

D. Practical Guidance: Personal Safety

Traveling in High-Risk Areas: What to Know About Drones



! Risks of drone attacks during travel

- Drones often target vehicles on the roads or at checkpoints.
- Periods and areas of military operations and insurgent activity increase the risk of drone attacks.

! An important challenge:

- Is it safer to identify vehicles as being from an aid agency or for them to blend in with other civilian traffic?

Risks and mitigation measures while travelling

Travelling between areas in conflict-affected zones – particularly if there is known militant activity in the area – increases the risks of drone strikes. Drones frequently target vehicles being used by militants to transport people or supplies, increasing the chance of civilian or aid vehicles being mistakenly identified as militants' vehicles or becoming collateral damage, especially if aid agency vehicles resemble those used by militants. Checkpoints, especially those controlled by insurgents, are also at risk of being targeted by drone strikes.

The following suggestions are designed to help protect aid agency vehicles against the risk of drone strikes while they are travelling. These measures may help to keep you and your staff travelling in vehicles safer, but they cannot guarantee safety.

Guidance

Display a logo visibly on the vehicle roof OR use a local car without any identification.

- Decide on the use of logos based on your assessment of whether your organisation's vehicles could be targeted or would be protected if they are clearly identified.

Don't use vehicles that resemble those used by armed entities.

- Don't use any form of camouflage to disguise vehicles.
- Don't use vehicles of the kind that are typically used by insurgents.

Plan travel routes in ways that limit risks of and exposure to drone strikes.

- Identify safe routes and consider specific risks posed by "choke points" that expose teams to possible attacks while they are travelling, e.g. bridges, cuttings, and areas where travellers are more visible and there is less opportunity to evade or hide from a drone attack.

Plan several different travel schedules and routes.

- Plan routes based on observed armed activity in the area and any possible checkpoints and "choke points".
- Vary days, times and, where possible, routes of travel.

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Avoid travelling at times of low visibility.

- Avoid travelling at dusk, at night, or during dust storms or fog, and in particular when humanitarian actors might be mistaken for combatants.

Provide staff with guidance on best practice.

- Regularly repeat to staff the main guidance principles on how to avoid drone attacks and how to deal with them if they do occur, so that staff are able to remember these principles during an emergency. Get them to regularly practise emergency steps they should take in the event of a drone attack.

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This is taken from '**Sudden Threats from the Sky Security Measures against Drone Strikes Guidance for the Protection of Aid Workers and Aid Operations**' prepared by Insecurity Insight following its January 2025 report entitled '**Hovering Threats: The Challenges of Armed Drones in Humanitarian Contexts**'. All decisions made on the basis of the document remain the responsibility of the organisations and individuals making these decisions.

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Outside When a Drone is Spotted

Practical Guidance: Personal Safety
Outside When a Drone is Spotted

Key messages for personal safety if you are outside when a drone is spotted:

- Seek cover! Inside and lower down is safer than outside and higher up.
- Look for low and cover between you and the drone.
- When hiding, stay still. Lie flat. Don't reflect the drone's visual sensors by moving.
- If no cover is available and the drone is close, run in a zigzag pattern towards the nearest cover to make it difficult for the drone to follow you.
- If they are in a group, people should disperse in different directions.

Guidance if you are outside when a drone is spotted
These measures do not guarantee your safety, and different risks must be carefully assessed and balanced.

Do's	Don'ts
If you are outside when a drone is present, seek shelter.	Don't try to outrun a drone. Drones travel faster than humans. Running may highlight yourself as something suspicious or a potential target.
Get off a motorbike and seek shelter.	Don't try to outride the drone. It is not possible to drive faster than a drone flies.
Get out of a vehicle and seek shelter.	Don't try to outride the drone. It is not possible to drive faster than a drone flies.
Take shelter. Ideally in a solid structure, e.g. under a bridge or inside a building or any other solid structure. Ideally you should try to find "two-way cover", i.e. where at least two solid walls separate you from the potential impact zone of a drone strike.	Don't run through an open field or in the middle of a road.
If no solid structure is nearby, take shelter, if possible, in a ditch or the ground (the noise explosions spread upwards in a "V" shape and not downwards).	Don't stay close to any potential target.

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Inside a Building During a Drone Attack

Practical Guidance: Personal Safety
Inside a Building During a Drone Attack

Key messages for personal safety if you are inside a building during a drone attack:

- Seek cover! Ideally where two walls are between you and the outside.
- Don't look out of the window.
- Stay away from secondary hazards that may catch fire.

Guidance if you are inside a building during a drone attack
These measures do not guarantee your safety, and different risks must be carefully assessed and balanced.

Do's	Don'ts
Ideally, find a room that provides two solid walls between yourself and the outside.	Don't look out of the window.
Sturdy furniture, such as tables or beds, can be used to form improvised drag-proof barriers to shelter behind.	Stay away from windows or wooden doors that may shatter or splinter.
If they are available, sleeping mats with metal cores will provide an additional with limited protection from drones filled with thermal cameras that can detect your body's heat.	Blankets do not provide effective cover to individuals during drone attacks.
I keep away from windows, but if it is safe to do so, close curtains and shutters or shutters.	Don't position yourself near windows or other openings to the outside.
If a space is regularly used to shelter people, cover windows with tape film or duct tape to reduce the risk from flying glass.	Don't hide close to windows that may shatter, even if they have been covered by blast film or duct tape.
Remain aware of and stay away from secondary hazards that may catch fire or explode during a drone attack.	Don't hide near oxygen cylinders, which may explode following an impact nearby or in a fire.
Try to ensure that there are at least two exits from any place of shelter.	Don't stay in or use the upper floors of a building that might be targeted.

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Traveling in High-Risk Areas: What to Know About Drones

Risks of drone attacks during travel

- Drones often target vehicles on the roads or at checkpoints.
- Permits and ease of military operations and targeted activity increase the risk of drone strikes.
- An important challenge:
- Is it safe to identify vehicles as being from an aid agency or for them to blend in with other civilian traffic?

Risks and mitigation measures while travelling
Traveling between areas in conflict-affected zones – particularly if there is known militant activity in the area – increases the risks of drone strikes. Drones frequently target vehicles being used by militants to transport people or supplies, increasing the chance of civilian or aid vehicles being mistakenly identified as militant vehicles or becoming collateral damage, especially if aid agency vehicles resemble those used by militants. Checkpoints, especially those controlled by insurgents, are also at risk of being targeted by drone strikes.

The following suggestions are designed to help protect aid agency vehicles against the risk of drone strikes while they are travelling. These measures may help to keep you and your staff travelling in vehicles safer, but they cannot guarantee safety.

Guidance

Display a high visibility on the vehicle roof OR use a local car without any identification.

- Decide on the use of routes based on your assessment of whether your organisation's vehicles could be targeted or would be protected if they are clearly identified.

Don't use vehicles that resemble those used by armed entities.

- Don't use any form of camouflage to disguise vehicles.
- Don't use vehicles of the kind that are typically used by insurgents.

Plan travel routes in ways that limit risks of exposure to drone strikes.

- Identify safe routes and consider specific risks posed by "choke points" that expose teams to possible attacks while they are traveling, e.g. bridges, valleys, and areas where travelers are more visible and there is less opportunity to evade or rise from a drone attack.

Plan several alternate travel schedules and routes.

- Plan routes based on observed armed activity in the area and any possible checkpoints and "choke points".
- Vary stops, times and where possible, routes of travel.

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Operational Preparedness: Responding to Drone Attacks on Aid Work

Practical Guidance: Operational Preparedness
Responding to Drone Attacks on Aid Work

Aid agency responsibilities:

- Aid agencies have a duty of care towards their staff.
- Aid agencies have a duty of care towards the communities they serve.
- Aid agencies should do what they can to maintain vital services.

Response during a drone attack: Guidance for managing staff members and beneficiaries during a drone attack
Aid agencies need to plan how to manage people they are working with in the eventuality of a drone attack. These measures do not guarantee safety, and different risks must be carefully assessed and balanced.

If a crowd is present, encourage people to disperse in as many directions as possible, which will make it harder for a drone operator to follow any individual for a targeted attack.

- Make sure that all staff members are aware of emergency procedures.
- Make sure that staff members have been agreed in advance and work as a team.
- Make sure that staff members responsible for giving instructions to communities are well trained and know what to do during a drone attack.

Ensure access to cover/shelter for aid workers.

- Make sure all staff know where safe areas and places where they can shelter are located.
- Make sure instructions have been given for how to support vulnerable members of your staff and/or the community your agency serves.

Ensure that someone is in a position to monitor the situation and provide updates as it evolves.

- Designate specific people to monitor the situation.
- Train these people and to look out for.
- Establish clear communication lines and information requirement for what monitors should pass on to whoever is in charge or other personnel/community members.

Be prepared to provide emergency care as soon as it is safe to do so.

- Make sure the necessary supplies are available to provide emergency medical first aid and care.
- Remember the possibility of double-top strikes and act appropriately. (These attacks follow after the initial attack and are specifically designed to target first responders.)

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