



## Full length paper

## The futures of policing: Going beyond the thin blue line

Sohail Inayatullah

Macquarie University, Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, Sydney, Australia

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## ABSTRACT

Is proactive and predictive policing possible? Based on an examination of drivers and emerging issues related to law enforcement, this article explores the alternative futures of policing. Four scenarios are posited: (1) Policing that is unable to adapt but no one cares, (2) Policing value in question, (3) Policing fragmented, and (4) Prevention in Policing. The essay concludes by linking general policing futures with the 'Pearls in Policing' action learning process as one way to move policing from reactive to preventive.

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## 1. Popular culture and the futures of crime and policing

What are the futures of crime and policing? One way to understand the futures of crime and policing is through popular movies. In the 1976 American movie *Logan's Run* living past the age of 30 was in effect a crime. Population and resource consumption were maintained at a steady state through policing. At 30, individuals ended their lives, though they were told they were "ascending". Demography was the primary issue in *Logan's Run*, and remains so in the real world. As we rapidly age [1]—throughout the world though far less in Africa than in OECD countries and China (there are likely to be over 480 million people over 60 by 2050) [2]<sup>1</sup>—criminal activity towards, and by, the ageing will likely increase and new crime categories, unthinkable today, will be created. Along with ageing is the youth quake. As the Age quake moves towards Asia and Africa [3] (in the 60s it impacted upon the USA and Europe, and now it is impacting upon South Asia [4] and the Arab world), we can forecast major political uprisings or dramatic increases in crime as young males, generally those who are unemployed, search for work and purpose. Civil conflict will certainly increase as political authority is challenged [5]. And there is also the possibility of a dramatic demographic dividend, which would allow for the development of a middle class [6]. Demography, after all, is not destiny.

In the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the criminals were replicants—biogenetically engineered individuals who performed tasks humans found distasteful. They were banned from Earth, and if they secretly returned were hunted down and "retired" (permanently deactivated) by "Blade Runners" (specialist police). Crime was associated with the undesirability of co-existing with a new species (one that, ironically, we had created). As the explosion of science and technology continues, new crimes associated with out-of-control robots and vicious digital viruses are likely to increase, becoming far more serious threats than they are today [7,8]. Policing will need to adapt to this new AI-roboticized world. Certainly robots will damage humans and nature. Who will be liable? Corporations who own them, geeks who design their software, or, as robots become learning machines with some degree of intelligence, will they develop some level of "rights" [9]? Will police be called on to track, monitor, arrest, and disable artificial intelligence entities? Or can we imagine even stranger futures? Already there are legal debates on human–robot marriages [10].

E-mail address: [s.inayatullah@qut.edu.au](mailto:s.inayatullah@qut.edu.au).<sup>1</sup> China will move from six workers for every over 60 in 2000 to two in 2030.

While technology will certainly challenge current policing, making the world far more risky, the science and technology revolution also provides new tools to address crime. For example, new forms of lie detection, based not on anxiety but on brain scanning, are likely to enhance the likelihood of apprehending and convicting criminals. In 2008 a woman in India was found guilty of murder on the basis of brain scan evidence [11,12].<sup>2</sup>

The 2002 movie *Minority Report* takes this much further when a number of psychics gain the ability to predict crime. Police appear at a crime scene just *before* the criminal act is actually committed. However, and not surprisingly, mistakes are made. Eventually this programme (except ‘program’ in computers) of policing must be abandoned, but not before considerable harm is done. Increasingly, we can expect varied attempts to intervene *earlier* in the crime cycle. These will likely be in the form of enhanced surveillance technologies: from cameras in the sky (mounted on drone aircraft) to bio-monitoring cameras in the body. Prevention will certainly take on a new meaning. As a first step, prevention oriented policing is focused on data crunching leading to models of areas where crime is likely. This allows for a wiser use of resources. Colleen McCue, a behavioural scientist with GeoEye, a firm that works with US Homeland Security and local law enforcement on predictive analytics, writes that “studying criminal behaviour [is] not that different from examining other types of behaviour like shopping. . . . ‘People are creatures of habit’. ‘When you go shopping you go to a place where they have the things you’re looking for . . . the criminal wants to go where he will be successful also” [14]. The psychic of *Minority Report* is now the artificial intelligence geo-statistician. Overtime, these AI systems will continue to gain in complexity, even becoming adaptive as criminals attempt to predict the strategies of “predictive policing.”

Movies like *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004) focus not on future crime, per se, but on the importance of factoring climate change in to our predictive models, though certainly the reality of Hurricane Katrina demonstrated the critical importance of police leadership in creating security and safety in disaster situations. As climate change continues to disrupt the planet—creating droughts, floods, tidal waves, and typhoons, to begin with—the move towards sustainability will no longer be merely a ‘feel good,’ ‘green’ option; rather, it will become mandatory and need to be policed. Environmental crime—crimes that make an eco-system more vulnerable, at national, corporate and personal levels—will grow. As regulation thickens and expands, police and other branches of law enforcement will be called onto ensure compliance. Unfortunately, given the tendency of policing to be reactive—waiting for legislatures and judiciaries at the nation–state jurisdictional level—law enforcement agencies are unlikely to have the necessary skill sets to proactively and transparently police new arenas (ageing, environment, cyberspace, global, genomics, to name a few). This can lead to the *Judge Dredd* and 2012 future (based on the comic book character and the 1995 and 2012 movie) wherein to deal with changing technologies and a complex environment, police acquire “instant field judiciary powers” [15]. However, legitimacy and public trust can only decline once the separation of powers is breached or technology runs ahead of civil regulation.

## 2. Futures of crime

To further our understanding of policing futures, we need to conceptually understand the futures of crime more effectively. First we need to challenge how we define crime. Postmodernists, such as philosopher Michel Foucault, suggest we consider crime as socially constructed, historically defined, and not as an *a priori* universal [16,17]. Laws are invented. For example, thirty years ago in developed parts of the world, forecasts of water scarcity and water crimes were dismissed. However, today, because of water scarcity, watering lawns in many cities is a punishable act. Will a water mafia develop in the near future? In poorer countries, electricity theft is already common [18]. Policing energy, however, is challenging because corruption ensures that offenders merely pay a “personal fine” to the local police officer or electric company. Energy “thieves” are certainly not yet seen as criminals. In Pakistan, because of energy monopolies, home solar energy systems are unlawful. As energy systems become smaller—through nano-tech and bio-mimicry inspired solar and wind energy systems—and more distributed, how will they continue to be regulated and policed?

Or imagine a future vegetarian society where those who eat meat are sent to prison. What would our prisons look like then? What would be an appropriate sentence for a meat eater? What would early intervention be like? Given the link between our diet choices and climate change, is this really a far off scenario [19]? Leading water scientists are already asserting that “the world’s population may have to switch almost completely to a vegetarian diet over the next 40 years to avoid catastrophic shortages” [20]. “Humans derive about 20% of their protein from animal-based products now, but this may need to drop to just 5% to feed the extra 2 billion people expected to be alive by 2050” [20]. And if the production of meat for human consumption becomes a criminal activity, how will those who skirt around meat prohibition be treated?

If environmental sustainability (how green are you?) is the emerging future, should the police of 2012 move towards carbon neutral police stations, cars? Should prisons become totally green? Should police and correction facilities engage in green audits? Become vegetarian to lead the way and better represent the changing community? And as we continue to globalise, what is the appropriate jurisdiction for these sorts of questions? While there are certainly some geographical distinctions, as we continue to move towards a fully globalised society (capital, technologies, climate and crime do not respect national boundaries!), can we create policies and laws around policing and prisons that are also shared at the planetary level?

<sup>2</sup> While the evidence remains mixed, certainly neuroscience information carries with it the allure of certainty [13].

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