

# Sudden Threats from the Sky

## Security Measures against Drone Strikes

### Guidance for the Protection of Aid Workers and Aid Operations

May 2025

#### Document summary

This document aims to provide guidance for the protection of aid workers and operations facing drone threats in the Sahel region, where drone strikes on vehicles, at checkpoints, and in populated areas have been reported in areas close to militant activity. It is designed to be used by local aid agencies and their international supporters. It outlines general strategies for dealing with the drone threat, such as risk assessments, how to identify feasible strategies and what to include in an organisation's emergency response plan. It also contains practical guidance for aid workers to support their personal and travel safety, and provides general guidance that organisations and individuals need to adapt to their specific contexts or circumstances.

#### Key messages for personal safety when a drone is spotted:

- Seek cover! Inside a solid structure and lower down are generally safer.
- When hiding, stay still! Don't attract its visual sensors.
- If the drone is very close and no cover is available, run towards cover in a zig-zag pattern to make it harder for the drone to follow you.
- If you are in a group, people should disperse in different directions in zig-zag patterns seeking cover.

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# Introduction

The ever-increasing use of armed drones in conflict is expected to continue, with significant implications for aid agencies. Drones' lower operating costs and the reduced risk to their operators compared to manned aircraft make them an increasingly preferred tool in military operations. A recently published Insecurity Insight report and associated summary documented a marked increase in the use of armed drones since 2023 that directly impacts on aid activities. These trends are particularly evident in regions where armed drones are increasingly deployed in counterterrorism operations. Health services and aid operations serving specific communities in proximity to insurgent activities are particularly frequently affected.

Security risk measures to protect aid operations need to consider the protection of aid workers, aid infrastructure (including vehicles), and aid activities, and the impact of drone use on the communities being served, particularly people's ability to access aid.

All mitigation measures to protect aid operations from the impact of drones need to be tailored to the specific situation of each aid agency and its work. The measures proposed in this document have been compiled for use in the Sahel region in 2025. Context analysis should consider the location or context in which a specific aid organisation is operating. However, this location's circumstances and unique characteristics will change over time, so the mitigation measures proposed in this document will not all be appropriate for all contexts and will have to be adapted to the specific context in which an agency is operating.

**This document covers aid agencies' general preparedness to address drone threats and includes specific guidance on how both agencies and individual aid workers should respond to a drone sighting or attack.**





Based on an examination of past drone-related incidents, the following activities and sites are at risk of being attacked by drones:

- moving vehicles, particularly in areas where there is known militant activity
- checkpoints or roadblocks
- near areas or villages where militant activity has been reported
- near displaced people's settlements
- markets or fuel depots
- where care is being provided to injured people, which may be the target for secondary drone strikes (which are known as "double-tap" attacks).

Drones also affect aid programmes through fear and stress, and interfere with aid agencies' supply chains through

- surveillance
- intimidation
- electronic threats.

Aid agencies should take these factors into account when managing their supply chains and aid distribution activities.

As a conflict develops and changes, so do the risks to aid organisations. Aid organisations therefore need to be flexible in the planning and implementation of their operations so as to be able to rapidly adapt to these changes when they occur. This includes their plans to deal with drone sightings and strikes.

**! The risk of drone strikes increases during periods of military engagement and increased insurgent activities.**

**! While drones are usually used to target vehicles associated with insurgent groups, any vehicles in zones where insurgents are active are at risk of being mistaken for insurgents' vehicles.**

**! Negative stories and false allegations on social media may increase the risk of aid organisations being perceived as supporting a targeted insurgent group.**



### Mitigation measures

A mitigation measure is an action or strategy designed to reduce or minimise the negative impacts of a risk, threat, or harmful event.

These measures can be implemented to increase the safety and protection of individual workers, infrastructure, humanitarian operations and supplies, and communities. Mitigation measures need to be designed to respond to the specific threats your agency and the services it provides are facing.

**! Remember:** Mitigation measures should be selected based on the level of risk, the level of vulnerability and the criticality of a particular service. They need to be attainable and can be developed over time as aid organisations' understanding of the context in which they are operating develops.

### Challenges posed by drones

The use of drones poses many challenges. Often different risks need to be weighed against each other, and managers and individuals will have to take difficult decisions to determine the best course of action. Specific drone-related challenges are discussed below.

#### **There is little warning of a drone attack/strike.**

Some drones are silent, and most are able to move very rapidly, which limits the effectiveness of early warning systems.

#### **Risks from armed drones are difficult to determine.**

- Some drones can operate autonomously and self-select targets because they have been pre-programmed to recognise specific images – but there is usually no information on which images drones are pre-programmed to recognise and then attack.
- Some drones are remotely controlled – making it difficult to be in contact with the operator, who may be hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away.
- Drone operators may be instructed and trained to respect the distinction between humanitarian and combat actors, but there is no way of knowing if this is the case.
- Drone operators may be poorly trained and may find it difficult to distinguish between civilian and military targets.
- Drone operators may be instructed to target a civilian organisation because of what the operators' commanders believe the organisation is doing or if they don't like what it is actually doing.
- Armed drones can carry different types of weapons, which means the blast radius of strikes can be small or large.
- Some explosives used in drone strikes have wide-area effects and therefore can cause more damage and destruction than just to the intended target.



### **Flexible adaption to circumstances is vital.**

Drone technology is changing very quickly and the risk environment is therefore constantly changing, requiring the constant adjustment and updating of measures to mitigate drone-related risks.

### **Action is needed to avoid misunderstandings and unwanted attention.**

Because drone operators identify a target from remote positions, targets can be wrongly identified. To mitigate this risk, the following needs to be done:

- Ensure that local authorities and communities understand the organisation's mission in order to reduce the risk of its staff and infrastructure being misidentified as a target.
- If possible, inform conflict parties/groups and local military/political leaders of the reasons for your agency's presence and activities in the area in which you operate.
- Don't use drones in your agency's operations and activities because this may lead to confusion or suspicion among armed actors.



## Several steps can be taken at different levels to protect aid operations against drones.

- Provide advice to staff on how they can protect themselves and their families from drone attacks both at and outside work.
- Put in place measures that protect your organisation's infrastructure and activities from drone attacks (such as planned movements or direct contact with the communities you are supporting).
- Put in place measures to maintain your organisation's ability to keep working in the aftermath of a drone strike.
- Consider the context in which your organisation is working, its resources, and the support that is available when you are deciding on strategies and mitigation measures to deal with drone attacks.

! Multi-step implementation plans will help to put workable, properly functioning policies for dealing with drone attacks in place.

This document provides further ways to help you develop strategies to protect your agency's staff members, infrastructure, and activities from drone strikes, and provides specific guidance on road travel and personal safety both outside and inside buildings.

## Measures to protect staff, critical infrastructure and activities

### Getting started: Carry out a risk assessment of your agency's operating area.

- Identify and map areas where drone strikes are more likely (e.g. areas or villages where insurgent activities are known to occur, roads travelled by armed groups, military or insurgent installations (e.g. checkpoints), or contested areas).
- As far as possible, identify the movement patterns of both state and non-state armed actors in order to avoid being caught up in a drone strike aimed at them. You may need to engage with other actors (such as local networks or UN agencies) for additional information, so ensure you have the contact numbers of these actors.
- Think about the visibility of your operations (including teams travelling from one area to another). If you are operating in areas with known militant activity or using vehicles or buildings that resemble military or militant vehicles or infrastructure, this may place your staff, vehicles or infrastructure at an increased risk of being misidentified as the target for a drone strike.
- Identify specific points where your operations or staff may be exposed to the risk of drone strikes.



## Identify and implement feasible measures to prevent drone strikes or mitigate their effects.

- **Shelter and protection:** Identify areas where staff can shelter during a drone attack, such as solid structures and underground spaces, including safe areas along a planned travel route where teams could shelter if they are attacked.
- **Disperse your staff and supplies:** Avoid concentrating staff, supplies or vehicles in a single location. Try to spread your staff and assets as much as possible in order to minimise the impact if a strike does occur.
- **Movement planning:** Think about how your agency's teams travel, and avoid predictable travel patterns by varying routes, days, and times of travel. Minimise the time staff spend in locations where drones have been spotted or where insurgent activity has been reported.
- **The visibility of your organisation's activities:** Reduce the size of crowds gathering during activities by delivering aid to small groups of people at different times rather than all at once to large crowds. Decide whether vehicles should be identifiable (by using agency logos, etc.) or whether it is better to blend them in with civilian traffic. Avoid nighttime activities or conducting activities at times of low visibility (e.g. at dusk).
- **Routines or activities that could be misinterpreted when watched from above by a drone operator:** Avoid routines or activities that can be misinterpreted by trying to imagine what a distant drone operator may be seeing and how they will interpret it. When appropriate, announce your activities to relevant authorities and ensure that these activities are easily identifiable (e.g. by holding them outside, and by doing exactly what you've said you would do).

## Developing policies and procedures

### Emergency response plan

- **Easy-to-do vs critical actions:** Identify measures that can be immediately implemented (such as training staff and developing communication plans) versus those that require external support (such as building and/or securing safe shelters).
- **Staff awareness:** Educate and train your staff on what to do in case of a drone sighting or attack, what actions to take, and how to communicate warnings quickly. Ensure that staff know and have practised response plans, and have received training in emergency first aid.
- **Communication methods:** Decide which communication methods your teams will use. Establish regular schedules for reporting at specific times, and adapt them to the threat level (the higher the threat level, the more frequent reporting should occur). Develop back-up plans if these systems are disrupted or fail.
- **First aid kits:** Ensure that your teams are provided with well-stocked first aid kits and ensure that vehicles are properly maintained and staff members are in good health before they are required to travel in a high-risk area.



## Protocols

Develop protocols for the implementation of mitigation measures to address the drone-related risks/vulnerabilities you have identified in your operating area/s.

### Identify individuals in charge of:

- monitoring the situation in general and during a drone attack
- communication – who informs whom of which specific events/situations, and the communication method they should use (mobile phones, two-way radios, face-to-face)
- crowd control – who ensures that people disperse
- first aid – who ensures that those with serious injuries receive treatment.

## Communications

! Don't set off on an activity without communication devices and protocols for how to communicate.

- Ensure access to appropriate communication tools for anyone travelling who is required to communicate.
- If possible, put a secondary means of communication in place in case the primary means is lost, damaged or compromised.
- Choose communication systems carefully. Assess the risk and value of different communication technologies. Get advice from other aid agencies on which communication devices they use and why they use them.
- Be aware of the risks of communications being intercepted, being used by drone operators to identify targets, or jammed prior to a drone attack.

### Communication tools

- Choose reliable communication systems.
- Choose communication systems that are or can be adapted to the environment and context in which your agency operates.
- The use of mobile phones, satellite phones, and radios can be monitored, and can be used for gathering intelligence and identifying targets for drone attacks.
- Aid organisations' use of the wrong technology can cause aid vehicles to be wrongly identified as forming part of an insurgent activity.
- Consider the pros and cons of antennas on vehicles. They can improve communications, but may increase the risk of vehicles being mistaken for military vehicles and attacked.

### Communication protocols

- Use a regular check-in protocol.



## Training

Training is critical to ensuring that people know what to do in crisis situations. If people have practised how to react to a drone attack, they are more likely to do the right thing when under the extremely high stress of a real attack.

- The essential principle for effective training is “Practise, practise, practise”.
- Don’t just talk to and lecture staff; get them to repeatedly practise what they should do in the event of a drone sighting or attack.
- Discuss possible scenarios as a group.
- Encourage staff members to be actively involved in thinking through, discussing, and dealing with the issues that might arise from a drone sighting or attack.
- Play out possible scenarios with different individuals taking different roles so that everyone knows what to do.
- Review incidents and planning sessions/exercises to identify and act on lessons learned and adapt plans accordingly.

### **The value of thorough training:**

- Everyone knows the protocols and procedures they have to follow.
- Everyone knows their role and what to do.
- Everyone knows where shelter areas are situated and what to look for when seeking shelter.
- Staff feel supported and cared for.
- The agency is much more likely to experience less disruption from a drone attack if its staff are properly trained.

## Early warning systems

Early warning systems may provide the additional few minutes of warning that can be very important in saving lives. Currently, no effective or reliable early warning systems are available to warn of a drone’s presence/approach; however, some methods that can be tried are listed below.

- Use binoculars to monitor the sky and listen for the sound of drone motors (this may be easier at night). However, drones are becoming increasingly quiet. The sound of a drone means that it is only a few hundred metres away.
- Be aware of warning signs that drone attacks may occur such as increased military activity in the area, unexplained failures of GPS coordinates and/or radio/communications jamming.
- Consider building a network of “human spotters” further away from your agency’s operations who send out warnings when a drone has been spotted. Think about effective ways of communicating with these spotters (e.g. mobile phones or two-way radios/walkie-talkies), especially because some communication methods may be jammed before an attack.



- Assign a person to monitor the area (land and sky) for any visible or audible signs of a drone's presence. Provide detailed guidance on potential distractions that will limit their ability to do this, such as playing music, which will prevent them from hearing a drone, and being in a room with only one window, which will prevent them from seeing the whole area.

## **Equitable risk sharing: what to ask from your partners**

Whenever feasible, reach out to your INGO or UN partners for training on security-related capacity-building of the same kind that is provided to their own staff, in order to equalise all aid organisations' capacity to manage risks and security, encourage good practice, and reduce risks caused by lack of information or experience among agency personnel who are responsible for security risk management.

## **Using humanitarian diplomacy and deconfliction to avoid being targeted**

Deconfliction is the process of avoiding conflict or removing potential conflicts between different parties or situations.

Humanitarian diplomacy and deconfliction can help to protect aid operations from drone attacks by ensuring that humanitarian actors are recognised as neutral and protected entities. Through diplomatic engagement with all the parties to the conflict in the country in which your agency is operating, humanitarian organisations can negotiate safe access, clarify their mission, and reduce the risk of being mistakenly targeted by drone attacks. Deconfliction mechanisms, such as pre-notifying conflict actors of the movements of aid agency staff and vehicles and coordinating your activities with these actors when it is appropriate, help to distinguish aid operations from combat activities, minimising the likelihood of misidentification.

However, even though they may face heightened risks, local partners and civil society organisations (CSOs) are often unable to negotiate with conflict parties to ensure humanitarian access to the communities they support. They can seek support from the UN and other coordination mechanisms to carry out these negotiations and enhance their security.

You can use the capacities of and trust placed in large humanitarian organisations to establish contacts and facilitate negotiations.

### **Some key humanitarian actors include the following:**

- The United Nations (UN) can engage at the highest diplomatic levels and negotiate broad agreements with states and armed actors to establish humanitarian corridors and put deconfliction mechanisms in place.
- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) can act as a neutral intermediary and conduct confidential dialogues with all conflict parties to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of the humanitarian space.
- International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) can coordinate operational-level deconfliction measures by engaging with local authorities, military actors, and other stakeholders to secure safe access for the delivery and distribution of aid.
- Local partners and CSOs can play a crucial role in grassroots-level negotiations by leveraging their deep community ties to facilitate negotiations, build trust, and relay critical security information.



The following pages provide **ractical guidance focuses on people's personal safety when spotting a drone when they are outside (i.e. not in a building), and what to do inside a building during a drone attack.** It provides guidance on how to manage crowds of people if a drone attack hits an aid operation and how to approach drone debris. The travel guidance provides general guidance on how to deal with the threat of a drone attack, because travel in a vehicle or a convoy of vehicles increases the risk of being affected by drone strikes.

Each guidance is also available as individual documents:

## 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 head down is safer than outside and trying to run.
- Look for low walls and cover between you and the drone.
- When hiding, stay still or crouch. Don't alert 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 motorcycle and seek shelter.	Don't try to outrun 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 outrun 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-wall 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 in the ground (because explosives spread upwards (i.e. '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 your personal safety if you are inside a building during a drone attack:**

- Seek cover (ideally) when low 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 structural 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.
Keep away from windows, but if it is safe to do so, close curtains and shutters or add barriers.	Don't position yourself near windows or other openings to the outside.
If a space is regularly used to shelter people, cover windows with blast 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.

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

**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 checkpoints.
- Perils and areas of military operations and insurgent activity increase the risk of drone attacks.
- An important challenge:
  - "Is safer to identify vehicle 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 risk 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 attacks 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 organization'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 attacks.
  - 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 checkpoints 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.

## 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 safe services.

**Responses 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 communication methods have been agreed in advance and work as intended.
- 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 when to look out for.
- Establish clear communication lines and information requirements for what monitors should pass on to wherever it is in charge of 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 care.
- Rehearse the possibility of double-tap strikes and act appropriately. (These attacks follow after the initial attack and are specifically designed to target first responders.)

# A. 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 two wall cover between you and the drone.
- When hiding, stay still! Lie flat! Don't attract the drone's visual sensors by moving.
- If no cover is available and the drone is close, run in a zig-zag 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.	<b>Don't try to outrun a drone. Drones travel faster than humans. Running may highlight yourself as something suspicious or a potential target.</b>
Get off a motorbike and seek shelter.	<b>Don't try to outdrive the drone: it is not possible to drive faster than a drone flies.</b>
Get out of a vehicle and seek shelter.	<b>Don't try to outdrive the drone: it is not possible to drive faster than a drone flies.</b>
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-wall cover", i.e. where at least two solid walls separate you from the potential impact zone of a drone strike.	<b>Don't run through an open field or in the middle of a road.</b>
If no solid structure is nearby, take shelter, if possible, in a dip/fold in the ground (because explosions spread upwards in a "V" shape and not downwards).	<b>Don't stay close to any potential target.</b>

# A. Practical Guidance: Personal Safety Outside When a Drone is Spotted



If a drone is very close, move to shelter by running in zig-zags, changing direction as often as possible.	<b>If a drone is very close, go to the nearest shelter, but don't run in a straight line.</b>
Once you are away from the immediate site where the drone was spotted, move slowly and deliberately, stay under trees or in shade, and avoid panicky or jerky movements.	<b>Don't wave to get the attention of friendly people for help. Movement attracts a drone's visual sensors.</b>
If appropriate and possible, lie flat, ideally under something that will screen your body from the drone's camera.	<b>If possible, don't expose your body. Advanced drones can detect the heat of your body.</b>

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# B. Practical Guidance: Personal Safety Inside a Building During a Drone Attack



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

## B. Practical Guidance: Personal Safety Inside a Building During a Drone Attack



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### **! 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 communication methods have been agreed in advance and work as intended.
- 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 what 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 care.
- Remember the possibility of double-tap strikes and act appropriately. (These attacks follow after the initial attack and are specifically designed to target first responders.)



## Guidance

### **A drone's kill zone is seven metres or more.**

- Keep people at a safe distance from any landed drone.

### **Do not touch any munition or any part of the munition.**

- It may still detonate or may be booby trapped to detonate if it is touched.

### **Be aware that the drone operator may still be watching with the drone's camera.**

- The drone may still detonate the munition if someone approaches the drone.

### **Do not approach a drone or debris from the side the drone's camera is facing.**

If the camera appears to be intact, do not let the operator see that someone is approaching.

### **Mark routes to the drone debris or unexploded munition (UXO).**

- If possible, identify safe routes to the drone and only allow trained people to approach it.

### **Be aware of the possibility of "blinds" (i.e. munitions that fail to detonate).**

- This may also include drones that fail to explode, or which get stuck in trees, electricity wires, etc.

### **Be aware of potential secondary hazards.**

- These include collapsing walls, glass splinters or fires.

### **Be aware of the possibility of double-tap drone attacks**

- These attacks follow after the initial attack and are specifically designed to target first responders.

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# 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.

# D. Practical Guidance: Personal Safety

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



### **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 document has been 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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