

Executive Summary

The Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV) is focused-deterrence or “pulling levers” approach designed to reduce gun violence. The CIRV approach provides notification to gang members that their continued involvement in violence will result in “group consequences,” where gangs are systematically targeted for law enforcement efforts. In keeping with the larger principles of CIRV, an investigation was launched by the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD) into the criminal activities perpetrated by a gang known as the “Northside Taliband.” A six-month investigation was initiated in May 2008, and resulted in the identification of over 100 Taliband gang members, a 95-count indictment for criminal activity, 71 arrests of gang members and their associates, 15 gang members charged with “Participating in a Criminal Gang” (a second degree felony), and several gang members facing federal charges that carry life imprisonment terms. Over 50 undercover narcotics buys of crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and marijuana were executed, and 22 firearms (including fully automatic assault weapons) were purchased or recovered.

This investigation was the largest criminal gang investigation and prosecution in the history of the CPD and Hamilton County, Ohio. The following CPD units were involved: District 5 Neighborhood Liaison Unit, District 5 Violent Crimes Squad, District 5 Investigative Unit, District 1 Violent Crimes Squad, District 2 Violent Crime Squad, Vortex Unit, Intelligence Section, Tactical Planning Section, SWAT, and Homicide Unit. In addition, the CPD partnered with several external agencies/units including: University of Cincinnati, U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, U.S. Attorney’s Office Southern District of Ohio, State of Ohio Adult Parole Authority, Ohio Investigative Unit, Hamilton County Probation Department, Hamilton County Prosecutor’s Office, and Hamilton County Sheriff’s Office.

What was truly unique about the Taliband investigation was the merging of traditional police practices with innovative data-driven approaches. Given the volume of evidence associated with a criminal investigation of this magnitude, the CPD engaged academic partners to assist by developing a new database tailored specifically for the collection and management of information associated with the Taliband gang. For the first time, CPD officers systematically documented gang activity across social internet sites, including over 1,800 photographs to document criminal network connections. Using social network analysis software typically utilized in business research, but rarely applied to criminal justice efforts, the “key players” from the Taliband were systemically identified and empirically validated. Likewise, vehicles and travel patterns were tracked using data gathered from Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR). This information was graphically displayed using GIS mapping software to demonstrate the locations and travel patterns of gang members’ homes and criminal activities. These statistical analyses allowed CPD investigators to determine the “impact” players within the criminal network and provided an independent official source documenting the network for prosecution.

The Taliband investigation led to a 40% reduction in violent crime in the Northside neighborhood. Using this group focused, data-driven approach, violent crime in Cincinnati is decreasing despite an 800-bed jail closure in January 2009 that effectively cut available jail space in the community by one-third. The Taliband investigation and subsequent arrests have empowered and improved police-community relations. This methodology now serves as a template for future gang prosecutions throughout Hamilton County and State of Ohio.

Case Overview

The CPD is the lead law enforcement agency engaged with the Cincinnati Initiative to Reduce Violence (CIRV). CIRV (pronounced “serve”) is a focused-deterrence violence reduction effort that has established partnerships with over 25 groups/agencies, including multiple law enforcement agencies (local, state and federal), social service providers, university researchers, medical professionals, business leaders, and community members. A key component of the CIRV approach is to focus law enforcement efforts on criminal gangs that continue to engage in violence. In face-to-face offender notification meetings, members of violent gangs/groups are warned there would be group consequences for gangs that continued to engage in gun violence.

The “Taliband” criminal gang was initially identified as one of sixty-two criminal groups/gangs within Cincinnati as part of the larger CIRV law enforcement process. This particular criminal group, based in the “Northside” community, invoked intensive law enforcement scrutiny when one of its members, Michael Grace, was murdered on December 28, 2007 by David Johnson and Marty Levingston. Johnson and Levingston were known members of a rival gang, the Hawaiian Terrance Posse (HTP). The HTP was a small gang and most of its associated members were already in prison. Therefore CPD attention focused on the Northside Taliband. The initial investigation into this gang began in May 2008 and lasted over six months. During the course of the initial investigation, it was determined that the Taliband gang was one of the largest, most violent and most organized of all the criminal networks within Cincinnati. Members of the Northside Taliband had a history of criminal behavior that included burglary, robbery, firearm assaults, firearm trafficking, and drug trafficking. As promised to gang members during CIRV’s offender notification meetings, comprehensive multi-jurisdictional law enforcement efforts were focused on the Taliband criminal gang because their members continued to engage in gun violence. Over one hundred Taliband gang members were specifically identified over the course of the investigation.

It was quickly determined that the CPD must utilize innovative techniques to overcome obstacles associated with data management capacity to efficiently manage the volume of evidence associated with a criminal investigation of this magnitude. Like many police agencies, the CPD has multiple databases that cannot be easily merged or accessed. Therefore, the CPD engaged academic partners from the University of Cincinnati (UC) to assist in the effort. UC academics assisted in the development of a new gang database tailored specifically for the collection and management of information associated with the Taliband gang. CPD officials documented every known official contact with Taliband gang members for the prior five year time period within this single database. These contacts included field interrogation reports, arrests, incident reports in which Taliband members were listed as victims or suspects, citations, bond histories, court histories from previous cases, surveillance photographs and tattoo photographs. In addition, over 25 social internet websites (e.g., Myspace.com; Urbanchat.com, etc.) were monitored daily for Taliband activity. All pictures and associated materials indicating criminal gang activity found on these websites were downloaded and archived within the database. Likewise, vehicles and travel patterns were tracked using data gathered from Automatic License Plate Readers (ALPR). This information was graphically displayed using GIS mapping software to demonstrate the locations and travel patterns of gang members’ homes and criminal activities.

CPD’s academic partners also assisted the investigation with the use of “social network analysis.” Network analysis consists of the visual display and empirical assessment of social

relations among actors in a network. These analyses were conducted through the use of Analytic Technologies networking software, including a combination of Ucinet, Netdraw, and Key Player software. The objective for conducting analyses of networks was to document and measure the centrality of gang members for the purpose of removal to cripple the network. Measures of “centrality” within this software provide measures of the importance, influence, and prominence of a particular actor within the network. The links empirically established between individual gang members were based on their official known contacts within the criminal justice system, and through their own social networking on internet sites. These analyses allowed CPD investigators to determine who the key “impact” players were within the criminal network. In addition, it provided an independent official source documenting the criminal network for use during prosecution.

Over a six-month period, CPD’s Violent Crimes Squads (VCS) conducted more than fifty undercover narcotics buys of crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and marijuana and purchased or recovered twenty-two firearms, including fully automatic assault weapons, with the majority of these purchases occurring in close proximity to neighborhood elementary schools, parks and recreation centers.

On November, 17, 2008, the first of two round-ups of Taliband gang members was conducted, beginning with the service of four simultaneous search warrants by the CPD SWAT team. Immediately following the initial warrant service, 85 officers and agents from the CPD, State of Ohio Adult Parole Authority, Hamilton County Probation Department, and U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives responded to the Northside neighborhood. These officers worked in eight joint arrest teams to serve the initial 95- count indictment. As the search warrants were served and arrest teams fanned out through the neighborhood, many Northside residents came out of their homes and businesses to cheer the police effort. So many tips regarding the current locations of other gang members were phoned into Crimestoppers that an additional phone line had to be added to handle the volume of calls. Over 40 wanted gang members were taken into custody in the first round-up and the extensive media coverage reiterated that additional law enforcement efforts against Taliband members would follow with additional arrests. Following the success and media exposure surrounding the first round-up, gang members who were not initially indicted, their lawyers, and in some cases their parents, began to show up and call the neighborhood police district to turn themselves in prior to the second round-up. They appeared in such large numbers that appointments had to be scheduled with district investigators. Based on additional information provided by these sources, over 30 additional Taliband gang members were arrested.

The meticulous documentation of Taliband members’ criminal activity allowed for prosecution under Ohio statute that makes participation in a criminal gang a prosecutable offense. Specifically, R.C. 2923.42 prohibits participating in a criminal gang: No person who actively participates in a criminal gang, with knowledge that the criminal gang engages in a pattern of criminal gang activity, shall purposely commit or engage in any act that constitutes criminal conduct. The offense is classified as a Felony in the 2nd degree and carries a penalty range of two to eight years incarceration. Hamilton County Prosecutors were initially reluctant to charge key Taliband members under the gang statute. There was no prior history of its use within Hamilton County. Members of the CPD team were able to convince initially skeptical prosecutors regarding the merits of the case based in part on the application of social science principles and statistical analyses to identify and document the relationships across gang

members. The Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office eventually assigned two fulltime adult and two fulltime juvenile prosecutors to the enforcement team.

In summary, based on this investigation, 71 gang members and their associates were arrested. A 95-count indictment on a gang specification was lodged against 13 adults considered the most active within the gang. Two additional key juvenile members have also been charged with a gang specification. Five of these 15 key players have pled guilty and have been sentenced to incarceration terms ranging from 2 – 4 years, combined with 2 - 3 years of post-release control for the gang specification alone. The remaining gang members are awaiting trial. Several are also facing federal charges for drug and firearm offenses carrying potential life prison terms. In addition, two Northside businesses that served as Taliband hangout locations-- Reflections Jazz Lounge and Orlando's Bar – had charges filed against their liquor licenses by the Ohio Investigative Unit and are currently closed to the public.

The Taliband gang round-up and prosecution is the *largest gang enforcement effort ever undertaken* by the CPD or any other police agency within Hamilton County, Ohio. Within the CPD, multiple units and patrol districts worked collaboratively and contributed to the success of this operation. These units include: District 5 Neighborhood Liaison Unit, District 5 Violent Crimes Squad, District 5 Investigative Unit, District 1 Violent Crimes Squad, District 2 Violent Crime Squad, Vortex, Intelligence Section, Tactical Planning Section, SWAT, and the Homicide Unit. Partnering agencies outside of the CPD included the University of Cincinnati Policing Institute, U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, U.S. Attorney's Office Southern District of Ohio, State of Ohio Adult Parole Authority, Ohio Investigative Unit, Hamilton County Probation Department, Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office, Hamilton County Sheriff's Office (Electronic Monitoring Unit, Corrections Division, and Regional Electronics Computer Investigation Section).

The elimination of the Taliband Gang from the Northside community has resulted in a 40% reduction in both violent crime and overall crime in this neighborhood compared to similar months just one year prior. Community residents feel empowered and have taken proactive steps to secure long-term stability in their newly reclaimed neighborhood. CPD's Community Relations Section is working directly with Northside residents to engage in both short-term and long-term problem solving efforts to sustain these initial crime reductions over time. Community leaders and both local and state political officials have also commended CPD members for their diligence and innovations in this gang investigation.

Following the larger principles of the CIRV effort, the purpose of the gang round-up day was to send a very clear, deliberate message to all individuals that continue to associate with violent gangs. In addition to the media blitz that followed, nearly 100 members of *other* known criminal gangs that were under court supervision were gathered at offender notification meetings just three weeks after the first round-up day. These gang members were told directly by CPD Chief Thomas H. Streicher, Jr. exactly what the CPD-led law enforcement team had done to eliminate the Taliband Gang. This investigation and resulting arrests sent an unequivocal deterrent message to the larger gang population in Cincinnati. In the three months following this widely publicized gang round-up, the number of Gang-Member Involved (GMI) homicides reached its lowest levels since the beginning of the CIRV approach.

Innovations

Several challenges and limitations that could have impeded this investigation were overcome through the use of innovative techniques. These challenges included: 1) the initial use of data sources that were not systematically compiled and merged into a useable format; 2) the lack of a central database to collect and classify evidence; 3) initial reluctance from the Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office to prosecute a criminal gang case; 4) limited involvement of officers from other local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies on investigative and arrest teams. To overcome these challenges, the CPD successfully merged exemplary police practices with social scientific data-driven approaches. The innovative investigative model that resulted led to a highly integrated local, state, and federal gang law enforcement partnership.

First, a new comprehensive and user-friendly database was developed to specifically document the criminal activity and social relations of Taliband gang members. This database was tailored by academic partners specifically for use with criminal gangs based on input from CPD officers, along with state and federal prosecutors. Once the database was created and populated with information for the past five years, advanced statistical analyses were performed to identify key impact players for additional charges, and map geographic locations for criminal activity and likely travel patterns.

In addition, CPD officials extensively scanned and documented information posted by gang members on social internet sites. Evidence from these internet sites included an audio rap song listing gang members' names and criminal activities, over 1,800 photographs of gang members flashing their gang signs, posing with weapons and drugs, etc. These pictures were included in the database, and with assistance from community members, each individual was identified and their relationships with other individuals in the photographs were documented within the interactive database.

This is one of the first known applications of social network analysis (typically used in business research) for gang enforcement and prosecution. A report graphically displaying the known relations among Taliband members based on the social network analyses (ego networks and complete networks) was produced and has been used as part of the prosecutor's criminal case. Ego networks graphically display a centralized actor and all other actors the "focal" actor has a relation (weighted based on the strength of the relationship). In contrast, complete networks consist of relations between all actors within the network. Statistical analyses including network cohesion, network centrality, and key player analyses were conducted and documented. Visualizations were created that demonstrated how the network would collapse if these key identified players were removed. This approach allowed for a surgical focus on key players and ensured that limited resources would be deployed to maximum effect.

The visualizations created using network analysis software convinced initially reluctant prosecutors that the strength of this gang case could be easily demonstrated during prosecution. Further, this data-driven approach persuaded the heads of three additional law enforcement entities (Ohio Adult Parole Authority, Hamilton County Probation Department, and ATF) to enter into a fulltime investigative partnership with the CPD. This is the first time that these law enforcement agencies worked collaboratively in a large-scale gang investigation

Significance

The overwhelming success of the Taliband investigation has led to a significant change in the investigative culture at the CPD. The traditional CPD investigative approach of focusing on individual perpetrators has been modified to a new focus on “group enforcement.” The successful investigation, apprehension, and prosecution of violent gang members required a more sophisticated, data-driven approach than had been typically utilized. The CPD now routinely monitors gang memberships, activities, geographic locations, alliances, feuds, criminal activities, social relationships, impact players, etc. This information is systematically gathered and documented every four months by CPD investigators and their academic partners. The information is gathered from knowledgeable CPD, probation, and parole officers, patterns are identified and documented, and graphic displays are distributed.

The methodology and tactics used during the Taliband investigation are currently being replicated in four large-scale, CPD-led gang investigations. These additional investigations have included the use of tailored databases, social network analyses, spatial analyses, and continuous documentation of internet websites frequented by gang members. Representatives from probation, parole, and ATF are now integrated into the new investigatory models. Both county and federal prosecutors attend monthly team meetings to discuss strategies for success in gang prosecution cases. This feedback has intimately informed and focused CPD’s efforts throughout the investigations.

CPD’s officers successful use of innovative tactics and development of law enforcement partnerships have been presented at every level within the CPD. In-service training now focuses on data-driven gang investigative approaches, where the database, analyses, and tactics are clearly demonstrated to officers. Further Violent Crime Squads from all five CPD patrol districts have embraced this model and are implementing it on a smaller scale within the districts.

A fulltime CPD unit has been formed to monitor internet websites frequented by gang members. This intelligence (acquired daily) is entered into databases for use by investigators and patrol officers interacting with gang members. Information, photographs, and videos gathered from these websites are shared within CPD and to other enforcement agencies regionally.

The Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) has identified the CPD / UC research team as modeling best practices in gang enforcement and has provided funding for CPD officers to train other agencies and lead gang information gathering sessions in six Ohio cities (Cleveland, Dayton, Youngstown, Toledo, Canton, and Mansfield). The CPD has also hosted police officials from around the world, including officials from England, Scotland, and Turkey, to learn about our gang enforcement efforts and investigative techniques.

Most importantly, the community has gained additional confidence and legitimacy in the CPD, and police-community partnerships are strengthening. Northside residents openly applauded CPD’s efforts and gave valuable information to assist in additional arrests. After the gang was eliminated, violent crime in Northside decreased approximately 40% compared to the same time frame one year prior. Community residents have regained their neighborhood, and are actively working with CPD’s problem solving unit to implement long-term strategies designed to sustain crime reductions over time. Other residents are actively seeking this same type of investigatory work in their neighborhoods.