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# Evolution of Law Enforcement ISR

## An Air Bear White Paper

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## Evolution of Law Enforcement ISR

I first started to study Military Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance (ISR) in the mid 1990's. This is when the ISR world was rapidly changing, about the time when the first General Atomics Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's) were first deployed. Like the A-10 Warthog, a plane built around a large gun, the Predator was a platform built around a powerful day/night broadcast camera system. Along with GPS technology, an operator could point the camera at any mapped location with perfect precision. Key targets could be located and followed until strike aircraft could be launched and guided in to take care of business. Now that capability has been upgraded, allowing the newest version of the Predator (Reaper) to carry the Hellfire missile. ISR technology continues its rapid advancement as well as the tactics used in deployment. This has revolutionized the way our military forces use and deploy airpower and has acted as a force multiplier of ground and air assets.

The war against terrorism is very much like our domestic war on crime, what we typically address in airborne law enforcement. My point here is there isn't a stationary military target, such as complexes, ports, airfields, but rather individual adversaries who are constantly attacking and on the move. It's very similar to a suspect committing a crime, and immediately fleeing the crime scene.

The military ISR community realized part time reconnaissance wasn't the answer. They have a term called "Unblinking Eye", which is more of an operational goal of creating a world of constant overhead intelligence. Economics of UAV operations in comparison to the F-18 (for example) allowed for a paradigm shift in tactics and as a result, a tremendous improvement in force multiplication.

The same holds true for airborne law enforcement. There is no tactical edge provided when the ISR system is parked in a hanger or waiting on the ramp for the next dispatch call. Patrol airtime allows a police aircrew to constantly be in a position of advantage, allowing timely response, to see, act and gather key information to relay it to ground units. Force multiplication in action, but it can only be effective if it is available to immediately respond.

Most incidents requiring airborne law enforcement assets require a three to five minute response window. New fixed wing aircraft offer the ability to remain airborne for hours, at a fraction of the cost of rotor wing operations. While aircraft are spooling up on the ramp to respond, units already airborne are already engaged. New, military grade sensors and the ability to transmit imagery to ground units has revolutionized law enforcement activities. Force multiplication by way of investing in fixed wing airborne operations, gaining a manifold response in effectiveness of your operations.

Let's look at this in more detail. I have used new ISR technology as an airborne law enforcement officer for many years, so I know first-hand the potential and viability of this level of intelligence from above. Airborne intelligence has powerful value when you can look at a crime scene within seconds of its



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dispatch, even from miles away while you begin to gather key information. I call this bringing the “crime into the cockpit”, or analyzing the information, putting all the pieces together and sending down key tactical answers to responding ground units. When you park a fixed wing platform over a city with this level of capability, you create a world below where criminals cannot outrun or hide from law enforcement. Police officers literally have the same level of protection and information afforded to our troops overseas, which is information they need to effectively surround a suspect, and take them into custody.

It is vital to have an aircraft, or what I refer as the ISR platform, that is easy to maintain, has good endurance for long patrols, and won't put the air support program into a “Fiscal Straight Jacket”. Airborne patrol time and lots of it, is key, as a ground based response makes timely tactical information an impossibility. In today's police budget environment, we must reduce the cost of keeping the ISR equipment airborne. This is critical to making sure an air support program can produce results and add true value as a crime-fighting tool.

Tight fiscal budgets are forcing the rethinking of airborne law enforcement. Traditional rotor wing operations have their place, primarily in rescue operations, however the economics and capabilities of operating effective fixed wing assets far outstrip the capabilities of the helicopter community. Operating at a fraction of the cost of hourly helo operations, a fixed wing platform can remain aloft economically, ready to respond at a moment's notice to the latest dispatch.

My final patrol flight was on a Saturday night. I piloted a CHP fixed wing aircraft a mile above the Sacramento Valley, providing air support to several dozen police municipalities. Our goal was to take full advantage of our MX-15 ISR camera and Geo-auto point mapping system. It was an active night, an exercise of everything I've learned in the last 3 decades of providing intelligence from above. We had three successful tactical events, providing quick clear concise information. Each call, ended with a familiar radio transmission -- “Code 4, one in custody, Thanks Air”.

Modern ISR technology has changed the requirements of the platform. Fielding the right fixed wing ISR platform is truly a game changer, both operationally and economically. Technology and tactics have changed the face of airborne law enforcement and fixed wing operations are the future.

*John*

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