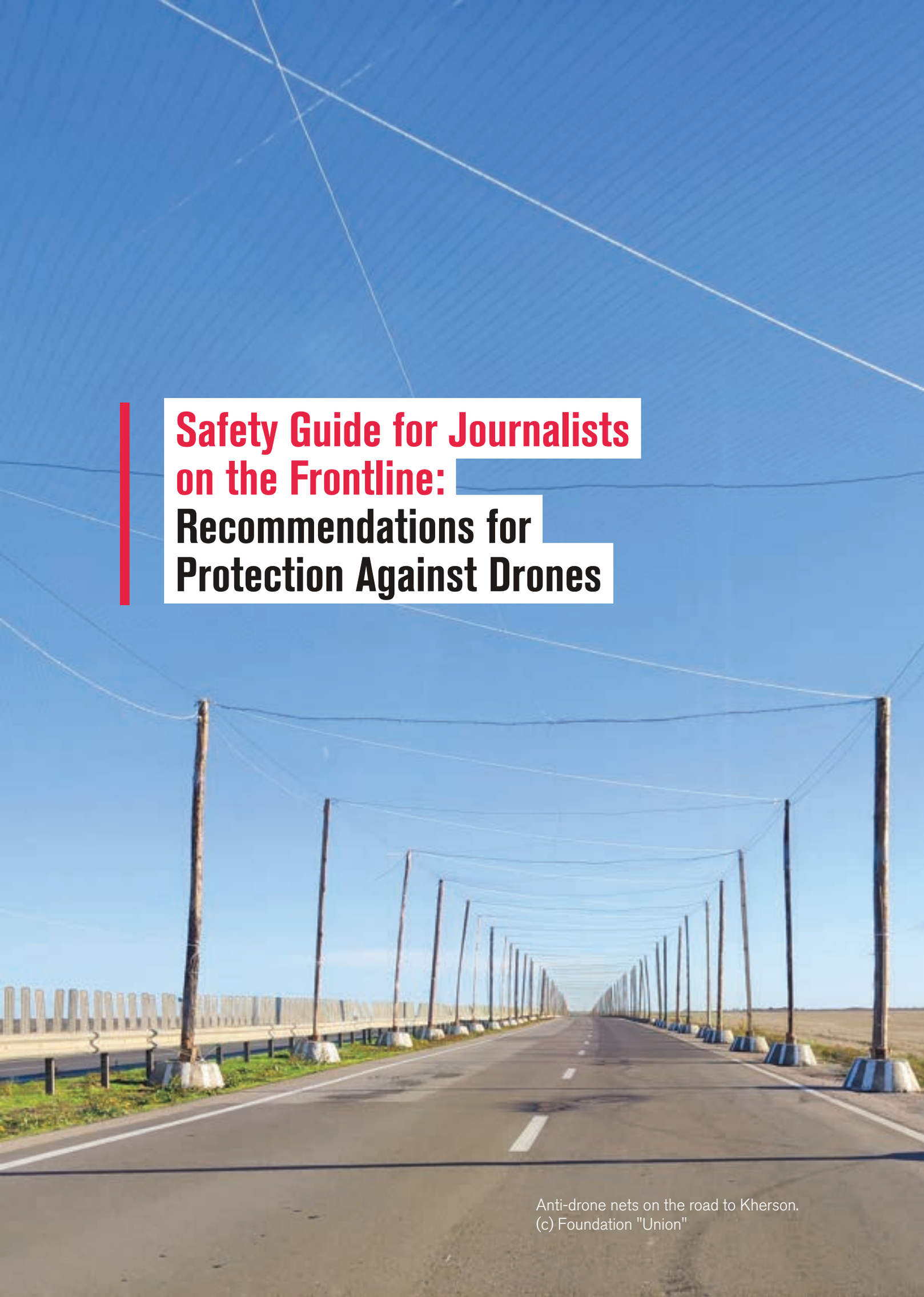
Safety Guide for Journalists on the Frontline: Recommendations for Protection Against Drones



Anti-drone nets on the road to Kherson.
(c) Foundation "Union"

These recommendations are intended for journalists and other media professionals whose work requires their presence in frontline areas of Ukraine. While in 2022 artillery posed the primary threat, in 2026, the battlefield has changed fundamentally. Unmanned systems have become the dominant source of lethal danger. The territory commonly referred to as the **"kill zone"** — a strip 10–20 kilometres from the front line — has turned into an area of total aerial control, where any moving object may be instantly identified and attacked by unmanned aerial vehicles (known as UAVs or drones).

Unlike Shahed drones (also known as Geran drones), which fly according to pre-programmed GPS coordinates, this guide primarily addresses small drones operated by Russian pilots in real time, often using virtual reality goggles. These are highly manoeuvrable, high-speed quadcopters or small aircraft capable of altering their trajectory, pursuing moving targets and flying into windows or hatches before detonation.

This document is effective as of March 2026.

Warning! These recommendations cannot guarantee 100% safety. They are designed to minimise risks; however, working in frontline areas is always extremely dangerous. No instruction, body armour or electronic device can provide absolute protection. Your key survival factors are vigilance, critical thinking and the ability to adapt to the situation in which you find yourself.

List of Abbreviations Used Below:

- UAV — Unmanned Aerial Vehicle.
- FPV — First Person View.
- EW — Electronic Warfare.
- IFAK — Individual First Aid Kit.
- RMA — Regional Military Administration.

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These recommendations are not intended to eliminate risks entirely — which is impossible in wartime conditions — but to significantly reduce them through informed decision-making and heightened situational awareness. They should be integrated into a broader risk management approach that includes training, appropriate personal protective equipment and thorough preparation.

SECTION 1

TYPES OF DRONES

Understanding the types of UAVs allows you to immediately assess the time available for reaction and the nature of the threat.

Multirotor UAVs (often quadcopters)

These are the most common drones used at the tactical level. They operate at short distances from the operator, who controls the UAV via goggles or monitor screens.

Common characteristics: Four (or more) rotors; capable of hovering; vertical take-off and landing; high manoeuvrability (can fly into windows, under roof overhangs, etc.).

COMMERCIAL DRONES

Popular models: DJI Mavic, Matrice, Autel. Used for reconnaissance, adjusting fire and dropping grenades/mines from high altitudes. They can "hover" in the air while waiting for the right moment to attack.

- **Range:** 8–15 km.
- **Speed:** up to 75 km/h.
- **Flight duration:** 30–55 minutes.
- **Operating altitude:** 50–300 metres.
- **Sound:** A characteristic high-frequency buzzing similar to bees or insects.

FPV DRONES

These are high-speed kamikaze drones. The entire drone functions as a munition. They attack at high speed through direct impact. Used against both static and moving targets.

- **Range:** 5-25 km (standard), up to 40–50 km for models with fibre-optic cables and/or repeater drones or "mother drones".
- **Speed:** 80–150 km/h, sometimes up to 200 km/h.
- **Flight duration:** 10–35 minutes.
- **Operating altitude:** 5–50 metres.
- **Sound:** A high-pitched, piercing whine or whistle resembling a dental drill.

SECTION 1

TYPES OF DRONES

Understanding the types of UAVs allows you to immediately assess the time available for reaction and the nature of the threat.

Fixed-Wing Strike UAVs

These are long-range guided munitions equipped with wings.

Common characteristics: High speed; straight flight or gradual dive; capable of loitering in a designated area while searching for a target.

MOLNIYA

These low-cost plywood kamikaze aircraft are controlled by an operator via FPV goggles and have an extended range. They are primarily used to strike static targets.

- **Range:** 30–60 km for basic models.
- **Speed:** 60–80 km/h.
- **Flight duration:** up to 40 minutes.
- **Operating altitude:** 50–500 metres.
- **Sound:** Electric motor hum, similar to a large fan or a distant chainsaw.

LANCET

These drones have distinctive X-shaped wings. They most often target military equipment and civilian vehicles. They attack from high altitude, almost silently, becoming noticeable only in the final moments before impact.

- **Range:** up to 80 km.
- **Speed:** up to 300 km/h.
- **Flight duration:** up to 60 minutes.
- **Operating altitude:** usually up to 1–2 km.
- **Sound:** Practically inaudible due to high altitude; becomes audible only during the dive.

Reconnaissance UAVs

These fixed-wing UAVs fly at high altitude and are used for reconnaissance and adjusting fire.

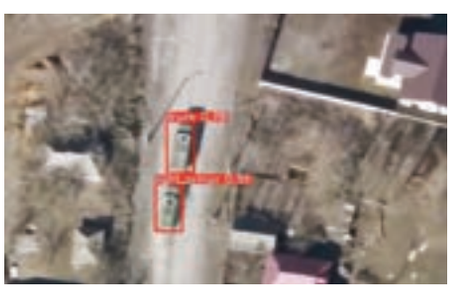
Common characteristics: Long operational range; extended endurance. Visually, they resemble small aircrafts high in the sky. They do not attack directly, but their presence usually indicates artillery fire or an FPV strike within minutes. Common models: Zala, Supercam, Orlan-10.

- **Range:** 50–300 km.
- **Speed:** 80–150 km/h.
- **Flight duration:** 2–18 hours.
- **Operating altitude:** up to 5 km.
- **Sound:** Monotonous lawnmower-like rattling high in the sky.

Modern Drone Modifications

FIBRE-OPTIC CABLE DRONES

Externally, they resemble FPV drones but are controlled via a thin fibre-optic cable that unwinds behind them. They can only be detected visually (by spotting the thin filament in the air) or by sound. Range: up to 50 km. Speed and manoeuvrability: similar to standard FPV drones. Primary danger: They are not detected by drone detectors, and electronic warfare (EW) systems are ineffective against them.



AI-ENABLED DRONES (MACHINE VISION)

Autonomous target-lock features allow this drone to complete its attack independently during the final phase, even if communication is lost. The drone autonomously recognises the silhouettes of people and vehicles.

HEAVY NIGHT BOMBER MULTIROTORS

These large multi-motor drones operate mainly at night using thermal imaging. They drop heavy munitions and produce a characteristic low, heavy hum audible from a distance.

MOTHER DRONES

These large fixed-wing aircraft or multirotor drones carry several smaller FPV drones and release them closer to the target. This significantly extends the operational range of FPV drones.

SECTION 2

HOW DRONES SELECT TARGETS

Understanding how Russian drone operators select targets may save your life.

What Makes a Target "Attractive"

Russian military pilot controlling drone with FPV goggles

This section outlines the types of targets that receive increased attention and the factors that heighten their vulnerability.

It analyses how visibility, movement parameters and environmental conditions increase the risk of detection and engagement by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE RISK OF DRONE ATTACK:

- **Time of day:** Visibility is better during daylight hours; therefore more attacks occur during the day. However, drones equipped with thermal imaging are active at night.
- **Weather conditions:** The risk is higher in clear weather. Fog, rain, snow and strong wind significantly complicate drone operations.
- **Route repetition:** If you travel the same route at the same time every day, operators will memorise this pattern.
- **Predictability:** Logical routes (main roads, shortest paths) are monitored by drones more frequently.
- **Isolation:** A lone person or vehicle in open terrain is a more noticeable target.
- **Contrast:** A white vehicle on dark asphalt or a person on an open road is more visible.
- **Thermal signatures:** At night, running engines, generators, lights in buildings and the "glow" of human bodies on thermal imaging screens attract increased attention.

A factor beyond your control — yet one that may result in an indiscriminate attack — is the moment when a Russian drone's battery is running low. When this happens, if the drone has failed to locate a priority target, the operator may strike any person or object within view.

HIGH-PRIORITY TARGETS THAT ATTRACT GREATER ATTENTION:

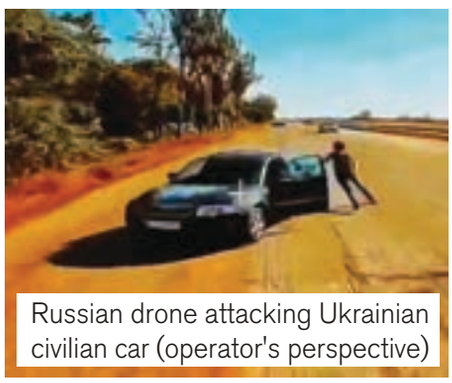
1. Military equipment and vehicles.
2. Pickup trucks, SUVs and minibuses.
3. Groups of people and clusters of vehicles.
4. Individuals wearing camouflage or tactical clothing.
5. Moving objects.
6. People near strategic facilities.

Common Attack Tactics and Traps

Russian forces employ various tactics and traps to increase civilian casualties.

SYSTEMATIC DRONE ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS (also referred to as a "human safari")

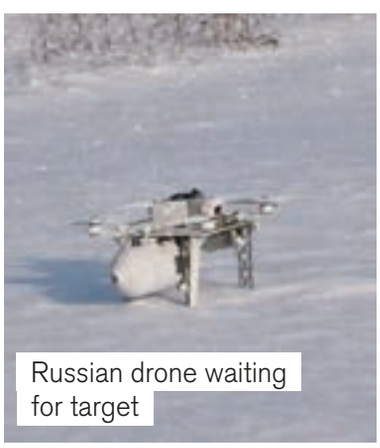
Deliberate drone attacks targeting pedestrians, cyclists, volunteers and journalists. The objective is to terrorise and demoralise the local population.



Russian drone attacking Ukrainian civilian car (operator's perspective)

TRAINING GROUND

Frontline settlements are used by Russian forces as training grounds. The objective is to train new personnel using live moving targets (people and vehicles). Drone operators practise target identification and artillery or mortar coordination, while artillery and mortar crews train to strike the "probable enemy" using received coordinates.



Russian drone waiting for target

"DOUBLE TAP" STRIKES

After an initial strike (by drone or artillery), Russian forces pause for 10–40 minutes, waiting for rescuers, medical personnel and journalists to arrive. Once people gather at the scene, a second strike is carried out.

AMBUSHES AND "WAITING DRONES"

Drones may land on rooftops, trees or roads and enter "sleep mode" as their engines switch off. When a target approaches, they reactivate and attack.

METAL CALTROPS ON ROADS

Russian operators drop four-pointed metal spikes onto roads to puncture vehicle tyres. When the vehicle stops, it is attacked by a drone.

Caltrops

LAYING ROAD MINES USING PFM-1 MINES

Russian forces frequently lay mines on roads and streets in populated areas by dropping small, nearly invisible plastic mines PFM-1 (known as "flower petal") from drones.

PFM-1

"HUNTING THE LIGHT"

At night, drones target any light sources — streetlights, vehicle headlights, illuminated windows, etc.

SECTION 3

CLOTHING, IDENTIFICATION AND EQUIPMENT

The correct choice of clothing can reduce your visibility — or, conversely, make you a priority target.

Clothing and Footwear

Do not wear camouflage. In a combat zone, anyone wearing "pixel", "multicam", or even solid "olive drab" or "coyote" may be perceived by a drone operator as military personnel. Reflective elements and shiny accessories should also be avoided, as they may glint in the sun and attract additional attention.

Recommendation: Wear civilian clothing in neutral, non-military colours: dark blue, grey, black, brown, dirty denim. Your clothing should blend into the surroundings. Bright colours (red, yellow) may signal civilian status, but they also significantly increase visibility. Where there are systematic drone attacks on civilians, bright colours will not protect you — they will only attract attention. Clothing should be durable yet comfortable for running and should not restrict movement. Wear closed footwear with sturdy soles.

Materials: Avoid synthetic fabrics that melt (such as polyester). In the event of a thermobaric strike or a vehicle fire, synthetic fabrics melt into the skin, causing severe burns. Choose natural cotton, wool or flame-resistant materials (e.g. Nomex) where possible.

"PRESS" Identification

Although the Geneva Conventions protect journalists who are clearly identified, visible "PRESS" markings in areas of active FPV attacks no longer provide protection. On the contrary, they attract the attention of Russian operators and may make you a priority target.

When operating in the kill zone (0–20 km), it is often safer to remain inconspicuous rather than visibly marked. Blending in with local transport and the civilian population increases the chances of survival. For vehicles, use removable markings (magnetic car signs) that can be quickly removed when entering a dangerous area.

You must carry a press card (worn on a lanyard, under clothing) for identification when interacting with military personnel and law enforcement.

If working in a relatively safe area that remains within drone range, use front-only removable patches (vest, chest sticker). DO NOT mark your back or helmet. Use subdued, non-bright colours.

"PressMark: A Guide for Deciding When to Visibly Identify as a Journalist" by ACOS, available via RSF's resource website:

Essential Equipment

Body armour and helmet: Like "PRESS" markings, they can be both helpful and harmful. On one hand, Level 4 body armour can protect against shrapnel from dropped grenades. On the other hand, a person wearing body armour and a helmet attracts more attention from drone operators, increasing the risk of attack. When using body armour, insert ceramic plates not only at the front and back, but also at the sides.

(c) Philippe Desmazes/AFP

IFAK and tourniquets: A minimum of 2–4 tourniquets is needed per person, and should be kept in rapid-access locations (on body armour, on a belt). Injuries caused by FPV strikes often involve massive bleeding. It is strongly recommended to complete first aid training (and refresh knowledge at least every six months) and to know how to properly apply a tourniquet and use the contents of an IFAK.

Ballistic glasses: Protect the eyes from small fragments, glass and dust.

Drone detector: This is critically important equipment. It must always be switched on and readily accessible while working in a dangerous area. The two types of done detectors — RF and Video-intercept — may be used simultaneously.

Active hearing protection or earplugs: Amplify quiet sounds (such as the approach of a strike drone) while suppressing loud impulses (such as explosions), which may help prevent concussion.

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT:

- Fire extinguisher, kept in vehicles: UAV strikes often result in vehicle fires.
- Offline maps: Mobile internet may be unavailable in frontline communities and GPS signals may be jammed.
- Two-way radios: Mobile communication may be unavailable in frontline communities.
- Torch with red light: This preserves night vision and improves concealment at night.
- Power bank: For powering detectors, radios and phones.
- Multitool or knife.

SECTION 4

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ON THE GROUND

The key safety reflex is to minimise the time spent in open areas and to remain constantly prepared to take immediate evasive action upon detecting an aerial threat.

CORE RULE: Any drone in the sky must be treated as hostile and potentially lethal — and you should assume that you are its target.

Movement on Foot

IN URBAN AND RURAL SETTLEMENTS:

- Move under trees, awnings, balconies, or close to building walls. This limits the drone's viewing angle from above.
- Move along walls on the side opposite the likely Russian positions.
- Use shadows cast by buildings or fences.
- Avoid the centre of roads, open squares, crossroads and long straight streets.
- Remain alert near damaged vehicles and craters along roads — they may be mined with drone-dropped munitions.
- Plan your route so that the distance between potential shelters does not exceed 20–30 metres.
- Maintain spacing in groups: move dispersed, with 10–15 metres between individuals.

IN FIELDS AND OPEN TERRAIN:

- Avoid open spaces as much as possible, especially hills and large open areas.
- If crossing is necessary, do so in short sprints (10–15 seconds) between cover, using your surroundings to help you.
- Move along tree lines, shelter belts and forest edges. Use depressions, ravines and ditches.
- Always have a plan for immediate cover (tree, bush, pit, ditch).

Russian FPV kamikaze drone

ACTIONS UPON DETECTING A DRONE:

You hear a drone but do not see it:

1. Stop and listen (try to determine the direction it's moving in).
2. Assess the distance to shelter.
3. If shelter is more than 20 metres away — move towards it slowly (do not run until you see the drone).
4. If shelter is close — move quickly to it.
5. Keep scanning the sky visually.

You see a drone, but it is NOT heading towards you:

1. Freeze or move slowly towards shelter.
2. Do not look directly at the drone — the human face is highly visible.
3. Avoid sudden movements.
4. Gradually move out of its line of sight.
5. Remain in shelter for 5–10 minutes. Proceed only if no additional drone activity can be identified.

A drone passes nearby:

1. Do not relax — it may turn back and attack if it does not find another target.
2. Continue moving towards shelter.
3. Keep observing the drone.

A drone is flying in your direction:

1. Immediately run towards shelter.
2. If shelter is far — lie down in the nearest depression or ditch.
3. If no cover is nearby — run in a zigzag pattern towards any available shelter.

A drone is hovering above you (e.g. a Mavic drone):

1. Critical situation — a munition drop is likely.
2. Immediately break its direct line of sight (move under a tree, roof or into a building).
3. Run to the nearest overhead cover.

An FPV drone is flying directly at you:

1. You have approximately 3–7 seconds before impact.
2. Make a sharp turn and drop behind cover (tree, pole, embankment).
3. Alternatively, turn sharply and run in a zigzag pattern.
4. Do NOT run straight away from the drone — move laterally.

A drone is pursuing you:

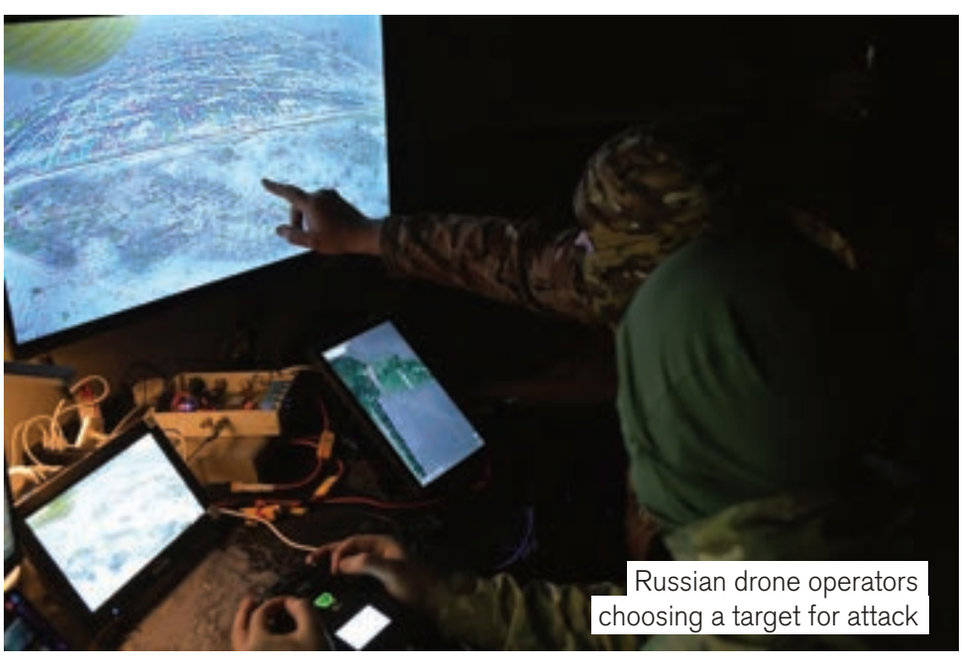
1. Usually FPV, less commonly Mavic-type.
2. Run towards shelter while constantly changing direction.
3. Use obstacles (trees, poles, fences).
4. Turn around building corners.

After an attack (drone missed or struck nearby):

1. Remain in shelter for 10–15 minutes — a second strike may follow.
2. Listen for additional drones.
3. Do not approach or touch drone debris.
4. If a munition has not detonated — move at least 100 metres away and call emergency services (101) or police (102).

Munition drop:

1. There is no time to think.
2. Drop to the ground: face down, hands behind your head, mouth open, legs together on the ground.



Russian drone operators choosing a target for attack

Movement by Vehicle

GENERAL VEHICLE PREPARATION AND DRIVING RULES:

- Avoid white, black or bright-coloured vehicles. Opt for subdued, natural colours (grey, brown).
- A moderately dirty vehicle attracts less attention than a freshly washed one.
- Remove reflective elements and any markings that could resemble military identification.
- Before departure, check local Telegram channels and official military administration channels for current drone activity on your route.
- Keep the drone detector switched on at all times while driving.
- Keep windows slightly open to hear approaching drones.
- Do not play music, so that you can hear an approaching drone.
- Do not fasten seatbelts and unlock doors to enable immediate exit in case of attack.
- Avoid predictable routes; vary departure times.
- In certain extreme situations, temporarily disabling the airbag deployment system may reduce risk to the driver and passengers in a high-threat area. When a vehicle is attacked by a drone — even if the strike is unsuccessful — the blast wave may trigger the airbags. This can cause injury to the driver and passengers who are travelling at high speed (for example, while attempting to evade the drone).

Russian FPV kamikaze drone

A civilian food delivery vehicle damaged by a Russian drone attack. Kherson. March 2026

IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS:

- Never stop in open areas. Stops are permitted only under bridges, dense trees or beside solid building walls.
- Park close to walls or under trees.
- Do not park in the same location daily.
- Avoid stopping near administrative buildings or strategic facilities.
- Proper camouflage may help conceal a parked vehicle for extended periods. HOWEVER, improper camouflage may attract attention and lead to an attack. If you lack proper knowledge of vehicle camouflage, do not attempt it (nets, branches, etc.).

IN FIELDS AND ON HIGHWAYS:

- Maintain spacing: 100–200 metres between vehicles in a convoy.
- Scan the road ahead for traps and "waiting drones". If driving over spikes — do not stop. Continue driving on rims to the nearest safe shelter.

ACTIONS UPON DETECTING A DRONE WHILE DRIVING:

You hear a drone:

1. Do not panic.
2. Depending on the situation, you may increase speed.
3. Look for shelter (trees, bridge, building, hangar).
4. Passengers should monitor visually or via detector to determine direction.

You see an approaching drone:

1. Accelerate to maximum speed.
2. Change direction.
3. Drive towards the nearest shelter.
4. Do not brake sharply — a stationary vehicle is an easier target.

The drone attacks (FPV approaching directly):

1. **If possible and time permits — exit the vehicle and run in different directions towards shelter**.
2. Depending on circumstances, brake sharply, turn or accelerate to disrupt the operator's calculation.
3. If there is no time — brake sharply to allow the drone to overshoot the vehicle, then accelerate sharply or exit the vehicle immediately.

If the vehicle is hit:

1. Exit immediately (a second strike may follow within 5–10 seconds).
2. If time allows, retrieve your backpack/bag, documents and detector.
3. Run to the nearest shelter (within 20 metres).
4. Do not return to the vehicle until drone activity ceases.
5. Wait at least 15 minutes and assess the situation from the shelter.

The drone passes/misses:

1. Depending on the situation, either continue driving to shelter or exit the vehicle.
2. A second attack may follow.

Results of a Russian FPV drone attack on a civilian car. Kharkiv region. January 2026

Interview or Filming Location

Choosing a place for filming or an interview is a matter of survival, as a journalist's status is no longer a form of protection. Life is always more important than a good shot; therefore, safety must be the absolute priority.

LOCATION SELECTION

- **Avoid direct visibility from the sky.** The best place for an interview is an enclosed indoor space, a residential courtyard with dense overhead cover, or a location under broad-canopied trees.
- **Keep away from windows.** If filming takes place inside a building, contributors should be 3–5 metres away from the window. Ideally, choose rooms without windows (corridors, storage rooms) or spaces deeper inside the building.
- **Avoid strategic sites.** Unless required by the story, avoid filming near military equipment, positions, administrative buildings, humanitarian aid distribution points, or critical infrastructure.
- **Choose the right floor.** Avoid rooftops and top floors due to the risk of drone strikes. The preferred options are shelters or mid-level floors (e.g. the second floor).

ORGANISING THE TEAM

- "**Sky watcher**". One team member should continuously scan the horizon and monitor drone detector alerts.
- **Time limits.** Do not remain at one location longer than 10–15 minutes. Any prolonged presence increases the risk of a drone attack.

FILMING THE AFTERMATH OF STRIKES

- Never go to the blast site immediately. Russian forces often wait 15–40 minutes for media and rescue teams to gather before launching a second strike.
- Work as quickly as possible, stay dispersed, and always have an evacuation plan to the nearest shelter.

A Russian fibre-optic FPV drone flying between high-rise buildings in search of a target to attack (operator's perspective). Kramatorsk. October 2025

Safety in Buildings and Static Locations

Being indoors in a combat zone does not guarantee safety, as modern UAVs (especially FPV kamikaze drones) can fly through windows, doors and open hatches.

SELECTING AND PREPARING A BUILDING

- **Priority areas.** The best protection is provided by basements or semi-basements with reinforced concrete slabs, provided there are at least two exits.
- **Storeys.** Avoid top floors. Mid-level floors are generally preferable, as they offer protection from above and allow rapid evacuation.
- **The "two-wall rule".** Effective against blast waves and shrapnel, but it does not protect against a drone flying directly through a window. Choose rooms deeper inside the building, corridors, or bathrooms.
- **Window protection.** Cover windows with thick curtains or blankets to conceal light, thermal silhouettes and movement inside. Tape the glass (to reduce fragmentation). Use OSB boards, plywood or sandbags (at least up to half the window height).

BEHAVIOUR INDOORS

- **Distance from windows.** When inside a room, stay 2–5 metres away from the window. Never look out of windows or step onto balconies if you hear the sound of a drone.
- **Blackout.** At night, maintain complete blackout discipline.
- **Concealing high-value items**. Generators and Starlink terminals are priority targets — avoid using them where possible. If necessary, place them in caponiers (pits) or away from living spaces, using a long Ethernet cable for connection.

ACTIONS DURING AN ATTACK ON A BUILDING

- If an FPV drone enters the room, drop to the floor immediately.
- After an explosion, do not leave shelter for at least 10–15 minutes.
- Do not touch debris: downed or fallen drones may contain remotely detonated munitions, be booby-trapped, or be coated with toxic substances.

A Russian FPV drone hit a private residential building, causing it to catch fire. Donetsk region. February 2026

SECTION 5

Detecting Drones Using Personal Detectors

Personal drone detectors can detect various types of UAVs, but they do not jam drones and do not bring them down.

> **IMPORTANT! Detectors do not guarantee 100% detection. They do not replace vigilance or rapid reaction.**

How do drone detectors operate?

1. Depending on the type, detectors continuously scan radio frequencies (within a range of 50 metres to 5 km) used by drones, or intercept the FPV video signal if it is within range. Detectors recognise characteristic drone "signatures" and filter out background signals (Wi-Fi, mobile base stations, radios).
2. When a threat is detected, the detector alerts the user to the presence of a drone: via sound, vibration, visual indicators, and (where available) by displaying intercepted FPV video on the detector's screen.

Please note:

- In built-up urban areas, the effective detection range may be smaller than stated by the manufacturer.
- Detectors do not detect fibre-optic FPV drones or drones operating in "silent mode" (if the transmitter is switched off).
- Detectors may produce false alerts due to Wi-Fi and mobile networks.

Types of personal drone detectors

TYPE 1: RF DETECTORS (RADIO-FREQUENCY SCANNERS)

Also known as: drone radio-signal detectors, RF scanners, SIGINT devices.

Advantages:

1. Detect drones at long range (2–5 km).
2. Primarily detect reconnaissance drones.
3. Low power consumption.
4. Lightweight and compact (150–400 g).

Limitations:

1. Do not show WHAT the drone is seeing.
2. False alerts are possible in urban areas (Wi-Fi).
3. Do not show precise distance (except some models).

Examples: Tsukorok ("Sugar Cube"), MDDSR1 KSEON-L, Teneta, ARRAKIS, etc.

TYPE 2: VIDEO-INTERCEPT DETECTORS

Also known as: video detectors, FPV interceptors, visualisation detectors.

Advantages:

1. Display the same image that the drone operator sees.
2. Allow you to assess whether the drone has detected you.
3. Help you understand attack direction and approximate distance.

Limitations:

1. Heavier and larger due to the screen.
2. Higher power consumption.
3. Mostly operate with analogue FPV systems.
4. Do not operate with digital systems (DJI FPV System, Walksnail).
5. Typically do not detect reconnaissance drones.

Examples: Chuyka 3.0, WHOOWER, Dziga, SPUK-3, SENSE-3, etc.

Practical tips:

- Use both types of drone detectors.
- Update detector firmware to the latest version in accordance with manufacturer instructions.
- Buy the latest model/version — it is more likely to scan more bands and recognise more Russian drone signatures.

CHECKLIST

PREPARING TO TRAVEL INTO A HIGHER-RISK AREA

Before your departure, go through each item on the checklist and answer honestly. If you cannot honestly say "yes" in the key blocks (detector, routes, shelters, understanding actions in the event of an FPV threat), then the trip is not safe.

1. RISK ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

- ☐ I know the distance to the front line and understand which zone I am operating in (0–20 km / 20–30 km / beyond).
- ☐ I have checked current drone activity in the region (RMA, local Telegram channels, colleagues).
- ☐ I know the main types of drones used in this area (FPV, Mavic, Molniya, reconnaissance UAVs).
- ☐ I understand that any drone in the sky is hostile and potentially lethal.
- ☐ I have planned entry and exit routes, including alternatives.
- ☐ I do not plan to remain at one location for an extended period.
- ☐ The route and working time have been coordinated with a press officer or military administration.

2. DOCUMENTS AND IDENTIFICATION

- ☐ Press ID (on a lanyard, worn under clothing).
- ☐ Passport or other identification document.
- ☐ Accreditation from my newsroom or media organisation.
- ☐ Contact details for emergency services and regional military administrations.
- ☐ Blood group indicated on a bracelet or tag.

3. CLOTHING AND APPEARANCE

- ☐ I am not wearing camouflage, olive, "tactical" or military-style clothing.
- ☐ Clothing is civilian and in neutral colours (grey, dark blue, brown, denim).
- ☐ No shiny or reflective elements on clothing.
- ☐ Clothing materials are cotton or natural fabrics, not easily melting synthetics.
- ☐ Footwear is closed, with a sturdy sole, suitable for running.
- ☐ I understand when "PRESS" markings increase risk and use them carefully.
- ☐ Spare clothing (in case of damage or contamination).

4. PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

- ☐ I have made an informed decision about whether to wear body armour and a helmet, understanding both benefits and risks.
- ☐ If wearing body armour, plates are inserted at the front, back and sides.
- ☐ I have ballistic glasses.
- ☐ I have an IFAK / first aid kit and know how to use it.
- ☐ I have active hearing protection or earplugs (hearing protection and amplification of quiet sounds).
- ☐ I have 2–4 tourniquets in places where I can rapidly access them.
- ☐ I have completed basic training in controlling massive bleeding.

5. DRONE DETECTION AND COMMUNICATION

- ☐ I have a drone detector and it functions properly.
- ☐ I know which type of detector I have (RF / video-intercept) and its limitations.
- ☐ I understand that the detector does NOT detect fibre-optic FPV drones.
- ☐ The detector will remain switched on at all times while working.
- ☐ I have spare batteries / a power bank.
- ☐ I have offline maps, a compass or alternative navigation tools.
- ☐ Backup communication is available (two-way radio / satellite tracker, if available).
- ☐ My torch has a red-light mode.

6. WORK EQUIPMENT

☐ Camera / video camera fully charged.
☐ Spare camera batteries.
☐ Sufficient memory cards.
☐ Audio recorder.
☐ Notebook and pens.

7. MOVEMENT ON FOOT

☐ I avoid open spaces, crossroads and squares.
☐ I move along walls, under awnings and trees, using shadows.
☐ I maintain distance from colleagues.
☐ I know the nearest shelter (no further than 20–30 metres).
☐ I know the plan of action if I:
  ☐ hear a drone
  ☐ see a drone
  ☐ observe a drone hovering
  ☐ see an FPV drone flying towards me
☐ I do not approach drone debris or suspicious objects.

8. MOVEMENT BY VEHICLE

☐ The vehicle is not brightly coloured and does not resemble military transport.
☐ The vehicle's technical condition has been checked (full fuel tank, spare tyre).
☐ There are no unnecessary markings or reflective elements on the vehicle.
☐ The drone detector is switched on while driving.
☐ Windows are slightly open (2–5 cm) for auditory awareness.
☐ Music is switched off.
☐ I know what to do during an FPV attack (acceleration / manoeuvre / evacuation).
☐ I understand that after a vehicle is struck, I must not return to it immediately.
☐ There is a fire extinguisher in the vehicle.

9. SELECTING A FILMING / INTERVIEW LOCATION

☐ The location is not directly visible from above.
☐ I am not filming near strategic facilities.
☐ Filming is not conducted near windows, on rooftops or on top floors.
☐ There is a clear evacuation plan.
☐ A "sky watcher" has been assigned within the team.
☐ I do not arrive immediately after a strike (due to the risk of "double tap" strikes).

10. SAFETY INDOORS

☐ I know the shelter location (basement / semi-basement, at least two exits).
☐ Windows are covered and blackout measures are observed.
☐ I do not use generators or Starlink unless absolutely necessary.
☐ I know what to do if an FPV drone enters the building.
☐ I know not to leave shelter for 10–15 minutes after an attack.

11. ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

☐ Multitool or knife.
☐ Water bottle and snacks (energy bars).
☐ Thermos (if necessary).
☐ Lighters or matches in waterproof packaging.
☐ Backpack or tactical bag.
☐ Waterproof clothing or raincoat.
☐ Protective gloves.

12. CONTACTS AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

☐ 112 / 101 / 102 / 103 saved in my phone.
☐ Local contacts available (RMA, volunteers, journalists).
☐ I have informed colleagues or my newsroom of my location and check-in time.

13. PERSONAL DECISION

☐ I understand that no story is worth a life.
☐ I am prepared to cancel filming or travel if the risk increases.
☐ I am physically and psychologically prepared to work in these conditions.

IMPORTANT:

- This checklist does not guarantee 100% safety.
- Your life is always more important than the story.
- Any drone in the sky is a potential threat to your life.
- Always remain vigilant and ready to react quickly.

Date of departure: _____

Journalist's signature: _____

USEFUL CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

In frontline communities, general emergency numbers may not always function reliably. It is advisable to obtain local duty unit and regional military administration contact numbers in advance.

Official Telegram channels of Regional Military Administrations (RMAs) frequently publish warnings about drone activity in the region. Subscribe to the channels of the frontline region and the specific community — they may provide early alerts regarding detected Russian UAVs.

Frontline communities also often maintain unofficial volunteer-run Telegram channels that publish information about drone movements and related threats. Subscribe to these before travelling to a high-risk area (local journalists and volunteers can usually advise on relevant online resources).

UKRAINIAN EMERGENCY AND OPERATIONAL SERVICES

- Single emergency number: 112 (universal number for all emergency services).
- State Emergency Service of Ukraine: 101 (to report detected drones, debris, unexploded ordnance and mines).
- National Police: 102 (for reporting shelling and documenting war crimes).
- Ambulance / Emergency medical services: 103.

UKRAINIAN MILITARY STRUCTURES AND ADMINISTRATIONS

- Press and Information Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine: +38 044 271-34-33, psmodu@post.mil.gov.ua
- Main Communications Directorate of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (General Staff press service): +38 044 454-42-55, press@post.mil.gov.ua
- Security Service of Ukraine (SBU): 0 800 501 482, callcenter@ssu.gov.ua
- Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security: +380 11 222 33 44, stratcom@spravdi.org
- Regional Military Administrations (official websites): cg.gov.ua, sm.gov.ua, kharkivoda.gov.ua, lova.gov.ua, dn.gov.ua, adm.dp.gov.ua, zoda.gov.ua, khoda.gov.ua, mk.gov.ua, oda.od.gov.ua.

SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANISATIONS

- Institute of Mass Information (IMI): +38 (050) 447-70-63, info@imi.org.ua
- National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU): +38 (044) 234-52-09, spilka@nsju.org
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF): kyivpfc@rsf.org / assistance2@rsf.org
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): info@cpj.org.

RSF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

For 40 years, REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS (RSF) has defended media freedom, independence and pluralism all over the world. Headquartered in Paris with 14 bureaus and sections and more than 150 correspondents worldwide, it has consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO.

FUND UNION
Developing Ukraine since 2011

For 15 years, the Kherson Regional Charitable Foundation “Union” has been strengthening communities in Ukraine by supporting participatory development, fostering collaboration between citizens, authorities, and civil society, and applying open data-driven approaches. The Foundation has implemented dozens of projects across the country. Now, it's focusing on three core areas: enhancing community safety, fostering social cohesion, and providing analytical support for informed, transparent decision-making in recovery and development processes.

Anti-drone nets on the road from Kherson.
(c) Foundation "Union"