



ISS GLOBAL OSINT BRIEF



Terrorists and Militant Use of Drones: Tactics, Effects and Evolving Threat Landscape | Reporting base: Monday 4 May - Sunday 10 May

[MORE INFO](#)

Executive Summary

Terrorist and militant groups are increasingly using low-cost commercial drones for reconnaissance, propaganda, battlefield coordination and direct attack. The reporting from Lebanon, Mali and Colombia suggests that drone warfare is becoming an effective and accessible method of attack for non-state actors globally.

Hezbollah's drone pressure against Israel, JNIM's expanding use of drones in Mali, and the attempted explosive drone incident near Bogotá's El Dorado International Airport demonstrate how governments are struggling to counter adaptable and inexpensive unmanned systems targeting both military and civilian infrastructure.

AREA OF FOCUS



Lebanon



Mali / Sahel



Colombia

Primary Tactical Uses

- **Reconnaissance:** Mapping military positions, patrol routes, checkpoints, and soft civilian targets.
- **Attack delivery:** Dropping improvised explosive devices or using one-way FPV-style strike drones.
- **Battlefield coordination:** Guiding ambushes, adjusting fire, and monitoring security-force response.
- **Propaganda:** Recording attacks and military movements to amplify psychological impact.

Operational Effects

- Increases reach without requiring militants to expose themselves directly.
- Raises the cost of defending bases, convoys, airports, and critical infrastructure while allowing militants to exploit asymmetry through low-cost systems.
- Undermines confidence in electronic jamming when fibre-optic or non-radio guidance is used.
- Enables groups with limited budgets to contest better-equipped state forces and may encourage wider global adoption by terrorist organisations seeking inexpensive but effective attack methods.

Strategic Assessment: The reporting across Lebanon, Mali and Colombia suggests that low-cost drone warfare is transitioning from an emerging capability into a normalised method of attack for non-state actors. The effectiveness of commercially available drones against military forces, infrastructure and civilian targets may encourage wider adoption by terrorist organisations globally.

Analyst Judgement: The drone threat is likely to become more frequent, more precise, and harder to disrupt as terrorist groups copy techniques from Ukraine, Lebanon, Gaza, and criminal-insurgent theatres such as Colombia. The combination of low cost, accessibility and operational effectiveness makes drone-enabled attacks attractive to extremist networks globally. The immediate risk is tactical disruption; the longer-term risk is normalisation of drone-enabled attacks across fragile security environments.

Drone Capability Data Snapshot

PRIMARY PLATFORM

COTS

Commercial off-the-shelf drones adapted for militant use.

OBSERVED PAYLOAD

IED

Improvised explosive material and small munition drops.

GUIDANCE SHIFT

FO

Fibre-optic guidance reduces reliance on radio links.

TARGET SET

Dual

Military positions and civilian infrastructure both exposed.

Reconnaissance and Target Selection **Very High**



Counter-Jamming Resistance **High**



Explosive Delivery Potential **High**



Civilian Infrastructure Exposure **High**



Data interpretation: The most consistent pattern across the source set is the movement from simple aerial observation toward multi-role drone use: reconnaissance, attack facilitation, propaganda recording, explosive delivery, and counter-jamming adaptation. The Colombia airport incident shows that drone risk is not limited to battlefields and can extend to civilian aviation and urban infrastructure (Ratings are qualitative analyst judgements based on the cited source set).



Colombian IED drone discovered by the National Police near Bogotá's El Dorado airport. Reporting states that Anti-explosives officers confirmed the drone had been modified with a fiber-optic guidance system designed to bypass electronic jamming measures commonly used against unmanned aircraft. Investigators found the device was carrying around 258 grams of C4 explosive packed inside a PVC tube with an improvised detonator.



A Hezbollah drone slams into an Israeli tank in the southern Lebanon town of Mays al-Jabal on April 15, 2026, in footage published by the terror group on April 27, 2026. (Hezbollah media office).

Sahel: JNIM and ISGS

The Sahel provides a permissive environment for drone adoption: porous borders, weak airspace monitoring, dispersed military positions, and growing extremist control over rural terrain. JNIM in particular appears to be integrating drones into a wider toolkit that already includes IEDs, ambushes, assassinations, and complex assaults.

Drone-enabled surveillance allows militants to select targets more carefully and apply pressure on isolated bases, convoys, and local authorities. Mali's government and regional security forces continue facing operational pressure from groups such as JNIM that are integrating drones into broader insurgent tactics.

Lebanon: Hezbollah and Fibre-Optic Drones

Hezbollah's reported use of fibre-optic guided drones illustrates a major defensive problem: platforms that do not depend on vulnerable radio links can be harder to jam or spoof. This reduces the effectiveness of common electronic countermeasures and forces defenders to rely more heavily on detection, physical interception, and tactical dispersion.

Only recently have the IDF been equipped with 12-gauge shotguns to counter incoming drones, highlighting the limited counter measures in place and the effectiveness of non state actors method of employing VBIED against military forces.

Colombia: Civilian Infrastructure Targeting

The Bogotá incident demonstrates how modified commercial drones can be used to threaten civilian infrastructure far from active battlefields. A drone carrying improvised explosive material near El Dorado International Airport highlights the vulnerability of airports, transport hubs, and crowded urban facilities.

The reported use of non-conventional fibre-optic guidance also shows how attackers may attempt to bypass jamming systems, forcing authorities to combine detection, physical interception, perimeter security, and intelligence-led disruption.

Chronological Incident Timeline

03 MAY (PRECURSOR)

JNIM threat outlook highlights drone-enabled tactical adaptation

The JNIM-focused threat outlook places drone use within a broader pattern of militant adaptation across the Sahel. The key implication is that JNIM is not only relying on conventional insurgent methods such as IEDs, ambushes, and complex attacks, but is increasingly incorporating aerial surveillance and drone-enabled facilitation into its operating model.

Source: Daniele Garofalo Monitoring — Strategic Threat Outlook | JNIM — April 2026

05 MAY

Sahel extremist groups exploit fragile security conditions

The CFR conflict tracker frames violent extremism in the Sahel as a persistent and expanding regional threat. This security vacuum is highly relevant to drone proliferation because weak border control, limited airspace monitoring, and overstretched military forces create conditions in which groups such as JNIM and ISGS can test and normalise low-cost unmanned systems.

Source: Council on Foreign Relations — Violent Extremism in the Sahel

06 MAY

Hezbollah FPV attacks expose pressure on Israel's Lebanon strategy

Reporting on Hezbollah drone attacks against Israeli positions shows how repeated FPV and UAV strikes can generate operational pressure disproportionate to their cost. The incident pattern demonstrates that drones can threaten troop concentrations, complicate forward deployments, and force a reassessment of defensive assumptions even by technologically advanced militaries.

Source: Times of Israel — Hunted by drones, Israel's Lebanon strategy is now at risk

07 MAY

Fibre-optic guided drones challenge electronic countermeasures

The New Arab article describes Hezbollah's reported use of kamikaze drones guided by fibre-optic cables against Israeli troop gatherings, tanks, and artillery positions. This is significant because fibre-optic guidance reduces reliance on radio control links, making standard jamming and spoofing methods less reliable and raising the importance of layered detection and physical interception.

Source: The New Arab — How Hezbollah drones are testing Israel's strategy in Lebanon

08 MAY

Explosive drone deactivated near Bogotá's El Dorado airport

Colombian authorities reportedly deactivated a commercial drone carrying improvised explosive materials near Bogotá's El Dorado International Airport. Although outside the Sahel and Lebanon theatres, the incident underlines the wider diffusion risk: modified commercial drones can threaten airports, urban infrastructure, and crowded civilian areas, forcing security planners to treat drone defence as a domestic counterterrorism priority.

Source: The City Paper Bogotá — Explosive Drone Deactivated Near Bogotá's El Dorado International Airport

Why This Matters

Drone adoption gives terrorist groups a relatively cheap way to observe, harass, and attack state forces. Even limited payloads can have disproportionate psychological and operational effects when used against airports, military bases, convoys, public gatherings, or symbolic infrastructure. The low financial barrier to entry makes these systems particularly attractive for extremist actors seeking scalable attack methods.

Most Exposed Targets

- Forward operating bases and checkpoints
- Airports and aviation approaches
- Fuel depots and logistics hubs
- Military convoys and static patrols
- Government buildings and crowded civilian spaces

Key Judgements

- **Drone tactics will continue spreading** because the required hardware is cheap, modular, widely available, and operationally effective against both military and civilian targets.
- **Electronic jamming alone is insufficient** where militants use fibre-optic guidance, pre-programmed routes, or autonomous flight behaviours.
- **Propaganda value is a major driver** because drone footage can make small attacks appear more sophisticated and strategically meaningful.
- **Sahelian states face a compounding threat** as drone-enabled attacks combine with weak border control, contested rural governance, and stretched military capacity.

Planning Implication: Security forces should treat drone defence as a layered problem: detection, identification, electronic disruption, physical defeat, hardening of exposed sites, tactical concealment, and intelligence-led disruption of supply chains.

Website References

DATE	PUBLISHER	REFERENCE	WEBSITE
03 May	Daniele Garofalo Monitoring	Strategic Threat Outlook: JNIM April	https://www.danielegarofalo.com/monitoring/p/strategic-threat-outlook-jnim-april
05 May	Council on Foreign Relations	Violent Extremism in the Sahel	https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel
06 May	Times of Israel	Hezbollah drone pressure on Israel's Lebanon strategy	https://www.timesofisrael.com/hunted-by-drones-it-should-have-seen-coming-israels-lebanon-strategy-is-now-at-risk/
07 May	The New Arab	How Hezbollah drones are testing Israel's strategy in Lebanon	https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-hezbollah-drones-are-testing-israels-strategy-lebanon
08 May	The City Paper Bogotá	Explosive drone deactivated near Bogotá's El Dorado International Airport	https://thecitypaperbogota.com/news/explosive-drone-deactivated-near-bogotas-el-dorado-international-airport/

Explore Report Desk

Report Desk gathers reports across the globe regarding terrorism and security-related incidents to create and analyse trends and patterns worldwide.

Collected by AI, curated by humans.

Visit: www.issglobal.co.uk/report-desk