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EYES ON INNOVATION – USING DRONES IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

Technological innovations have been transforming police work in the 21st century – introducing new tools to fight crime across the globe. From drones that are using as eyes in the sky to GPS tagging systems and thermal imaging technology. Digital technology has the prospective to change the way policing is delivered, by bringing police officers closer to crime scenes and communities. The digital policing vision aims to improve investigations and will make it easier for the public and police to communicate, enabling forces to respond and adapt to the digital world that is playing an ever more important role in everyday life.

Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), commonly referred to as “drones”, have become increasingly popular in recent years and among their fans are various law enforcement agencies. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) estimates that 3.55 million consumer drones and 442,000 commercial drones will be in operation by 2021 [1].

In many countries, the use of drones by police is considered for special tasks. Police departments have started to use the small, unmanned aircraft to find missing people, investigate accidents and photograph crime scenes. In those ways, drones can help policemen better do their jobs. Hundreds of police officers in the world have already been trained to use drones. Many public safety agencies have or are starting their own UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) programs.

In Finland, drones are already everyday devices that are likely to become a regular part of every police officer's toolkit. Superintendent Sami Hatonen of Finland's Police University College calls the introduction of drones "the start of a success story" and described the results already achieved as "encouraging"[2].

Nowadays drones are used for a number of reasons, starting with keeping police officers out of harm's way, to helping them obtain results not possible in any other way, drones are going an extensive way to help make the world safer. Warrants, raids, barricades and hostage situations are some of the most dangerous operations for police officers. An aerial perspective can help officers gain critical situational awareness while maintaining a safe distance. Drone is ideally suited to provide critical surveillance of any high-risk situation when decisions need to be made quickly, and they can remain at the station to transmit live video to the office and command points at the same time.

The first and most evident use for drones by police departments is search and rescue. Drones can embrace the area much more quickly and efficiently than officers can walk or even by a vehicle. Also drones can get under tree cover, or between buildings, to reach spots that helicopters can't. When well-equipped with a thermal camera, a drone can easily spot a missing or lost person hidden under debris, undergrowth or even during the night.

Police drones can be used to assist apprehension of the offenders on the run. With object tracking capabilities, the drone can track and follow an individual fleeing the scene of a crime, and provide information on the entire script, allowing officers to apprehend the suspect safer. An aerial perspective can provide vital information in dangerous situations such as active sniper scenes, or in investigation of illicit operations. The eyes in the sky can evaluate the situation, getting both the big picture, and even down to minute detail with zoom cameras, while growing the safety of law enforcement officers. High-risk traffic stops also can be made safer by the use of drones. In situations where a suspect is refusing to get out of a vehicle, the officers can deploy a drone to assess the situation or even broadcast recorded messages, while keeping at a safe distance. Drones can serve crucial role in crowd monitoring as well, allowing operators to scan the entire scene for suspicious behavior, or to locate individuals in distress. Zoom cameras here again are essential in their ability to see the overall view as well as

the tiniest details. Reporting and Analysis is an aerial perspective in conjunction with mapping software can play a role in reconstructing traffic collisions or crime scenes. Photographs and maps produced by drone camera software can be used in analyzing the sequence of a collision for accident reports, as well as unraveling the events connected to a crime.

On May 8, 2019, 35-year old physical therapist Amanda Heller went missing during a morning run in the isolated Makawao Forest Reserve in Hawaii. Heller was, thankfully, found injured but alive 16 days later, thanks to the extraordinary endeavors of law enforcement officials and volunteers who made use of the latest technology to boost their search efforts. Apart from making use of traditional methods involving canine search teams, a bird's eye view of the area was obtained thanks to drones armed with infrared cameras [3].

The use of drones and other technologies are making the work of law enforcement agencies more easily. Thanks to the high-speed at which drone technology is developing, one can't even to image to what extent it will influence public safety in the coming years.

References

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