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COMBATING CRIME IN ISRAEL

Israel, like many other countries, has experienced a rising crime problem, both in terms of violent street and property crime. Crime statistics are collected and maintained by the police, and they are published in the Israel National Police Annual Report each year.

In recent years, Israel has been grappling with human trafficking cases in which most victims were subjected to forced labour or sexual exploitation. Refugees and economic migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Women who travel willingly to Israel to work in the legal prostitution market are at risk of sexual exploitation or extortion.

Extortion and protection racketeering pose significant challenges to Israel, and are a major source of income for organized crime groups within the country. Notably, while this type of organized crime has an exceptional impact on certain migrant populations and Arab communities, the issue is almost absent in most of the country. These criminal activities are generally prevalent in the northern regions, especially within Arab communities, where various criminal networks engage in territorial disputes and use illegal weapons to exert violence on the local population.

Thus, for example, criminal files were opened by the police, an increase of almost 16 percent over the previous year. The crime rate increased to a level not experienced since 1984. While a violent crime is committed in Israel every thirty-one minutes, the murder rate is very low, especially by American standards (the U.S., with a population 50 times that of Israel, has 250 times as many murders, or a murder rate five times higher). Property offenses account for almost 80 percent of all reported crimes; a property offense is committed in Israel every 2.2 minutes.

To a large extent, the increase in crime is attributed to police-initiated drug trafficking investigations. Although the level of drug abuse in Israel is still much smaller than in the U.S., according to Israel's anti-drugs authority, the country's drug abuse now equals that of France and England.

The drug problem in Israel began after the six-day war of 1967, but heroin did not enter the Israeli drug market until the latter half of 1975.

Israel is grappling with a growing market for synthetic drugs, especially ecstasy. Israeli youth are increasingly turning to new psychoactive substances, and there is concern about the alarming rise of methamphetamine, which is manufactured in Europe and finds a market in Israel. Synthetic cannabis is also making a comeback in recent years. The development and availability of synthetic drugs have been compounded by messaging platforms and home delivery services.

Juvenile Delinquency, Abuse, and Neglect. There are no reliable statistics on the number of juveniles who commit crimes in Israel. However, police officials and others involved with the problem of delinquency in Israel agree that the number of youth committing serious crimes is increasing. While teenage violence is still rather limited.

Still, child abuse is a matter of growing concern for the police. Under the provisions of a recently enacted law making abuse of minors and helpless adults a separate offense, certain professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, police officers, and others) are required to report suspected physical abuse to the police or to a welfare officer. Also, a hot line was established for reporting child abuse. In this regard, Israel has adopted an American public relations technique for stemming child abuse.

Since the passage of the new law, the greater emphasis placed on abuse and neglect has prompted the police to sponsor training programs on the subject and to coordinate meetings and activities with community organizations, and the various governmental agencies that share responsibility for the welfare of children in Israel.

Trade. Israel has a significant illegal arms trafficking market. Weapons sold on the illicit market are often stolen, diverted from legal stockpiles or smuggled into the country. The country's illicit arms market continues to be fuelled by the supply of weapons from both state and non-state actors via neighbouring countries.

In addition, Israel remains a prominent transit country for counterfeit goods and excisable items. Although border closures to contain the spread of COVID-19 may have had an impact on the illicit trade of cigarettes and other excisable goods, there is no direct evidence that this market has decreased. Instead, the tobacco smuggling rate in Israel remains relatively high.

Environment. Israel's involvement in the illicit trade of flora and fauna is relatively small. However, there have been reported

cases of smuggling of the khat plant, which is legal in Israel but banned in Europe. Israel has a negligible market for fauna crimes, and there have only been a few reported cases. There are, however, allegations of involvement in illegal procurement, sale and exploitation of other countries' natural resources.

Cyber Crimes. In recent years, Israel's substantial role in the global cybercrime landscape has become a growing concern. The country is now considered a central hub in the cyber-dependent crime market. The country has experienced a notable surge in cybercrime incidents, especially distributed denial of service attacks, with thousands of attacks launched against Israeli targets each year. These targets comprise government entities and defence companies, as well as social media pages, news publications and academic institutions.

In 2022, reports surfaced that the Israeli police had employed Pegasus spyware to surveil journalists, activists and government officials in multiple countries. This incident sparked global concerns over the ethics of governmental use of spyware, which is heavily exported by Israeli companies, making the country a major hub for commercial spyware.

Financial Crimes. Israel has a sizeable market for financial crime. The rise of online trading platforms has made it easier for criminals to carry out sophisticated fraud schemes and scams. Internet fraud, particularly phishing attacks, poses the biggest financial crime threat in Israel, with nearly half of all financial fraud reports being linked to this type of attack. Organized criminal networks are increasingly using online fraud and scams, such as forex and investment fraud, directed at both Israeli consumers and people abroad. The prevalence of fraud and scams is a significant source of criminal income, with major Israeli organized crime groups and entities connected to terrorism also involved in online scams.

Leadership and governance. In Israel, organized crime is not as high on the agenda as terrorism, which has impeded to an extent anti-organized crime efforts. While the country is politically among the most stable in the region.

Arab citizens of Israel frequently express concerns about the failure of the Israeli police to fight organized crime in their neighbourhoods, as demonstrated by the frequent escalation of violence in Jerusalem and throughout the country. Activists and leaders have accused the government and police of being racist and deliberately neglecting the issue of organized crime because it does not pose a security threat to Israeli Jews. While Israel has anti-

corruption laws in place, political members are widely accused of fraud, bribery and breach of trust.

Notable members. Avergil Organization – Top Moroccan Jewish criminal organization in Israel. It is primarily involved in drug trafficking and illegal gambling. Yaakov Alperon – Leader of the Egyptian-Jewish Alperon crime family until his assassination in a car bomb on November 17, 2008. Ludwig Feinberg – He was an American criminal with ties to the Medellín Cartel and the Russian Mafia until he was arrested. Zeev Rosenstein – Formerly Tel Aviv's crime chief before he was arrested. He was allegedly heavily involved in drug trafficking, primarily ecstasy, and had other criminal activities.

Israel is a party to most relevant conventions and treaties pertaining to organized crime. The country has an agreement with Europol to combat organized crime, including cybercrime and terrorism. Nevertheless, although it has signed, it has yet to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, and concerns have been expressed over Israel's inaction on financial crime. Extradition of Israeli citizens is also complicated and requires extensive litigation.

Although Israel recently seems to be more open to extraditing its citizens to other countries, the country is often used as a haven to avoid prison sentences. The Israeli government has implemented laws to combat human trafficking, but they are inconsistent with international law. Laws are also in place to combat drug and arms trafficking, with new regulations proposed to decriminalize recreational cannabis use.

Criminal justice and security. In Israel, the state attorney is the main body responsible for managing cases related to drug trafficking, human trafficking and other forms of organized crime. Professional judges adjudicate all criminal proceedings in the independent Israeli judicial system.

However, there is an overall lack of confidence in the judicial system among citizens. Israel's prison system has also faced criticism for poor living conditions, inhumane treatment and torture, as well as racial profiling of Palestinian inmates.

While there is no evidence that organized crime has taken over prisons, the Israeli prison system has reported crackdowns on inmates who belong to mafia-style groups that have terrorized other inmates and guards. This comes in light of alleged organized crime-related coordinated attacks on prisons due to the poor living conditions experienced by certain inmates.

Even though Israeli law enforcement is considered one of the world's more effective law enforcement agencies in combatting organized crime, given its specialized units for specific criminal markets such as human trafficking and the drug trade, its efforts have been overshadowed by its involvement in the country's ongoing political conflicts and a consistent and well-documented pattern of human rights violations. In addition, the Israeli police face challenges in combatting online fraud and scams carried out by criminal networks due to difficulties in locating perpetrators and establishing an evidentiary basis for prosecution.

Israel's relationships with neighbouring countries are complex, as the country is not recognized as a state by the majority of countries in the region. However, it has diplomatic relations and peace agreements with Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco. Israel's annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights defied international law and continues to further tensions. Hamas, the Gaza Strip's de facto governing body, and the Palestinian Authority, which controls parts of the West Bank, are also sources of tension within Israel.

Technological advancements, coupled with the ongoing nuclear programme negotiations with the Iranian government, have led Israel to perceive Iran as a direct threat to its national security. Its concerns have grown stronger due to ongoing proxy conflicts between the two countries, emboldened by Iranian-funded groups in Syria and the Gaza Strip. Israel's borders, especially the Lebanese, Jordanian and Egyptian borders, continue to be used by criminal organizations for smuggling illegal arms and drugs.

Список використаних джерел

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