

USING DRONES TO FIGHT CRIME

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Drones are, increasingly, becoming an everyday facet of modern life. They are being used to combat terrorism, they are used as personal entertainment – indeed, one can readily purchase one online or at a store, and they are being used to provide services to individuals – e.g., Amazon's ongoing experimentation with deliveries via drones through their Prime service. Those areas, however, are not exhaustive. Both within the United States and abroad, drones are increasingly being used by law enforcement to more efficiently and effectively discharge their duties.

In most cases, criminals are less likely to offend against areas that are well-known to be surveilled or patrolled regular. That said, accomplishing such a goal – i.e., disincentivizing criminals from offending against a certain area – is difficult to accomplish with on the ground patrolling because of manpower costs. Some places – notably London – have worked around such limitations through the extensive use of closed circuit televisions (CCTV). There is, however, an extensive cost investment required to install and maintain a CCTV infrastructure such as London's. The alternative, however, is not just to resort to patrolling (or not patrolling). Drones, in many cases, can be an efficient alternative to both manual patrolling and building a CCTV infrastructure.

A powerful example of such a use of drones is in Ensenada in Baja California, Mexico. During the initial four months of using a surveillance drone, a general fall of 10% in crime occurs and home robberies – where the drone has been emphasized – have declined by 30%. An average of 25 missions per day are undertaken and much of flying – the drone is controlled by a central command center – is automated using specialty software. It also has assisted in arrests and reducing response times during emergencies. In other areas, drones are used to surveil large crowds – e.g., at an outdoor music festival, large sports event, or protest.

Drones have also been used more high-risk situations. In February 2013, Jimmy Lee Dykes boarded an Alabama school bus, committed murder, and kidnapped a 5-year-old child to hold hostage. During the almost one-week standoff drones were used to monitor the suspect's movements by monitoring his bunker to ensure that he could not escape with his victim. There is also talk of using drones – notably San Jose, California's Police Department is studying the feasibility – of using drones to assist in neutralizing potentially explosive devices and take pictures of such ordnance to assist technicians in determining how best to eliminate the threat posed by explosive devices.

Recently San Bernardino, California's police chief, Jarrod Burguan, discussed his police department's use of drones and the guidelines they put around their use. Their primary use, Chief Burguan noted, was to take crime-scene photos. Prior to owning a drone, the police department had to rely on the sheriff's department's helicopter which, while admittedly being able to provide the needed photos, tied up the resource and prevented the helicopter from being used for different purposes if called upon. The chief also noted that they are

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transparent with the city council and the public about their use of drones and are cautious to obtain warrants where one is needed. He noted that such transparency and collaboration has provided support within the community and amongst the city government for the continued use of the drone technology by the police department.

Soundbite analytics

- In Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, the use of drones not only led to the collection of data on 34 murders but also to the data needed to capture the hitman and associates.
- 347 U.S. agencies use drones – 35% of which are sheriff's depts, 28% are police departments.
- 518% growth in the use of drones over 24 months.
- At least 18 states have legislation requiring a warrant before using drones to conduct surveillance in most cases.

SOURCES

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