



## THE QUESTION IS: DO WE REALLY WANT TO WIN?

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*by Paolo Cambieri*

### Introduction

In one of my previous articles, I explored the remarkable potential of contemporary technology in enhancing police investigations by using the power of Artificial Intelligence in collaboration with human investigators. I also dedicated some space to drawing parallels with the science fiction film “Minority Report,” directed by Steven Spielberg and inspired by Philip K. Dick’s short story. In this imaginative future world, the occurrence of crimes was nearly eradicated thanks to a specialized police unit capable of

apprehending potential perpetrators before they could carry out any unlawful action. The invaluable assistance of the “Precogs,” individuals endowed with the ability to foresee crimes before they occur, was instrumental in this endeavour. The “Pre-Crime Department” relied on their prophetic visions to apprehend criminals before they could act, with the only challenge being to intercept them in time to prevent the commission of crimes. Starting from that point, I would like to think, imagine, speculate something different, taking my hints from the real world.

### Investigations on organized crime.

One of the most arduous and rewarding challenges for a police officer undoubtedly lies in the pursuit of dismantling a “mafia” organization. Such operations demand a colossal effort from law enforcement agencies and often

require the collaboration of various authorities spanning multiple sectors and even extending across international borders. The intricacies of these endeavours are compounded by the differences in national laws, distinct legal approaches to crimes, and different policing methodologies, all of which can pose formidable challenges and significantly impact the outcome of the investigation. To illustrate the complexity of this issue, consider that what constitutes a clear-cut crime in one country may necessitate a completely different investigative approach to demonstrate allegations of misconduct in another jurisdiction. To facilitate effective coordination and expedite responses to these complex challenges, transnational agencies have been established with the explicit purpose of fostering continuous cooperation among law enforcement entities and ensuring a rapid response to the victims.



We can remember Interpol: *“We connect police around the world – both technically and in person – bridging jurisdictions, time zones and languages. INTERPOL is unique. It is the only organization with the mandate and technical infrastructure to share police information globally. All 196 member countries are connected to each other and to the General Secretariat via a secure communications system called I-24/7. It also allows them to access our databases and services in real-time, from both central and remote locations. We also coordinate networks of police and experts in different crime areas, who come together through working groups and at conferences to share experiences and ideas.”* (www.interpol.int)

Another example of international police cooperation is Europol: *“Europol’s mission is to support its Member States in preventing and combating all forms of serious international and organised crime, cybercrime and terrorism. Europol also works with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. Large-scale criminal and terrorist networks pose a significant threat to the internal security of the EU and to the safety and livelihood of its people.”* (www.europol.europa.eu)

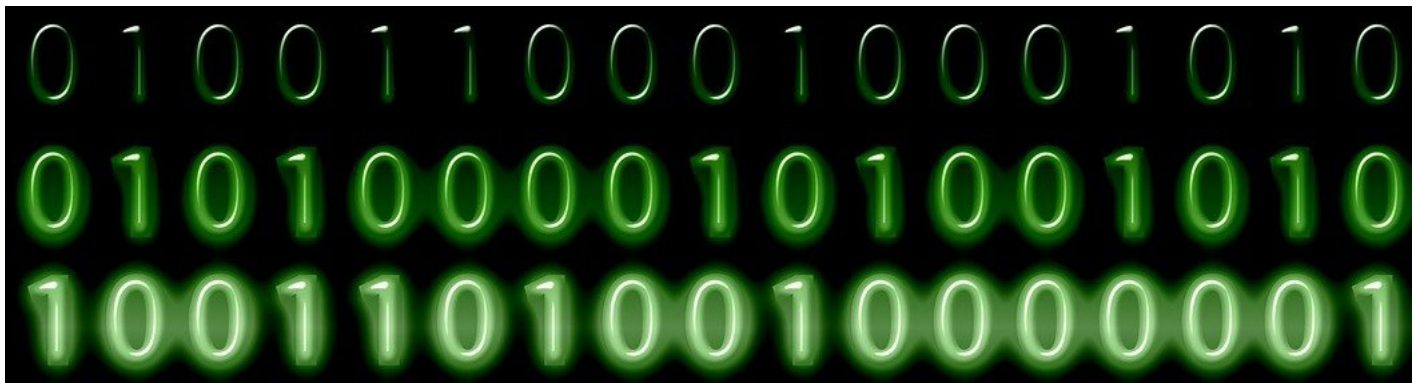
Billions of dollars/euros have been invested to increa-

se coordination and fighting the criminal organizations. Moreover, let’s not forget the dedicated investigative departments in every country, where officers give their lives to a mission: to protect and to serve, we can use this as a worldwide “motto”. Is all this investment providing us a valuable return? Absolutely. Law enforcement agencies deliver lethal hits to criminal organizations on a global scale year after year. It may take considerable time to piece together the intricate web of a transnational criminal organization or gather evidence of their illicit activities, in the end, justice prevails and the forces of good are victorious.

**So, we are winning.**

Not exactly. On a long-term span investigation, it becomes clear that law enforcement can ultimately achieve success. We have the legal framework and the dedicated personnel to dismantle all the most powerful organizations. If it’s so, what doesn’t work? These investigations often span several years, and in some instances, even decades, before reaching their objectives. “Italy’s most-wanted Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro has been arrested in Sicily after 30 years on the run. Messina Denaro was reportedly detained in a private clinic in Sicily’s capital, Palermo,

where he was receiving treatment for cancer. He is alleged to be a boss of the notorious Cosa Nostra Mafia and he was tried and sentenced to life in jail in absentia in 2002 over numerous murders..” (Braking news released by BBC on January 16th, 2023.) Italians applauded the Carabinieri Officers for their remarkable achievement. I feel privileged to know some of the colleagues responsible for the arrest, and they have earned my utmost respect. They effectively beheaded one of the world’s most notorious criminal organizations. However, it has taken three decades. Why such a prolonged duration? Because the fugitive was concealed in familiar territories with a multitude of individuals prepared to offer him all the logistical and financial support required. Probably investigators went close to apprehend him many times, but one minute late can make the difference. At last, we have achieved victory, but the question remains: have we truly won? Have we permanently dismantled the organization? Can we confidently assert that this organization no longer exists? The answer is easy: like all organizations, it will adapt and reconfigure itself to continue its operations. As a company can appoint a new boss if its chief resigns, this organization will find a way to





## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: CYBERSECURITY AND CYBER PEACEKEEPING

persist and carry on its activities. We must modernise investigations to be shorter, faster, and more efficient, disrupting criminal operations effectively. The objective of these investigations should be to make any illegal enterprise an unattractive deal for criminals.

### **AI support to investigations.**

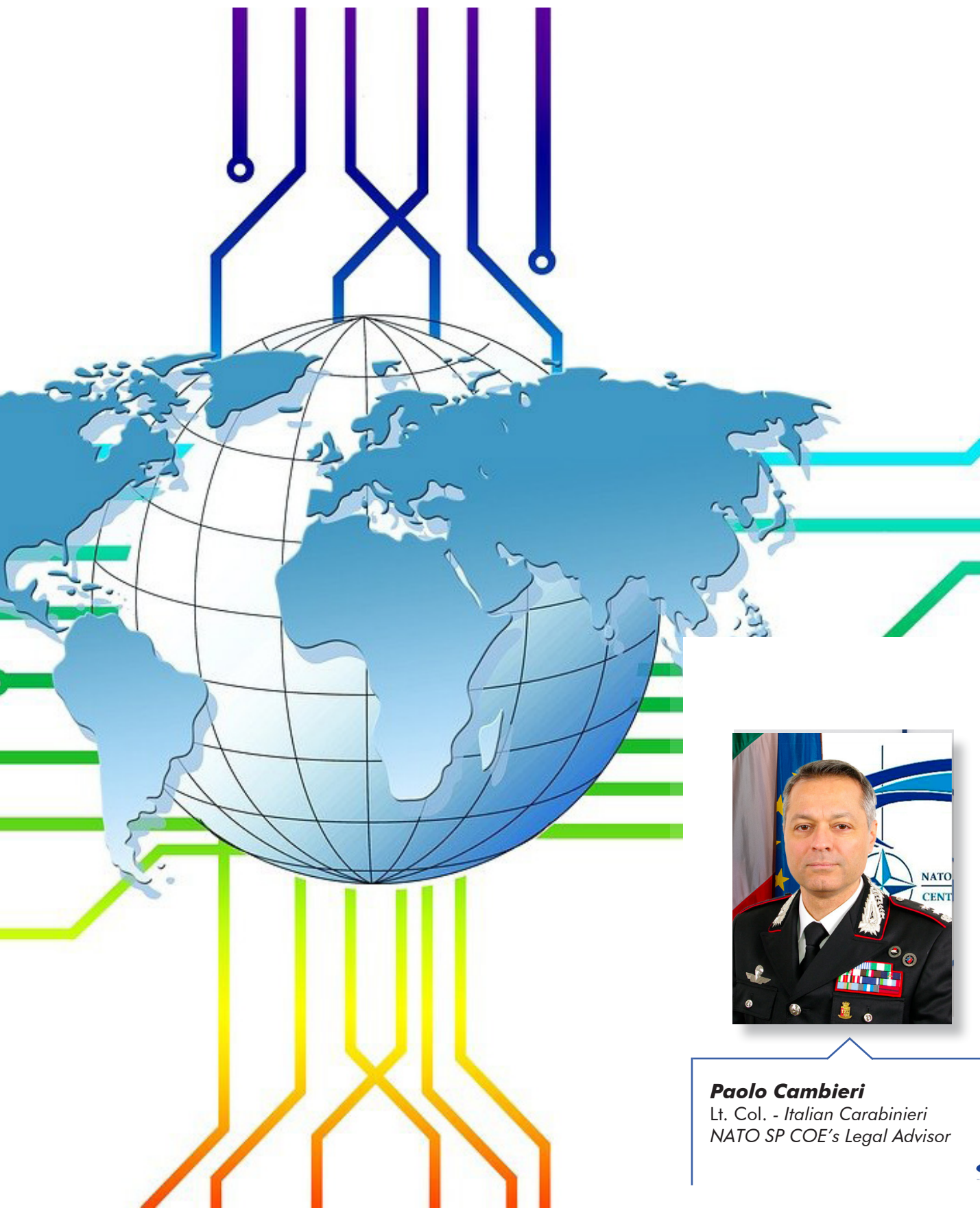
Let's give an example. An investigative team fights with an immense volume of data when tackling a case involving a drug ring. Officers must meticulously analyse emails, chats, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, and conduct examinations of properties, companies, bank transactions, and more. This intricate web of connections between individuals engaged in activities such as bank movements, drug trafficking, and money laundering presents an impressive challenge. It is no simple task to manage this amount of information and establish a comprehensive understanding of the whole organization while gathering evidence of illicit conduct. Criminals are aware of this, and they actively try to complicate the system with the aim of making any attempt to uncover the entire network and trace the laundering of money virtually impossible. Furthermore, in the present day, more than it was in the past, our dependence on witnesses seems out of step in an era of highly advanced technology often referred to as "intelligent.". We should have the capability to gather irrefutable evidence of crimes and hold offenders accountable for their actions without any active involvement of the victims. We should be able to collect evidence of crimes and prosecute criminal for their actions, saving their victims. As we have previously observed,

law enforcement efforts can span many years before they apprehend the leaders of these criminal rings and confiscate drugs. Seizing illicit gains is even more challenging due to the volume of data involved and the complexity to trace money movements across the world and hundreds of companies. This difficulty arises because processing such a vast amount of data can be an overwhelming task for human investigators. Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds immense promise in the field of policing, and probably it is to become an integral part of law enforcement in the future. Unlike humans, AI never rests, requires no food, and doesn't experience fatigue. It has no familial responsibilities nor social commitments. AI can continuously process data, utilizing its analytical capabilities to discern connections between individuals and uncover relationships between criminals and their accomplices. It may excel at tracing the flow of money, revealing intricate networks of connections that expose the true involvement of all parties involved.

### **Conclusions**

This is the right time for winning. Maybe, for the first time in our history, we have the machine able to win the war against criminal organizations. As never before, we are one step from making unattractive any illegal business for criminals, because they can no longer conceal their illicit gains and their intricate networks of connections. I want to conclude this article with one provocative sentence, going back to the title: Do we really want to win?





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