

Principal Brief // two-minute read

DRONES & AERIAL

RESIDENTIAL EXPOSURE

COUNTER-SURVEILLANCE



The First Drone Only Watches

A drone does not need to carry a weapon to create risk. Its camera can expose a home, its security and the routines of the people inside, and that can feed burglary, stalking or other harm without the drone ever coming back.

WHAT HAPPENED

Between October 2024 and January 2025 crews burglarized the homes of five professional athletes, striking on game days when the owners were publicly known to be away. The NBA warned players the groups used pre-surveillance, drones and signal jammers. In May 2026 a man in Northern Ireland was convicted of stalking his former partner with a drone. A 4K camera drone light enough to fly recreationally without registration sells for about \$300.

WHY IT REACHES YOU

A camera overhead sees what a street view cannot: the back of the house, where the cameras point, which cars are home, when the children play outside. Little in a typical household is set up to notice it, and you may not lawfully bring it down. You can notice it, record it and report it, and make what it sees less useful.

THREE THINGS TO TAKE FROM THIS

1

The camera is the risk

A drone needs no weapon to do harm. What it sees can support burglary, stalking or worse, with or without a return.

2

Visible is not seen

A camera drone can be heard and spotted. It works because nobody at the house is tasked to look up.

3

Absence leaks too

Public game schedules told burglars when athletes were away. Your calendar can do the same.

DO THIS

- ☐ **YOU, NOW**
Ask who at your home would notice a drone overhead, and what they would do about it.
- ☐ **YOU, WITH YOUR FAMILY OFFICE**
Stop publishing when the house will be empty: travel, events, schedules, and staff posts.
- ☐ **YOU, WITH SECURITY**
Log every sighting with time, direction and photos, and report the repeat ones.

NOT THE STORY YOU MAY HAVE HEARD

This is not a warning about insect-sized spy drones or drones that record conversations through walls. Small drones carry good cameras and poor microphones, and rotor noise defeats speech capture. Most drones near homes are hobbyists. The concern is the ordinary camera, used deliberately and repeatedly.

HOW SURE WE ARE

High that a cheap camera drone can survey a residence today and that stalkers have used them. Moderate on burglars: leagues warned of drone use, but no case ties a drone to a named burglary. No one counts how often it happens.

CB-078

Eyes before effect: the drone as a surveillance problem first



"A drone does not have to carry a weapon to threaten a principal. The cheapest use is to watch."

Attack drones take the headlines. The v1 of this brief, written in June, argued that the realistic near-term threat to a residence is the ordinary camera drone flown to map a home, its security and its routine. The record since bears that out in the most mundane way, through stalkers and, by the leagues' warnings, burglary crews. This edition treats that surveillance as an exposure in its own right, not as a step that must precede an attack.

BLUF. An inexpensive camera drone gives almost anyone a surveillance capability that can expose a residence and the people in it. That exposure is harmful in its own right, through burglary, stalking, harassment and unwanted observation, and it can contribute to other threats; it is not a necessary precursor to an attack, and an attacker may need no drone at all. The record shows the capability in use. A man in Northern Ireland was convicted in May 2026 of stalking his former partner by flying a drone over her flat. Crews linked to South American theft groups burglarized the homes of five professional athletes between October 2024 and January 2025; the NFL warned that they used public records and team schedules to strike on game days, and the NBA that they used pre-surveillance, drones and signal jammers, though no public record ties a drone to any of the named burglaries. The tool is cheap and lightly controlled: a 4K camera drone under 249 grams has sold for about \$300 and needs no FAA registration or Remote ID when flown under the recreational exception, and the FCC's December 2025 action blocks new foreign models, not those already sold. What a live flight adds to records and existing imagery is fresh observation at a time the observer chooses, repeated at will: the overhead view is how a known address becomes a plan. A private owner may not jam or down a drone (CB-059), and detection hears radios, not drones (CB-269). The response is an airspace watch with thresholds, so that patterns are noticed and single flights are not treated as threats, and less to see.

5 Pro athletes' homes burglarized, Oct 2024 to Jan 2025; leagues warned of crews using drones and jammers. AP; NFL AND NBA MEMOS	\$299 Launch price of a sub-249 g 4K camera drone; no FAA registration or Remote ID for recreational flight. PETAPIXEL, APR 2024	22 Dec 2025: FCC adds foreign-made drones to its Covered List. New models only; existing ones still sold. FCC, VIA DRONEDEPLOY	0 Private rights to jam, seize or down a drone over your own home. CB-059
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The overhead view is how a known address becomes a plan.

BURGLARY CREWS, OCTOBER 2024 TO FEBRUARY 2025

The homes of Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce in Kansas City were broken into within days of each other in October 2024; Joe Burrow's Ohio home in December while he played in Dallas; Luka Dončić's in Dallas the same month; Evgeni Malkin's in January. Three sources describe the method, and they say different things. The NFL's security bulletin of November 2024 said the groups learn where athletes live and when they are away from public records, social media and news reports, surveil properties by attempting deliveries or posing as groundskeepers or joggers, and exploit team schedules to strike on game days. The NBA's memo the next day listed "pre-surveillance, drones, and signal jamming devices." The FBI's liaison report in December described "physical and technical surveillance" to learn a target's "pattern of life," and Wi-Fi jammers. What is established: athletes were targeted when they were publicly known to be away, and the crews surveilled before striking. What is reported as a pattern: drone use. What is not established: that a drone was used against any of the five named homes.

STALKING FROM THE AIR, JULY 2025 TO MAY 2026

A man in Armagh used a drone to monitor his former partner's flat in July 2025 and was convicted of stalking in May 2026; the judge told him, "you do not use a drone to spy on people." In Greece a man received a suspended sentence in July 2025 for stalking that included flying a drone outside his former partner's home; in Italy a man was arrested in February 2026 after his drone crashed into his ex-girlfriend's window. The pattern is the domestic-abuse version of reconnaissance: a known address, a cheap camera, and repeated flights.

THE DEVICE, 2024 TO 2026

DJI launched the Mini 4K in April 2024 at \$299: under 249 grams, with a 4K camera on a three-axis gimbal. At that weight, flights under the FAA's exception for limited recreational operations need no registration, and Remote ID applies only to drones that must be or are registered, so such a flight may broadcast nothing for the apps and receivers that read it. The exemption is narrow: any operation under Part 107 requires registration regardless of weight, and a flight made to surveil someone is not obviously recreational. An unregistered drone is not necessarily a lawful one.

THE SUPPLY, 22 DECEMBER 2025

The FCC added foreign-produced drones and certain components to its Covered List after an interagency finding of an unacceptable national security risk. The listing bars new equipment authorizations; previously authorized models can still be sold, imported and flown, and a later notice granted a one-year exemption through 1 January 2027. The action changes what reaches the market next, not what is already in the air.

THE MECHANISM // WHAT THE OVERHEAD VIEW ADDS

M1 OBSERVATION AND INFERENCE

Commercial data and public records tell an adversary where a principal lives and, increasingly, when they are there (CB-076). A flight adds the physical environment, but what it observes and what an adversary can infer differ. One flight observes what is visible at that moment: the layout, entries, fences, cameras in view, cars on the drive, people outside. Patterns, occupancy and whether a security system works are inferences, and they need repeated flights or other sources. Much of the static picture is already available from aerial imagery, listings and photographs; what a live drone adds is the current picture, at a chosen time, and the ability to look again.

M2 VISIBLE IS NOT SEEN

A small camera drone is neither silent nor invisible. It works anyway, because nothing in a typical household posture is tasked to look up or to listen for rotors, and a flight that lasts minutes looks like a hobbyist. Detection products help less than buyers expect: they mostly hear radio links and Remote ID, and a light recreational drone may broadcast no Remote ID at all (CB-269). Detectable does not mean detected.

M3 ABSENCE LEAKS IN OTHER WAYS

By the leagues' own warnings, the athlete burglaries were timed to games. The crews did not need a drone to know when a house was empty; a published schedule told them. For a principal, travel posts, event appearances, charity calendars and staff social media are the same signal: they announce absence. Whatever reconnaissance follows, by drone, on foot or online, makes it usable.

The threat is mainly imagery. Small drones carry useful cameras; useful speech capture from one is limited and depends heavily on distance, wind and rotor noise, and is unrealistic at a typical overflight height without a device planted separately. Insect-sized covert drones remain a research trajectory, not a product. Thermal cameras on some models extend observation into the night. Overstating any of this would be easy and wrong; the exposure is mundane, available and serious on its own.

M5 FLYING LAWFULLY IS NOT WATCHING LAWFULLY

Federal aviation rules govern the flight. State privacy and stalking laws may separately restrict what is done with it, so a drone that is lawfully in the air is not thereby lawfully surveilling. Florida is a strong example: a person who cannot be seen by people at ground level on their own property is presumed to have a reasonable expectation of privacy there, whether or not they are visible from the air, and recording them by drone with intent to surveil, without consent, gives the owner or occupant a claim for damages, an injunction, attorney fees and possibly punitive damages. A private owner still may not jam, seize or shoot down the drone; that authority sits with government and, since July 2026, may extend to trained local police (CB-059). Stalking and harassmt laws apply whatever the platform, as the Armagh case shows.

FIGURE 1 // WHAT ONE FLIGHT OBSERVES, AND WHAT AN ADVERSARY MAY INFER

OBSERVED DIRECTLY, AT THAT MOMENT	WHAT IT MAY SUPPORT INFERRING	REDUCE IT
LAYOUT, ENTRIES, FENCES, GATES, REAR ACCESS	Approach and entry routes; places to wait unseen	Screening at sightlines that matter; review what aerial and listing photos already show
CAMERAS, LIGHTS AND SENSORS IN VIEW	Possible blind spots; effectiveness is not observable	Cover gaps; do not publish the system's make and layout
VEHICLES ON THE DRIVE	Occupancy, only with repeated flights or other sources	Garage vehicles; vary what is visible
PEOPLE AND ACTIVITY OUTSIDE	Routine, only with repeated observation	Vary timing; move routine activity out of open view
GUARD POSTS IN VIEW	Shift timing, only with repeated observation	Stagger changes; task one post to watch the sky
NOT RELIABLY: SPEECH, INTERIORS, THROUGH ROOFS	Little without a separate device	Technical countermeasures if a planted device is suspected

FIGURE 2 // THREE DRONE CAPABILITIES ON ONE PRICE CURVE: RELATED, NOT STAGES

CAPABILITY	MATURITY	EVIDENCE	RESIDENTIAL POSTURE
SURVEILLANCE	Operational now	Stalking convictions; league warnings on burglary crews; cheap airframes	Put the airspace on the watch; record and report; reduce what the view reveals
ARMED DELIVERY	Precedents in conflict abroad; domestic plots only	Leaders' homes struck in 2024 and 2026; a sting and an alleged plot at home (CB-076)	Know which agency holds counter-drone authority; shelter only where a credible threat exists (CB-269)
SWARM AND AUTONOMY	Emerging, military	Battlefield use; no residential case	Monitor; no residential product answers it

FIGURE 3 // A RESIDENTIAL AIRSPACE WATCH

NOTICE	Name who is responsible for looking up: a guard post, the house manager, or a camera set to cover the sky over the garden and approaches. Make it part of the job, not a hope.
RECORD	Time, duration, direction of approach and departure, altitude estimate, photographs or video, and any Remote ID reading from a phone app. A sighting without a record cannot be connected to the next one.
CORRELATE	Compare sightings with other indicators: unfamiliar vehicles, unordered deliveries or visits (CB-061), online interest in the property, and the principal's published schedule.
REPORT	Report patterns, stalking or unsafe flights to local police and the FAA, and preserve the record (CB-169). Where state law gives a civil claim, keep the evidence it would need.
ADJUST	Reduce what the view reveals and stop announcing absence. Escalate to physical protection only if the pattern or other intelligence points to a credible threat.

FIGURE 4 // TRIAGE: WHEN A SIGHTING BECOMES A CONCERN

OBSERVATION	RESPONSE
AN ISOLATED FLIGHT THAT APPEARS INCIDENTAL	Record if practical. No presumption of hostile intent.
REPEATED OR PROLONGED FLIGHTS NEAR THE PROPERTY, OR HOVERING OVER IT	Correlate sightings, preserve evidence, assess the pattern against other indicators.
A DRONE THAT APPEARS TO FOLLOW OR WATCH OCCUPANTS, OR FLIES UNSAFELY	Notify the security function and report to local police and the FAA.
A CREDIBLE IMMEDIATE THREAT	Activate the existing protective response and call emergency services.

► THE TEST

Imagine a drone at a hundred feet over the garden for ten minutes on a weekday afternoon. Would anyone at the residence notice it? Would anyone write down the time and direction, or photograph it? Would a second flight a week later be connected to the first? *If the answer to any of these is no, the airspace is not on the watch, and any surveillance of the household from above is happening unobserved.*

THE STRONGEST VERSION OF THE OPPOSING VIEW

- + A camera drone is neither silent nor invisible, so a principal or a detail would notice it.
- + Most drone flights near homes are hobbyists, real estate photographers or neighbors; treating them as reconnaissance is overreaction.
- + The documented cases are stalkers and, by league warning, burglars, not threats to life.
- + Most of what a drone shows is already available from aerial imagery, property listings, real estate photography, social media and observation from the street.

Concede that most flights are benign, that a drone is detectable in principle, and that much of the static picture is already public. What a live drone adds is not a new angle but fresh observation at a chosen time: current conditions, temporary objects and activity, changes to the property, and the same view repeated until a pattern appears. Nothing in a typical posture is tasked to notice, so detectable does not mean detected. The posture does not treat every drone as hostile; it records sightings so a pattern can be seen and escalates only on the thresholds in Figure 4. A residential airspace watch should detect anomalies, not manufacture threats.

ASSESSMENT

A cheap camera drone can survey a residence effectively today.	STRONG / DEVICE CAPABILITY, DOCUMENTED CASES
Stalkers have used drones against homes; leagues warned burglary crews use them.	STRONG / A CONVICTION; NBA MEMO
Sub-250 g drones flown recreationally may broadcast no Remote ID.	STRONG / FAA RULES
Typical residential postures do not watch the airspace.	MODERATE / PRACTITIONER ASSESSMENT
A drone was used against any of the five named athletes' homes.	NOT ESTABLISHED / PATTERN ONLY
Drone reconnaissance reliably precedes physical attacks.	NOT ESTABLISHED / NOT COUNTED
Small drones can capture useful conversation at a residence.	LIMITED / CONDITION-DEPENDENT

POSTURE

FOR PRINCIPALS

- Treat the airspace over the residence as part of the surveillance surface, and assume what is visible from above can be mapped.
- Stop announcing absence: travel, appearances and schedules tell a burglar or worse when the house is empty.

FOR FAMILY OFFICES

- Reduce the address and routine exposure that tells a flight where to go (CB-076), and assess what public imagery, listings and photographs already reveal of the property.
- Set staff rules on posting the household's schedule, location and the house itself.

FOR SECURITY AND LEGAL FUNCTIONS

- Run the airspace watch in Figure 3 with the thresholds in Figure 4: treat patterns, not single flights, as possible surveillance.
- Know the agency with counter-drone authority (CB-059) and the state's drone-surveillance law; do not buy hardware a private owner may not operate.

CONFIDENCE High that a cheap camera drone can survey a residence today and that stalkers have used drones against homes. Moderate on burglary: the leagues warned of drone use, but no public record ties a drone to a named case. Moderate that typical postures do not watch the airspace, which is practitioner assessment. Not established: how often drone surveillance precedes residential crime or attack.

METHOD Revised edition. First published 1 June 2026 as a capability assessment calibrated against overstatement; brought to the current format with the athlete burglaries, the stalking cases, the sub-250-gram rules and the FCC action added, and the v1's unsourced device price and "cents" figure removed. Following external review, the governing argument is reframed from precursor to exposure; the athlete evidence is split by source; observation is separated from inference; triage thresholds are added; and the FAA exemption, the Florida statute and the audio assessment are stated precisely.

SOURCES [AP via The Boston Globe, 8 February 2025](#), on the athlete burglaries; [ABC, December 2024](#), on the FBI's liaison report; [AP, 22 November 2024](#), on the NFL and NBA memos. [FAA](#) on registration and Remote ID. [Armagh I, 14 May 2026](#), on the stalking conviction; [blue News](#) and [iefimerida](#) on cases in Italy and Greece. [PetaPixel, 29 April 2024](#), on the device and its registration position. [DroneDeploy](#) on the FCC Covered List action and exemption. [Fla. Stat. 934.50 \(2025\)](#) on drone surveillance of private property. Authority, detection and the armed-delivery record from CB-059, CB-269 and CB-076. No principal-identifying detail is included.

Scope note: drone reconnaissance is rarely recorded and never counted; the cases here establish that it happens, not how often. This is intelligence analysis, not legal advice.

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