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Albuquerque police fight violence with intelligence-led policing

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The state of New Mexico has long held the dubious honor of high placement on the FBI National Crime Data Report. In 2014, the state was ranked the #2 most dangerous state in the Union. The city of Albuquerque has suffered a particularly high rate of violent crimes, with the number of murders in the city almost doubling between 2009-2013.



Among the problems contributing to the high crime rate in Albuquerque is a proliferation of gangs. The Stop Albuquerque Gangs Task Force maintains an online list of known violent groups in the city. At the time of this writing, more than 100 gangs were listed on the website. The Albuquerque Police Department (APD) is not one of exceptional size, and has historically struggled to provide enough officers to effectively combat the problem.

The APD is not the first and will not be the last police department to face this dilemma. Criminals have become more numerous, craftier, and are quick to take advantage of new technologies. Reactive police action, the traditional model of law enforcement in which police respond to crimes as they happen, has been steadily losing ground in the war against crime.

Instead, more and more police departments, the APD included, are turning to a new paradigm known as intelligence-led policing. The core of this law enforcement model is "Work smarter, not harder." In an intelligence-led police department, officers collect and analyze data using a variety of technologies and techniques. The data is used to decide where police resources should be committed to have the greatest effect. Intelligence officers are tasked with identifying repeat offenders and high

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risk areas, so that a department’s limited human resources can be utilized most efficiently.

Intelligence-led policing is a revelation within the law enforcement community. In a study conducted by the non-profit Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), 54% of responding agencies reported that they planned to increase the use of the practice within the near future. According to Wikipedia, intelligence-led policing has also found widespread adoption in Canada, Mexico, the UK, and New Zealand.

A subset of intelligence-led policing is the burgeoning field of predictive policing. Intelligence officers within a department use collected data to construct heat maps and other models in an effort to predict where crimes are likely to occur, days or even weeks before they do.

The heat map incorporates a vast amount of data about criminal activity over an area, allowing officers to visually identify the locations where crimes most densely concentrated. This technique allows “boots on the ground” to be sent where they can have the greatest positive effect, without wasting time patrolling quiet, low-risk areas. By patrolling the most crime-dense areas of Albuquerque, the APD is able to benefit the entire city by targeting the root causes of criminal activity.

In Albuquerque, predictive policing requires the high volume collection of data about gang members and other likely criminal elements. The APD has successfully leveraged technology to accomplish this task in several ways.

In 2013, the APD opened the Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC). The RTCC is a locus of crime prevention technology, staffed with trained operators who monitor a network of static cameras around the city that today exceeds 1,000 units. RTCC personnel also monitor pawn shops for stolen goods, distributes a daily newscast to APD officers, and is largely responsible for the creation of the heat maps APD higher-ups use to intelligently assign police. The RTCC has proven effective, and is the recipient of an award from the International Association of Law Enforcement Planners.

In its efforts to further develop the effectiveness of the RTCC and the APD as a whole, in 2014 the City of Albuquerque decided to invest in more advanced technology for its network of surveillance cameras. The selection criteria for the cameras prioritized flexibility and return on investment, meaning the cameras would have to cover more ground than the comparatively basic static-mounted cameras that comprised the original network.



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The new cameras would also necessarily be compatible with the existing systems at the RTCC, with a minimum of equipment retooling, software redevelopment, and operator retraining. After evaluating and testing camera solutions from a number of manufacturers across the United States, the APD settled on the Mobile Surveillance Unit (MSU) from [ECAMSECURE](#).

The MSU is essentially a freestanding camera tower. Each unit is portable enough to be towed by police vehicles, and can power and support a number of cameras with varying configurations. ECAMSECURE custom-designed and constructed 6 MSUs that each incorporated 1 pan / tilt / zoom (PTZ) camera, 3 fixed-angle HD cameras, and a speaker and microphone for two-way audio.

The portable nature of the MSUs has made them a perfect fit for Albuquerque's push towards intelligence-led policing. The APD can now assign MSUs to heavy crime areas just as it does human officers. The imposing structures, bristling with cameras, have proven an effective deterrent for crime.

By moving the MSUs from location to location, the APD keeps criminals guessing as to whether or not they are under surveillance. The cameras have proven a boon for law-abiding citizens. News coverage reports that residents often feel safer and more protected with the cameras present. After moving an MSU out of a neighborhood, the APD typically fields requests and petitions for the cameras to return.

Since the MSUs are a custom-built solution tailored to each client, ECAMSECURE was able to ensure that they would be seamlessly compatible with the existing equipment and software at the RTCC. By sourcing compatible hardware and modifying software where needed, the MSU deployed in Albuquerque can be accessed by RTCC operators using largely the same interface and software they have already used for years.

ECAMSECURE technicians accompanied the initial deployment of MSUs to Albuquerque to train RTCC operators in their use, and support personnel have remained on-call to the APD 24/7. The APD leadership has praised ECAMSECURE for its dedication to service and support, especially the fast response time and willingness to resolve any issue, problem, or concern.

The Mobile Surveillance Units have proven to be an excellent fit for the APD, and an order for additional units is already underway. ECAMSECURE is making several design upgrades and improvements for the next shipment of MSUs. The new units will include license plate capture, as well as other refinements. The existing run already deployed in Albuquerque will also be upgraded to match the new units.

The crime rate in Albuquerque is today still high, but dropping through the efforts of the APD, the RTCC, and ECAMSECURE. Using the MSUs, the RTCC is able to alert APD officers of crimes in progress, as well as in suspicious activity or congregations that may erupt into violence. Using the two-way audio features, RTCC operators can even resolve some situations on their own, by broadcasting to would-be criminals that the police are on their way.

The partnership is expected to continue, helping the APD leverage the latest technologies to safeguard the law-abiding residents of the city.

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