The Drone Threat Will Be Worse Than IEDs in Afghanistan

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General Matt Ross warns: unmanned systems pose a challenge set to surpass that of IEDs in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the Pentagon is accelerating the protection of US bases, in the Middle East and beyond.

The threat posed by drones could **surpass, in scope and impact, that of improvised explosive devices (IEDs)** that marked the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan during the Global War on Terror. This is the alarm raised by Brigadier General **Matt Ross**, head of the Joint Interagency Task Force-401 (JIATF-401), an organization created to enhance US capabilities to counter small unmanned aircraft.

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Speaking on Thursday at an industry event organized by the US Army, Ross explained that **the United States is trying to move quickly** to ensure that its bases, in the US and abroad, are protected from potential drone attacks, in a context marked by uncertainty over the evolution of the confrontation with Iran.

“What I can say is that **the challenge of unmanned systems, the threat posed by these systems, will far exceed what we saw with IEDs**,” Ross stated, recalling how Washington, despite having invested **over 20 billion dollars** in the fight against improvised devices about twenty years ago, never managed to develop a truly effective system to detect them in advance.

According to the general, unlike IEDs — tools without commercial applications — **drones are now widespread and destined to become increasingly common even in civilian airspace**. This very diffusion makes the phenomenon more complex and pervasive.

“We will see **a proliferation of unmanned systems in our commercial airspace**. They will be very common in the coming years,” Ross said. “This means that our ability to safely manage that airspace and to **protect critical infrastructure**,
whether they are military formations or sensitive installations, will become increasingly important.”

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The statements come as the US Army has just completed the identification of **six soldiers killed in Kuwait** in a “one-way” drone attack, meaning an aircraft used as a suicide weapon. Asked about the possible acceleration of efforts due to the conflict with Iran, Ross avoided direct references to ongoing operations but confirmed **an increase in attention and urgency**.

“We are ensuring that **they have everything they need to protect themselves, both at home and abroad**,” he declared. “I wouldn’t say this concerns exclusively the Middle East, but we are absolutely considering the locations of the Department of Defense’s partners and allies worldwide that might be under threat.”

For Ross, the creation of the **JIATF-401**, which took place at the end of last summer, responds precisely to the need to **not wait for a traumatic event on American soil** before addressing the problem. “We didn’t want to wait for **another 9/11 in the United States** to intervene on the threat of unmanned systems,” he explained.

The developments of the past week in the Middle East, he added, have simply **raised the level of political and operational urgency** around the issue, already present for some time in Pentagon dossiers.

Standards, Interoperability, and Rapid Response

Practically, the task force is working with partners like the **FBI** and the **Department of Homeland Security** to define common standards and policies for the use of drone countermeasures, as well as to develop **an online dedicated marketplace**.

The portal, Ross admitted, is already active but still “cumbersome.” The next step will be the awarding of a contract for a **common command and control architecture**, capable of smoothly connecting systems used by different armed forces and other government agencies. According to the general, **the new system could be deployed within a few months**.

Another crucial issue is **data sharing**. Ross emphasized the need to define common standards on the modes and formats of information transmission, an essential element to ensure that every counter-UAS system included in the JIATF-401 marketplace can function correctly, whether for the Department of Defense, **NATO**, or civilian law enforcement agencies.

“**They need to know it will work. I need to know it’s compatible.** Today people don’t know this,” he said.

Ross also aims to **radically simplify the installation of these devices**, envisioning ready-to-use solutions that do not necessarily require the intervention of specialized technicians sent by suppliers.

“A base should be able to order the equipment and **install it like you do with a Ring doorbell**,” he observed. “Today this doesn’t happen. Many systems require additional skills.”

https://youtu.be/l8ZOqVPSpzY?si=m8vxA_npXiKhHnrD

A Threat Destined to Grow

The Pentagon’s message is clear: **the drone threat is no longer a risk limited to specific war theaters**, but a structural problem destined to expand with the spread of technology in the civilian and commercial sector. For American military leaders, **the race to adapt defenses, procedures, and interoperability has already begun** — and cannot afford to be late.

News link: https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2026/03/drone-threat-will-far-exceed-gwots-roadside-bomb-threat-counter-drone-task-force-director/411921/