6-2014

Interpol’s fight against cyber crime

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Citation

Singapore Management University. Interpol’s fight against cyber crime. (2014).
Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/pers/96

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Published: 25 Jun 2014.

Interpol needs the co-operation of its 190 member states to keep up with online criminals

As Joint Commissioner of the Delhi Police in India, **Madan Oberoi** was in charge of the Special Cell which was responsible for fighting terrorism and organised crime. His team had been monitoring Dawood Ibrahim, the crime boss who had fled India for Pakistan following allegations of organising the 1993 Bombay bombings. Oberoi’s team were spying on his phone conversations to collect evidence to prosecute him; instead, they discovered leads to something else: the Indian Premier League cricket match-fixing and betting scandal.

“We identified a person by the name of Javed Chutani who was based in Dubai and was in direct talks with Dawood Ibrahim,” Oberoi recalls. “The talks were not direct in terms of match-fixing but there was a fair amount of suspicion based on their conversation. We then looked at the people that this Javed Chutani was in touch with – he was in touch with the big gamblers in India, whom Indians call the satta operators.”

“We then found out that some of these operators had been noticed by the International Cricket Council (ICC) anti-corruption unit. We were lucky that the person manning the ICC anti-corruption unit was my former boss, and he told me these were bad characters. We started listening to their conversations and we found that they were in touch with some players. One player led to another, and then we started hearing the conversations.”

Creative crime-solving

Oberoi, who is currently the Director of Cyber Innovation and Outreach at Interpol, soon had plenty of evidence to work with. However, there was a major problem: gambling is illegal in India. Gamblers who lost money because of the match-fixing cannot be cheated for an illegal activity, and therefore there was no victim; no victim, no case.

“So we look for victims outside of the traditional definition,” Oberoi explains the out-of-the-box thinking in proceeding with the case. “If I’m going to watch a cricket match, I’m going with the expectation of watching a fairly contested match. If I’m paying to watch a match that has been fixed beforehand, I would have been cheated. So we have our first victims – the fans.”

Oberoi adds, “We then received a complaint from the team (on which the match-fixers were on), the Rajistan Royals. Its management said the team had been denied the chance to win the prize money of 100 million rupees (US$1.68 million) because the players were involved in match-fixing. ‘If the three players had played to their full capabilities, we might have won this prize money,’ said team officials. The team became the second victims.”

> *"Hollywood has helped us improve our profile beyond reality. We don't have jet planes. We don't have fancy gadgets and weird guns."*

Commercial sponsors and advertisers also complained that their brands were damaged by association with Rajistan Royals, while broadcasting companies cited diminished viewership following the scandal. As such, victims were found, and the prosecution proceeded with the case.

Developing training to fight cyber crime

In his current job dealing with cyber crime at Interpol, Oberoi sometimes also deals with crimes that are not – specifically when it is so in one country, and not in another. Oberoi cites the case of the February 2012 Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks that infected sites in Colombia, Chile, Spain, and Argentina. Interpol traced the activity to an IP address and therefore a specific country – Oberoi calls it "country X" – but investigations had to stop because DDoS attacks were not recognised as a crime in that country.

"Interpol is not an investigation agency," Oberoi clarifies, "it is a co-ordinating agency. We don't have jurisdiction to carry out investigations." He added, for good measure: "Hollywood has helped us improve our profile beyond reality. We don't have jet planes. We don't have fancy gadgets and weird guns."

What Interpol can do, and is doing, is help its 190 member states develop the best training. With regards to cyber crime specifically, Oberoi described the need for curriculum standardisation of courses to train cyber crime units worldwide.

"We are tying up with academia – Singapore Management University included – and the private sector to help us create a standardised and accredited programme," says Oberoi. "However, cyber criminals are not one but 20 steps ahead of us."

To facilitate closing the gap between law enforcement agencies and cyber criminals, Interpol identifies the problem areas that need researching on, as well as providing access to data pooled from its member states. But despite Interpol's best efforts, individual law enforcement agencies sometimes reserve full support.

"We are encouraging countries to populate and trade this database at their immigration counters," Oberoi says of Interpol's Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database that has been put under the spotlight following the MH370 incident. "A person using stolen or lost travel documents would be highlighted by this database, and we can then prevent misuse of the travel documents.

"Many countries have concerns about what kinds of information may be captured in this database, and what kinds of information may be given away," he adds, voicing a common concern among countries that have limited the effectiveness of the SLTD database. "Many countries are not using the SLTD database. It is sad that people only started realising how important the database is after a tragedy such as the MH370 incident."

Countries are now asking for help in populating the database, providing a silver lining in a tragic event. Oberoi says that is a good thing despite necessitating unfortunate events to change mindsets. The final responsibility, however, lays with the individual law enforcements agencies because "Interpol has no jurisdiction to conduct investigations".

Dr. Madan Oberoi was the speaker at the Singapore Management University IT Security Awareness Talk: Defence Against Digital Dark Arts on May 9, 2014.