

THE SKY IS NO LONGER NEUTRAL

What the Drone Threat Means for Facilities, Events, and Critical Infrastructure

Exploring the evolving aerial security landscape and its implications for protecting vital assets, public gatherings, and essential services in a connected world.



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THE ESCALATING DRONE THREAT

Unauthorized Drone Incursions Highlight Profound Vulnerabilities

- **AIRPORT CLOSURES:** January 2026, El Paso International Airport closed due to an unauthorized drone, suspending flight operations.
- **STADIUM DISRUPTIONS:** During the 2024 NFL season, an unauthorized drone over M&T Bank Stadium disrupted a playoff game.
- **CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE BREACHES:** Christmas Eve 2024, mysterious drones hovered over sensitive infrastructure in Louisiana.
- **INADEQUATE RESPONSE:** Late 2024 New Jersey drone sightings revealed profound inadequacy in detecting and responding to drone activity.



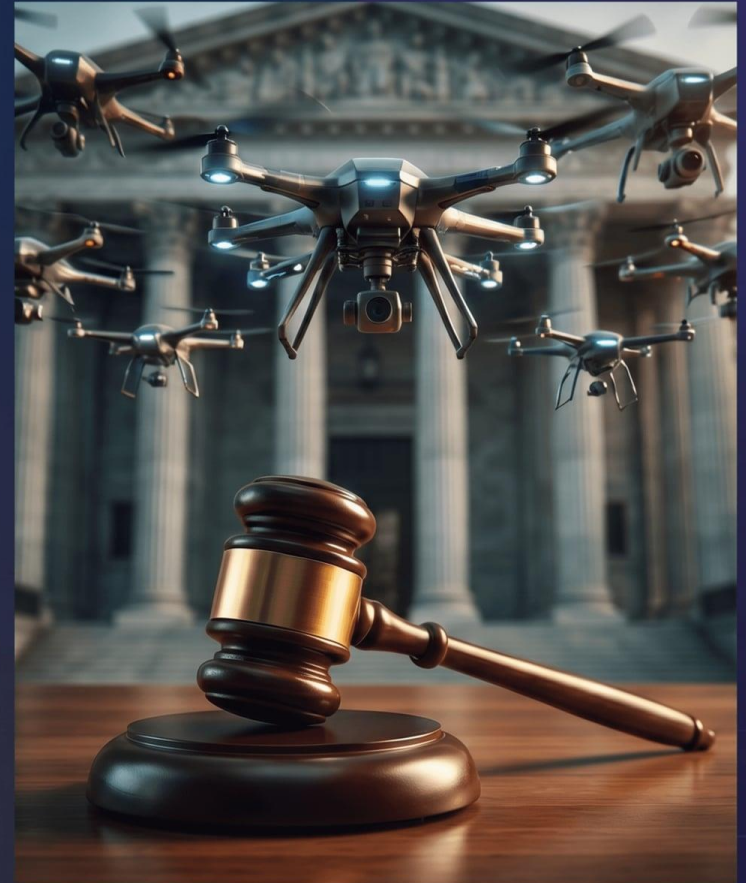
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LEGAL FRAMEWORK LAGGING BEHIND

The Threat Has Outpaced the Authority to Respond Effectively

- **EXCLUSIVE FEDERAL AUTHORITY:** Historically, only federal government and narrow authorized entities could neutralize unauthorized drones.
- **LIMITED FEDERAL ACTION:** Of 121,000 requests for federal counter-drone support (2018-2025), only 77 were approved (less than 0.1%).
- **MULTIPLIED THREATS:** Drone threats multiplied without reference to authorization, highlighting structural inadequacy of the system.
- **PRIVATE SECTOR HELPLESSNESS:** Port authorities, power plants, and event organizers were functionally helpless against drone threats until recently.



THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Drone Incursions and Disruptions Are Systemic and Growing

1. **NFL DRONE INCURSIONS:** Over 2,000 drone incursions per season for the past three years, growing from 67 in 2018 to 2,845 in 2023.
2. **PRISON CONTRABAND DELIVERY:** Drones systematically deliver drugs, cell phones, and weapons into correctional facilities.
3. **DISRUPTION, NOT DESTRUCTION:** Drones affect facilities by disruption (airport suspension, stadium evacuation), not necessarily physical destruction.
4. **ASYMMETRIC THREAT:** Cheap for attackers, expensive for defenders; drone disruption is attractive to criminal opportunists and state-sponsored adversaries.



SHIFTING LEGAL LANDSCAPE

New Legislation Extends Counter-Drone Authority Beyond Federal Control

- **SAFER SKIES ACT (FY2026 NDAA):** Extends drone mitigation authority to state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement agencies.
- **CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE COUNTER-UAS ACT:** Proposed legislation to extend limited counter-UAS authority directly to private operators of high-risk facilities.
- **CONGRESSIONAL CONSENSUS:** Growing recognition that the legal framework has lagged so far behind the operational threat.
- **EMPOWERING LOCAL RESPONSE:** Moving beyond exclusive federal authority to enable more immediate and localized action against drone threats.



CISA GUIDANCE ARCHITECTURE

Comprehensive Federal Guidance for UAS Threat Management

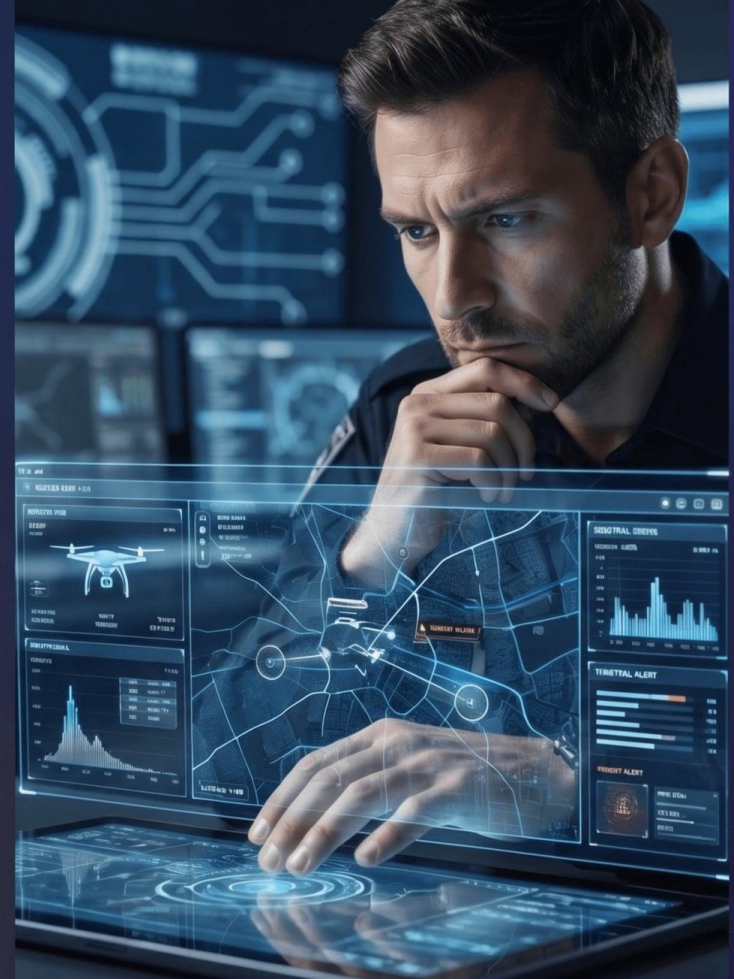
- **“BE AIR AWARE” CAMPAIGN:** November 2025, CISA released three new guidance documents for critical infrastructure operators on UAS threat management.
- **THREE-STAGE FRAMEWORK:** Establishes requirements for risk assessment, site-appropriate detection technology selection, and integration into existing security plans.
- **DETECTION TECHNOLOGY:** Includes radio frequency, radar systems, and optical sensor arrays for identifying and tracking drones.
- **INTEGRATION IS KEY:** Emphasizes embedding drone detection into existing security and emergency response plans, not as a standalone system.



THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN C-UAS

Trained Professionals Are Critical for Effective Drone Threat Response

- **OBLIGATION TO RESPOND:** A sensor detecting a threat creates an obligation to respond; quality of response depends on trained human professionals.
- **BEYOND DETECTION:** Sensor systems don't provide operational planning, trained personnel, or exercised response procedures.
- **CONTEXTUAL JUDGMENT:** Humans assess threat credibility, interpret sensor data, and execute proportionate actions.
- **OPERATIONAL PLANNING:** Whether law enforcement is pre-coordinated or operations adjusted, is a function of human planning and training.

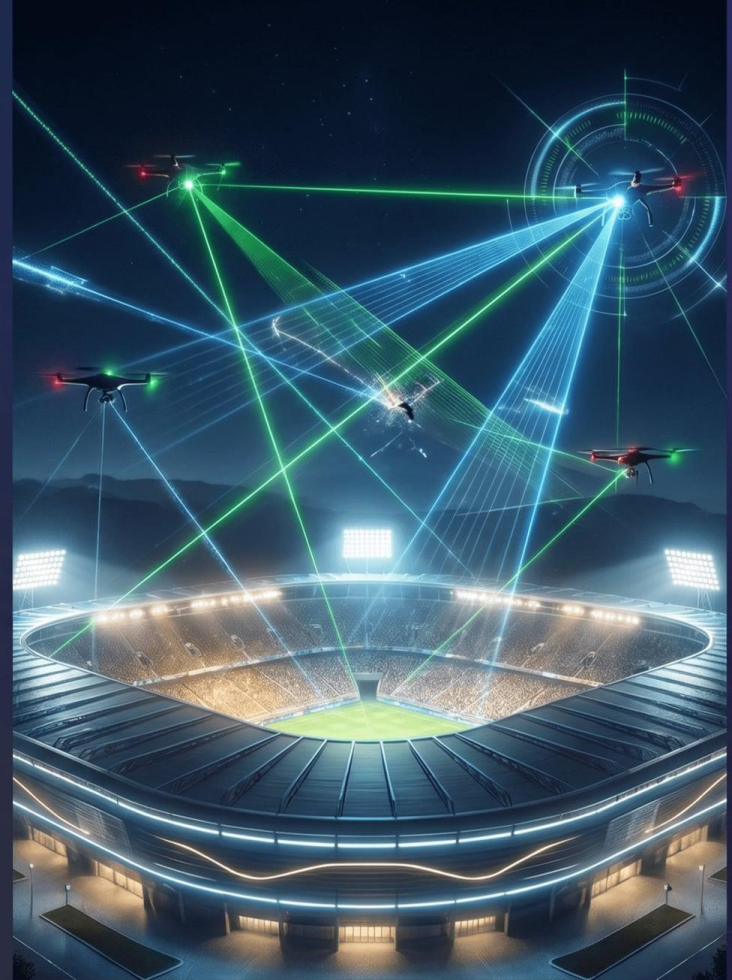


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THE WORLD CUP AS A SECURITY LABORATORY

Field-Testing New Counter-Drone Architecture at Scale

- **2026 FIFA WORLD CUP:** Eleven host cities and 64 matches serve as a crucible for testing the United States' new counter-drone architecture.
- **C-UAS GRANT PROGRAM:** \$250 million awarded to host states in FY2026, acknowledging that large-venue security now has a critical airspace dimension.
- **OPERATIONAL TEMPLATE:** National Guard exercises at host venues simulate drone attacks to test detection infrastructure and multi-agency coordination.
- **MEASURABLE OUTCOMES:** Performance metrics track system usage, detections, and investigations, treating C-UAS as a permanent operational function.



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THE PRIVATE SECTOR GAP

Procurement vs. Planning: The Path to Genuine Resilience

- **MARKET GROWTH:** Global counter-drone market projected to exceed \$30.5 billion by 2034, growing at nearly 30% CAGR.
- **PROCUREMENT VS. PLANNING:** Rapidly expanding market creates conditions where procurement substitutes for planning, and appearance for substance.
- **ASYMMETRY OF COST-IMPACT:** Easier to buy/operate a drone than legally stop one; cheap for attacker, expensive for defender.
- **UNMODELED EXPOSURE:** Facilities without genuine counter-drone operational capability accept exposure they may not have fully modeled.



PATH TO GENUINE RESILIENCE

Combining Infrastructure Strategy with Trained Human Professionals

- **CISA “HARDEN, OBSCURE, PERIMETER” STRATEGY:** Concealing or hardening critical assets; restricting access; identifying UAS launch/landing zones.
- **TRAINED HUMAN PROFESSIONALS:** Essential for translating sensor data into operational decisions and coordinating multi-agency response.
- **UPDATED ASSESSMENTS:** Facility security assessments must incorporate UAS threat scenarios; event security plans must address airspace.
- **OPERATIONAL DOMAIN:** Transition from treating the sky as neutral to treating it as an active, managed operational domain.



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CONCLUSION

The Imperative for Integrated Counter-Drone Strategies

- **ROBUST BTAM PROGRAMS:** Well-funded and staffed with trained professionals for early intervention and threat management.
- **HUMAN SECURITY PERSONNEL:** Embedded in the community with relational access to observe what technology cannot detect.
- **ANONYMOUS REPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE:** Empowering staff and students to surface concerning behavior before it escalates.
- **TECHNOLOGY IN PROPER ROLE:** AI detection, video analytics, and emergency communications integrated with human professionals.

