime was considered an outcome of development – as per social defence – now, it is considered an obstacle to development, particularly as the failures of neoliberal globalisation has sparked a search for

explanations for the continuing economic and social stagnation in the Global South (see Blaustein, Chodor and Pino 2019). Nevertheless, throughout this period, one thing has remained constant, namely the fact that global governance continues to facilitate the imposition of Northern expertise on the South, in order to serve Northern interests. No matter the definition of development, the UN continues to privilege the interests, understandings and perspectives of Northern countries, over those of the most vulnerable in the developing world. As such, it contributes – however inadvertently – to the continuation of the neo-colonial project established by Truman in 1949 (Escobar 1995).

However, there are two very important caveats to such a reading of the situation. Firstly, to say that the UN is part of neo-colonial project vastly overstates its actual capacity when it comes to intervening in the Global South. As we outlined in the final section, UNODC, and the broader developmental arm of the UN system, faces several structural and cultural factors which limit their ability to facilitate the implementation of global agendas, the SDGs included. Whether we consider the reality of limited funds, competition and turf wars between different UN organs, UNODC's continuing marginalisation in Vienna and ambiguity about its identity, the notion of an overbearing actor imposing policy agendas on subordinate developing nations bears little resemblance to a much messier reality.

This also speaks to the broader issue about the crisis of multilateralism, as global governance and cooperation come under severe strain from the competing interests and perspectives of key players, who are increasingly willing to go it alone. This has of course always been an issue for the UN system, but it has only been exacerbated by the populist backlash against 'globalism' and global governance personified in the election of strongman nationalist leaders who wield significant influence in both the Global North and the Global South. In such a climate, the need to accommodate the diverse interests and agendas of member states and build consensus often results in a race to the lowest common denominator. The consequence is that UNODC and other UN actors are often beholden to vague and broad agendas, such as the SDGs, that all stakeholders find agreeable. This does not however amount to a coherent interventionist political project such as that which Truman envisioned in his 1949 Presidential Address.

Secondly, as scholars such as Murphy (1994) have argued, global governance, and the UN system are not only sites of hegemony, but also contestation. The very fact that they involve attempts to construct global consensus around issues such as crime and

development, opens them up to potentially 'counter-hegemonic' forces which may want to challenge and resist such consensus. As we have mentioned, there have been times historically when such opportunities have presented themselves to countries from the Global South, in particular the influence of Third Worldism and the NIEO during the 1960s and 1970s on how the relationship between crime and development was understood. Likewise, in the current context, the shifting global economic geography has seen a growing prominence for 'rising powers' and 'emerging markets' in from the Global South, who are increasingly seeking to increase their profiles in global governance institutions. In relation to crime and development, this has seen a challenge to the dominance of Northern donors and agendas by states like Qatar which hosted the 13th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2015 and has since provided substantial amounts of funding for the UN's 'Education 4 Justice' initiative which aligns with SDG 16. As the economic stagnation in the North continues, it seems likely that certain Southern will continue to seek greater roles and to challenge Western hegemony over how crime is governed. However, a word of caution is in order. While a greater role for states from the Global South is a welcome break from the dominance of Northern interests, the fact remains that in many cases, their elites remain just as committed to stabilising and sustaining neoliberal globalisation as their Northern counterparts, and their policy solutions rarely stray from neoliberal technocracy (see for example: Robinson 2015; Hopewell 2016; Bond & Garcia 2015). As such, the real test of 'counter-hegemony' remains the extent to which the UN can engage not just states in the Global South, but their civil societies, where a plethora of 'non-state' actors, from social movements to NGOs, women's groups, labour unions and so on, may have different priorities and agendas. As we move into the 'implementation' decade of the 2030 Agenda, this question remains an open one.

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Footnotes

1. The historical narrative is based on our reading of more than two-hundred publicly available documents and interviews with seventeen international crime policy insiders, all of whom were actively involved with the UN crime programme between the 1970s and 2019. Parts of this chapter have been previously published in *Criminology & Criminal Justice* (Blaustein, Chodor and Pino 2019) and the *British Journal of Criminology* (Blaustein, Chodor and Pino 2020) and these have been

reproduced with permission from Sage and Oxford University Press. In adapting this material, we have omitted some of the interview data and specific historical details in the interest of brevity. The discussion of this historical account represents an original contribution of the chapter. Further details concerning methodology and historiography are provided in these articles. Ethical approval was secured from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee and the IRB at Texas State University. [↵](#)

2. As Murphy (1994) notes, IGOs including the International Telegraph Union did exist in the 19th century however their focus was limited to regulating specific industries. [↵](#)

3. The term 'social defence' has various criminological connotations but in this context, we refer to 'a doctrine that adhered to the protection of society and which developed with and through a positivist science of criminal behaviour (Ancel, 1965; quoting Walters 2001: 204).' [↵](#)

4. The UN has convened the quinquennial congress on crime prevention and criminal justice since 1955. The event is attended by diplomats and justice officials from around the world who agree upon and adopt a formal statement of the UN's crime policy priorities for the next five years. It is primarily a political event but the congress also plays host to numerous side events which provide a forum for the dissemination of expert knowledge. At recent congresses, the political declaration has been negotiated in advance thereby ensuring that more time is available for high level delegates to attend these side events. [↵](#)

5. UNTOC only went into effect in 2003 and UNCAC in 2005. [↵](#)

6. For details of our methodology and approach to deidentification, see Blaustein, Chodor and Pino 2020. [↵](#)