

Beware drone devastation

written by David M. Weinberg | 12.07.2026

In January, I detailed how tens of thousands of weapons are smuggled into Israel every year through the Egyptian and Jordanian borders via organized smuggling networks using drones. The weapons flow into mixed Jewish-Arab cities and from there penetrate Judea and Samaria, fueling both organized crime and terrorist activity and blurring the line between them.

This vast smuggling of weapons into Israel by our enemies – perhaps 160,000 weapons a year, with Bedouin criminal and terrorist gangs in the lead – is no longer a marginal criminal phenomenon but a growing strategic threat that urgently demands a national response.

This week, on a tour of the Negev and in discussion with officers of a new IDF “war room” tasked with this gargantuan problem, I learned that the threat is far worse, for two reasons.

First, it turns out that the threat is not just the smuggling of weapons over Israel’s borders via drones – some of which can carry 150 kilograms of arms – but the drones themselves. Via cutouts, the Bedouin terrorist and criminal gangs are buying hundreds, perhaps thousands of drones abroad and in Israel – yes, in Israel! – and flying them into Gaza with or without carrying contraband. Hamas is stockpiling these drones, apparently for a next assault into Israel.

In other words, the “threat assessment” that Israel must be prepared for at some point in the not-too-distant future is a Hamas attack via masses, perhaps thousands, of armed drones exploding simultaneously and continuously into IDF camps, bases and airfields, at sites of strategic infrastructure, and into civilian neighborhoods. The Nukhba raiders can then hit the ground after drone devastation from the air.

Everybody knows what difficulty the IDF is having interdicting a few Hezbollah explosive drone attacks per month against Israeli troops in Lebanon and along the border with Lebanon.

Imagine an attack, G-d forbid, along the lines of the massive and ruinous drone war underway between Russia and the Ukraine – where an estimated 70% of the

one-to-two million casualties over the past five years have been wrought by drone attacks!

SECOND, Israel's defense establishment is not geared to truly tackling this problem, and its efforts thus far run from weak to ridiculous.

By the IDF's own assessment, there are ten to 100 drone smuggling attempts every day across some 400 kilometers of border (Gaza, Sinai, and the Jordan Valley). The IDF has caught a grand total of 15 smuggling cells and 300 drones over the past six months (mainly drone flights into Gaza and from Gaza). There are no more than 15 of these smugglers now sitting in Israeli jails, many of them minors who will be swiftly released.

There are many reasons for this paltry operational and prosecutorial haul.

The Bedouin gangs in Israel behind the criminal and terrorist operations described here are well-organized with sophisticated intelligence networks (they know exactly where IDF forces are patrolling and where not); they purposefully employ minors (who don't look suspicious and when caught, get off quickly); and their wealth allows for many bribes to be paid along the way, including to unsuspecting and underhanded Israelis.

One drone haul alone can bring in half-a-million shekels of profit. There is a lot of Iranian money fueling the whole venture too.

On top of that, Israel doesn't currently have the technology, nor has it devoted the necessary operational bandwidth, to surveil and tactically interdict the drone flights or to penetrate the Bedouin gangs that operate them.

At least 20 different Israeli military, intelligence, technological, and legal agencies need to be involved in a national coordinated effort to end the drone threat - and there is little such coordination.

And at the moment, none of the relevant agencies see interdiction of the drone threat as their main responsibility. They each have so many other tasks to handle and thus point the finger of blame at one another, unsurprisingly. (That is the nature of such large security bureaucracies.)

The IDF, for example, argues that its main responsibility and focus is protection of Israelis towns and civilians in the Gaza envelope as well as elimination of Hamas

leaders and military infrastructures in Gaza – not running after drones and Bedouin gangs in the Negev.

Moreover, the IDF is prohibited by law from shooting at Israeli citizens such as Negev Bedouin. So, it can't fire from attack helicopters at Bedouin criminals even in hot pursuit of a gang engaged in real-time smuggling/terrorist activity. Efforts to have the open-fire regulations adjusted to allow the IDF a freer hand have been impeded by the IDF judge advocate general and Israel's attorney general.

The law is weak too. Until recently, the smuggling described here was prosecutable only as a violation of civilian border/customs law. It was only three months ago that the law was amended to identify smuggling and outlaw drone smuggling as hardcore terrorist activity, with expanded penalties – thanks to MK Amit Halevi (with input from my think tank, the Misgav Institute for National Security & Zionist Strategy).

SPECIAL attention needs to be given to the weapons smuggling situation across the Jordanian border – Israel's longest and least protected – which may be even worse than the situation in the Negev. It is fine that Israel is finally building a NIS 5.2 billion (\$1.4 billion) 425-kilometer (265-mile) security barrier along the Jordan border from the Sea of Galilee all the way down to Eilat. But this cannot be effective when only one division of IDF troops holds down the Jordanian border from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, and only one division patrols the Arava from the Dead Sea down to Eilat.

This is the place to mention and praise the government's recent establishment of a national task force and Defense Ministry/IDF command center to build new layers of civilian defense in the Jordan Valley via beefed up settlement, agriculture, and new communities with young people – on the principle that “settlement equals security.” This includes establishment of “National Mission Hubs” such as pre-military academies, Nahal pioneer youth outposts, student villages, and service-year organizations.

THE BOTTOM line is that Israel must designate the drone threat as a national security priority, to be dealt with as a terrorist and military threat of the highest order – not as a mere “smuggling” problem.

It should establish task forces at the ministerial level and at executive levels managed by the National Security Council to coordinate between the police,

army, intelligence services, justice ministry and prosecution, etc. – not just rely on a small war room in the south.

The Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee should establish a dedicated subcommittee to ride herd on this matter (something that my colleagues have suggested to committee chairman MK Boaz Bismuth).

More aggressive action may be necessary too, like attacking the smuggling/terrorist gangs in neighboring states (in Egypt and Jordan).

All this requires operational and technological resources, with budget for manpower that is both beefy and brainy. The sooner the better.

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