

...AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

A Hungry Dog Hunts Best

RAMESH NYBERG

The book my generation learned to read in the first grade went something like this: "This is Spot. See Spot run. Run, Spot, run!"

Then, there would be a big picture of the dog and the question, "Do you see Spot?"

The "book" is quite different now. It is compacted into an invisible computer code which goes, "Run, Spot! Now, go into the building with this geolocator, Spot. Once inside, send us back data in real time with your HD camera and sensors and tell us how many subjects are inside, if they are armed, and how many hostages or injured people might be there as well." And, Spot does it, unarmed and without hesitation. As you've already guessed, Spot doesn't need pay, praise, days off, and he only needs a few hours of "rest" to get charged back up.

We have Spot in the Miami-Dade Po-



lice Department now (that's really his name, too). He's pretty cool. He does all that stuff I wrote about in the previous paragraph and more. On his way in-

side the building, Spot can maneuver his way over rubble, fallen objects and other hazards, and he can withstand heat which human beings cannot. He won't even hesitate if he's shot at and being disabled by gunfire is no issue; he can be repaired. Spot is saving human lives from being in harm's way and can relay valuable intel to officers on scene before deciding to send in real flesh and blood. While Spot is busy scoping out the scene – whether it's a barricaded subject or a building collapse – a drone can be overhead, mapping out potential points of entrance and egress, and taking photos through windows to identify and assess threats inside the building from different vantage points.

This is just the tip of the AI/robotic iceberg, folks, and it's happening faster than most of us can keep up with. I've written about technology many times in this column and this one probably won't be the last, as it seems like every week there are advances which are mind-boggling in scope, as well as daunting in legal ambiguity. Drones are my favorite topic for now, because of the uproar they cause. Get this: We all know that everyone is concerned with school safety. School districts and the private sector have thrown an immense amount of resources into devising strategies and putting physical security measures in place. The school in which I work is a big campus with over 3,200 students. Cer-

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tain areas are vulnerable and while you can't cover *every* little nook and cranny, I proposed an idea. Have a trained person fly a drone in various patrol patterns around the perimeter of the school grounds. If they spot a threat, or even a suspicious person approaching or attempting to access the perimeter, they can see it from the air and quickly notify everyone to lock down, while police can be dispatched to intercept the intruder. Yes, the drone would have to land and recharge, so you have two – one lands and the other launches immediately. Two security people can handle this switch quickly and then the one can continue flying and monitoring. What's the cost? It's about \$4,000 for two good quality UAVs and *maybe* the hiring of an extra person. There are some very sophisticated systems now which can fly and autoland when their batteries run low and launch at the tap of a button. They are outfitted with hi-def cameras and an automatic tracking system (once motion is detected in a certain area) and even facial recognition, if you wanted to go that far.

My idea got shot down for one reason: The neighbors, I was told, would complain and be concerned with drones being able to see in their yards. I was aghast. The neighbors, I told them, should be thrilled that the school was using their tax money to provide security for the school *and* (albeit partially) their neighborhood! Why not send out a survey letter to all the surrounding residents to see how they feel? We can assure them that video footage will all be overwritten daily unless there is an incident or anything that might spur an investigation.

Grumbles, mumbles, and noncommittal...I will try again next year, though.

In law enforcement, we obviously face the same scrutiny and doubt, but on a much larger scale. Remember that old saying, "Damn cops are never around when you need them!" Oh, so now that we'd be "present," you seem to take issue with it. Artificial intelligence is not only here to stay, it is leaving behind those who aren't paying attention. I recently saw a video about military robotics which featured how "swarms" of drones can follow a leader and learn from one another, and other units which can act quickly upon real-time uploaded data describing what's going on at ground level. Chases? It would be a

piece of cake. Lock onto the car and fly without the cost of a pilot or fuel.

Because history has taught us this lesson over and over again, the one thing we can be assured of is the criminal element has (or will) get their hands on the most advanced technology available before we do. Cybercrime is a perfect example. As we have with weapons, computers and the Internet, we're always playing catch up. As far back as 2014, the NIJ's National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center held a conference to discuss the rapidly blossoming world of robots and AI. Discussions included "the identification of technology needs, including policy and practice related to technology that would produce desirable futures, or avoid and mitigate the effects of undesirable futures."

It has a rather ominous ring to it, right? – *undesirable futures*. We've had our share of undesirable pasts and presents. The business of mitigating those effects is exactly what our jobs entail.

I believe in training *people* better, but I also think that we should break tradition and be at the cutting edge, ahead of those with bad intent. We should be spending money on having AI developers in our ranks, people who can think outside the box and create powerful, imaginative, *responsible* systems which anticipate undesirable events before they happen, and move swiftly to identify offenders when they do. I'm not the expert, but I know they are out there, and the fact that we have drones flying around *on Mars* tells me we can do anything we set our minds to.

You'll have to excuse me, but I have to walk the dog. "Come, Bolo."

Uh-oh, he just looked at me and said, "I'm sorry, Ramesh. I can't do that." **P&SN**

Ramesh Nyberg retired from law enforcement in November 2006 after 27 years of police work. He lives in Miami and teaches criminal justice at a local high school. He also teaches regional law enforcement courses through Training Force, USA. He enjoys getting feedback from readers and can be reached at ramesh.nyberg@gmail.com. Also, Ram has written a new book, Badge, Tie and Gun: Life and Death Journeys of a Miami Detective, which is available on Amazon in both Kindle eBook and paperback. You can find it by visiting amazon.com/dp/B0CTQQKQTV