

The world was a rather different place 40 years ago. The “Cold War” was nowhere near as hot as it is today, and the threats that we learned to live with were in the main physical and, therefore, relatively distant. We were not at risk from cyber attackers, whether state-serving or simply just criminals and things were generally less fragile. Of course, there was the usual suspicion of China, but nothing like the level of concern today. The rough and tumble of east meets west was played out in exotic lands generally on a rather gentlemanly basis. There was recognition that the British Empire was failing, but there was optimism that the Commonwealth would hold good and even a degree of hope in the solidarity of Europe. What was clearly less dependable was the institutionalized, essentially colonial network of “assets” that could be expected to protect the interests of the UK – across the globe, from darkest Africa to the waving palms of the Solomons. While education, particularly in the law, was often a common bond, it lacked the predictability and relevance to address the threats that were starting to be perceived. Among these was growing concern about malevolent economic actors and, especially, those engaged in organized crime. The vast amount of wealth generated by, in particular, trafficking in drugs and the need to find a safe haven for it presented a relatively new set of threats to those who mind other people’s money and especially smaller, more vulnerable economies that one way or another ended up as entrepot havens.

Commonwealth governments urged on by the FCO took these issues seriously, and various initiatives were taken in the late 1970s to refocus the limited resources that existed on what to some degree were sensationalized as the new (or at least recently perceived) criminal empires. Commonwealth law Ministers meeting in 1979, recognizing that ICPO-Interpol and police networks were inadequate tools, established within the diplomatic privilege of the Commonwealth Secretariat a programme to develop and utilize essentially financial intelligence to disrupt criminal enterprises and better protect the integrity of economies. Way before its time, this office moved away from the practical and resource limitations, especially in the developing world, of traditional law enforcement to a *modus operandi*, which would be better recognized (and accepted) today. It needed a new specialized network of people and agencies to develop this intelligence and act upon it. With very limited resources and often encountering prejudice from traditional law enforcement agencies, there was an urgent need to establish a new network that was frankly rather different in character, range, expertise and orientation from what the heritage of Empire had provided. It is from this that the annual Cambridge Symposium on Economic Crime sprang!

One of the few “assets” that the Commonwealth Secretariat had to foster, this new network was a close relationship with the University of Cambridge and in particular Jesus College. The fact that then so many law officers in and beyond the Commonwealth had a common legal education was another important element. The first annual symposium on economic crime, drawing on two informal meetings at Marlborough House and hosted by Jesus College, Cambridge, lasted three days and was attended by nearly 200 mainly officials from 29 countries. Among these were 18 law ministers and over 15 ministers with other but relevant portfolios. The symposium from the start was not a conference, or for that matter a meeting in the Greek sense of symposia an excuse for a drink! While having a general theme, plenary sessions and workshops focused on a number of related and collateral issues. Those leading discussions and providing



analysis were without exception experts in their field with hands-on experience. They did not, in the main, seek to present pre-prepared papers, but address in the context of the themed topical issues. In workshops and in the cloisters specific issues, often involving ongoing cases, were discussed with a level of focused commitment second to none. As the years passed and many returned to the expertise was added the all important elements of personal and professional trust.

The Fortieth Cambridge International Symposium took place at Jesus College from Sunday, 3 September to Sunday, 10 September 2023. In testament to its relevance to those who actually are on the front line, whether of policy or policing, well over 2,500 participants passed through the gates of the college from over 100 countries. In addition to the 30 plenary sessions, most with over 15 speakers, 60 plenary workshops and 30 interactive workshops, there were parallel programmes on cyber-related crime, corruption, environmental crime, development and economic crime and a focused discussion of China's position in regard to international legal co-operation with particular reference to the pursuit of suspect assets. While the ethos and purpose of the symposium have not changed and still the emphasis is on facilitating better and more meaningful co-operation on the basis of mutual understanding and commitment, certain aspects have, as one would expect, graduated to a greater level of sophistication. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the various discussions of the double-edged sword of technology.

While the symposium was conceived within the Commonwealth and, indeed, in the Map Room of the Foreign Office, it has never been limited to the Commonwealth. From the start, it was recognized that there are states either surrounded or dependent on Commonwealth countries, which it would be a nonsense not to include. Indeed, from the start, the USA supported the Commonwealth initiative, designating a senior Assistant Director of the FBI as the appropriate liaison officer. Argentina, particularly after the Falklands War, came very much into the "club" as have countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia. China and Taiwan negotiated a mutual legal assistance agreement during one symposium. European countries such as Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy and Spain have not been slow to join the party. Today, there is no part of the world – including the Middle East that is not represented. Indeed, during the last symposium, a high-level ministerial delegation from Ukraine took advantage of the platform to underline its commitment to really addressing corruption both now and when peace comes – a commitment underlined by NATO.

Proceedings at the symposium have always been discreet, and while the media are encouraged to participate primarily as investigative journalists and expositors of wrongdoing, reporting is kept well within the rules of Chatham House. Given the extraordinary richness of discussion and analysis – formal and informal (particularly by our sumpotes!), it would be potentially misleading to attempt any summary of what transpired, let alone the amazing list of actual and practical achievements of the symposium over the years. Indeed, Sir Ivan Lawrence KC, in his closing address, somewhat generously credited the symposium with much of not only the strategy but practicality of our approaches to combatting serious crime today. On the other hand, there is some merit in providing a permanent record of at least some of the discussions that have fostered further research. It is from this that both the *Journal of Financial Crime* and the *Journal of Money Laundering Control* were conceived and still prosper. Therefore, I make no apology for publishing this brief perspective on what has become a unique and important annual event as an editorial comment in both journals.

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Those readers who would like to explore in more detail the development of the Commonwealth initiative and the role of the symposium might refer to the first chapters of B. Rider (ed), *A Research Agenda for Economic Crime and Development* (2023) Elgar and B. Rider (ed), *A Research Agenda for Organised Crime* (2023) Elgar. For the symposium, please refer to our website: [www.crimesymposium.org/](http://www.crimesymposium.org/).

Editorial

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