
FLYING INTO ILLEGALITY: CRIMINAL LAW DIMENSIONS OF DRONE-RELATED AIRSPACE VIOLATIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The use of drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), has grown rapidly in India and across the world. While drones have many positive applications in fields such as agriculture, delivery services, surveillance for disaster management, and filmmaking, they are increasingly misused for criminal purposes. These include carrying contraband across borders, spying on individuals, interfering with aircraft, and even targeting sensitive infrastructure. India has introduced regulatory measures through the Drone Rules, 2021 and updated its aviation framework under the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024. However, these measures remain largely regulatory, leaving gaps in the criminal law system. This paper examines the existing framework, highlights its shortcomings, studies comparative approaches in other jurisdictions, and proposes a set of criminal norms designed for India's legal context. It argues that developing clear offences, evidence procedures, and enforcement protocols is essential to tackle the growing risks of low-altitude drone misuse.

Keywords: Drone, UAV, Drone Rules 2021, Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam 2024, airspace violations, criminal law, India, privacy, evidence, enforcement.

1. Introduction

In the past decade, drones have moved from being a novelty to becoming an important part of everyday life. Farmers now use them to monitor crops, filmmakers capture sweeping aerial shots, and companies experiment with drone deliveries. Government agencies employ drones to survey disaster zones, inspect infrastructure, and even manage traffic. These developments show the promise of drones in supporting economic growth and improving governance.¹

At the same time, drones have brought new risks that were unimaginable even a few years ago. News reports have highlighted incidents where drones were used to drop narcotics and weapons across the Punjab border, or to smuggle contraband into prisons. In other cases, drones have hovered dangerously close to airports, raising fears of collisions with passenger aircraft. There have also been complaints of drones invading personal spaces, recording private activities without consent. Such incidents reveal how drones can be turned into tools for crime, disruption, and invasion of privacy if not properly regulated and controlled.

India has responded by introducing the Drone Rules, 2021, which created a digital platform for registration and compliance, and by updating its aviation law framework through the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024. These measures have brought clarity to licensing and operational restrictions, but they are mainly civil and regulatory in nature. They do not fully address the criminal aspects of drone misuse, leaving law enforcement to rely on general provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the Information Technology Act, 2000, and older aviation laws. This patchwork approach often creates confusion about jurisdiction, evidentiary standards, and proportional punishment.

Other countries have faced similar challenges and developed hybrid approaches. In the United States, the Federal Aviation Administration works alongside state criminal codes to address drone misuse. The European Union has moved toward creating a harmonised low-altitude traffic management system, while the United Kingdom has introduced specific offences for flying drones near airports or prisons. These experiences suggest that India too should adopt a more specific criminal law framework.

The purpose of this research paper is to examine gaps in Indian law, draw insights from international practices, and propose criminal law norms suited to India's context. The study

¹ Ministry of Civil Aviation, Drone Rules, 2021 (Government of India, Gazette Notification, 2021).

aims to balance deterrence with fairness, provide enforcement agencies with practical tools, and safeguard fundamental rights while addressing the challenges posed by drones.

2. Technology and Threat Landscape

Drones are versatile machines equipped with cameras, sensors, and payload systems. They range from small quadcopters under 250 grams to large UAVs carrying several kilograms. Their applications span agriculture, logistics, mapping, and disaster relief.² However, their affordability and ease of use also make them vulnerable to misuse for unlawful purposes.

Drones present multiple threat vectors relevant to criminal law. Their high resolution cameras and thermal sensors make privacy intrusions possible by recording individuals in private spaces, tracking movements, and collecting sensitive data without consent. News Reports from Punjab and Jammu highlight the use of drones for contraband smuggling, particularly narcotics, arms, and ammunition across the India–Pakistan border, with similar incidents documented in prisons where drones dropped mobile phones, drugs, and other banned items. Unauthorized flights near airports have created risks of collisions with manned aircraft, with several near-miss incidents recorded by Indian authorities. Security agencies have also raised concerns about the potential use of drones to disrupt critical infrastructure such as power grids, oil refineries, and communication networks. Further, the weaponisation of drones through explosives or incendiaries poses a serious risk of violence against civilian and industrial targets.

These risks are heightened by the small size of drones, their ability to evade detection, and the possibility of remote operation from long distances. GPS spoofing and signal jamming make detection and attribution even more difficult, limiting enforcement agencies' ability to trace offenders. In India, the combination of dense urban areas and porous borders adds to the challenges, increasing the likelihood of drone-related crimes.

3. Existing Indian Legal & Regulatory Framework

India has gradually built a regulatory framework for drones, seeking to balance innovation with national security and public safety. This framework spans specialized drone rules, general aviation laws, and certain penal and technology statutes. While progress has been made in

² Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Drone Ecosystem Report, 2021.

licensing, registration, and operational guidelines, gaps persist in the criminalization of drone-related offences and in the clarity of enforcement mechanisms.

3.1 Drone Rules, 2021 and Digital Sky

The Drone Rules, 2021, issued under the Aircraft Act, 1934, marked a significant departure from earlier restrictive regulations.³ They simplified ownership and operation by cutting down forms, permits, and approvals, and introduced the Digital Sky Platform for drone registration, remote pilot licensing, and operational monitoring.⁴ The rules also classified drones by weight from Nano (up to 250 grams) to Large (above 150 kilograms) with corresponding operational requirements.

The rules introduced the **No Permission–No Takeoff (NPNT)** system, requiring digital approval before any drone flight. They also designated green, yellow, and red zones, restricting operations in sensitive areas such as airports, military installations, and international borders.⁵ While these measures created a regulatory structure, enforcement remains centered on administrative actions like license suspension, fines, or confiscation, rather than criminal prosecution.⁶

3.2 The Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024 and the Aviation Law Landscape

The Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, which replaced the colonial-era Aircraft Act, 1934, modernized India's aviation law. It consolidates provisions on air safety, licensing, and offences involving both manned and unmanned aircraft. The Act empowers the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to regulate drone operations and enables coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs and state police on security matters.⁷

Although the Act imposes penalties for flying in restricted airspace, most rules are regulatory. Violations generally result in fines, license suspension, or other administrative actions rather than imprisonment. Critics argue that without criminal penalties for reckless or malicious drone

³ Ministry of Civil Aviation, Drone Rules, 2021 (Gazette of India, 2021).

⁴ Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Digital Sky Platform Overview, 2021.

⁵ Ministry of Civil Aviation, "Drone Operational Zones," 2021.

⁶ A. Singh, "Drone Rules 2021: Regulatory or Criminal Framework?" *Indian Journal of Air and Space Law*, 2022.

⁷ DGCA, "Regulatory Powers under Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam," 2024.

use, enforcement agencies lack sufficient deterrence to prevent offences like contraband smuggling or interference with aircraft.

3.3 Penal & Criminal Statutes Potentially Applicable

Beyond aviation-specific laws, the following existing criminal provisions can apply to drone-related misconduct:

- **The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023**, addresses trespass (Section 329), public nuisance (Section 270), and property damage such as Mischief (Section 324), but these provisions are not tailored to technological contexts.
- Under the **Information Technology Act, 2000**, drones equipped with cameras or hacking devices may facilitate cyber offences like unauthorized access to networks or data breaches, with Sections 43 and 66 being relevant.
- The **Arms Act, 1959**, can cover weaponised drones carrying firearms or explosives, provided there is direct evidence linking the operator to possession or use.
- The **Explosives Act, 1884, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967**, may also apply if drones are used for terrorist purposes or to carry explosive devices.

3.4 Enforcement Challenges within Existing Framework

Despite the array of laws, enforcement faces several difficulties:

- **Overlapping jurisdictions:** Multiple agencies such as the DGCA, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, Ministry of Defence, and state police share responsibility, which creates coordination challenges.
- **Evidentiary hurdles:** Tracing the operator of a drone is often difficult due to remote control, lack of identification, and signal spoofing.
- **Ambiguity of criminalization:** Most violations are treated as regulatory breaches, leaving ambiguity on when an act escalates to a criminal offence.
- **Judicial vacuum:** Few reported cases exist in Indian courts on drone crimes, limiting

precedents and interpretative guidance.⁸

India's legal framework is still evolving. While the Drone Rules, 2021 and the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024 have laid a strong foundation for drone governance, the criminal law dimension remains underdeveloped. Bridging this gap will be critical for building deterrence and safeguarding against the misuse of drones.

4. Enforcement Experience and Jurisprudence

India's enforcement record in the domain of drone misuse is still evolving. Unlike traditional crimes where there is a wealth of case law, drone-related offences remain relatively under litigated in Indian courts. The absence of jurisprudence means that law enforcement agencies often rely on general criminal statutes, ad hoc administrative powers, and executive guidelines to respond to drone-related incidents.

4.1 Border Security and Narcotics Smuggling Cases

The most frequent drone-related criminal incidents in India have been reported along the Punjab and Jammu borders. The Border Security Force (BSF) has repeatedly intercepted drones carrying heroin, arms, and ammunition allegedly sent from across the border. In many cases, these drones were recovered with payload mechanisms designed to release contraband at pre-determined GPS coordinates.⁹ FIRs in such cases are typically registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act), the Arms Act, 1959, and occasionally the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, depending on the nature of the contraband. However, there is no direct invocation of drone-specific provisions, as Indian statutes do not yet define or criminalize drone smuggling per se.

4.2 Prisons and Contraband Delivery

A second cluster of enforcement experience involves drones used to deliver contraband into prisons. Media reports from Punjab and Haryana have detailed instances where mobile phones, drugs, and small weapons were dropped inside jail premises using small quadcopters. In such cases, prosecutions are carried out under the Prisons Act, 1894, BNS/IPC provisions on conspiracy, and state prison rules. Yet, without clear drone-related offences, these cases are

⁸ Supreme Court Observer, "Survey of Drone-Related Litigation in India," 2023.

⁹ Ministry of Home Affairs, Counter-Drone Measures Report, 2022.

often prosecuted as generic contraband smuggling, obscuring the specific technological dimension of the crime.

4.3 Aviation Safety Incidents

Another area of concern has been aviation safety. Several near-miss incidents have been reported at major Indian airports, including Delhi and Mumbai, where drones were spotted close to flight paths of passenger aircraft.¹⁰ In these cases, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has issued advisories and imposed administrative penalties, but no criminal prosecutions have been reported. This stands in contrast to jurisdictions like the UK, where drone operators have been convicted under the Air Navigation Order for endangering aircraft.¹¹ The absence of criminal precedents in India leaves a significant enforcement vacuum.

4.4 Judicial Engagement and Case Law

Judicial engagement with drones in India has been limited. In certain bail applications before High Courts, references have been made to the use of drones in transporting contraband, but detailed judicial reasoning on drone liability is absent.¹²

Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have also sought guidelines on drone surveillance and privacy concerns, but these have been resolved through administrative measures rather than robust legal reasoning.¹³ As a result, Indian jurisprudence remains largely silent on drones as a category of criminal conduct.

4.5 Key Enforcement Challenges

The practical difficulties faced by Indian enforcement agencies include:

- **Attribution:** Identifying the operator of a drone is technically challenging, especially when drones are operated remotely beyond the line of sight.
- **Jurisdictional overlaps:** The BSF, DGCA, local police, and central security agencies

¹⁰ LiveMint, "Near Miss Between Aircraft and Drones at Indian Airports," 2021.

¹¹ UK Civil Aviation Authority, Air Navigation Order 2016 (as amended).

¹² *State v. Jaswinder Singh*, CRM-M-22496-2022.

¹³ *Suresh Kumar v. Union of India*, PIL No. 1123 of 2021, Delhi High Court.

often claim overlapping authority, leading to coordination problems.

- **Evidentiary concerns:** Courts require a clear chain of custody for drone-related evidence, but no standardized forensic protocols exist for seizing and analysing drones.
- **Regulatory versus criminal divide:** Most cases are treated as regulatory violations under the Drone Rules, 2021, leaving serious criminal misuse inadequately addressed.

India's enforcement experience demonstrates growing instances of drone misuse but limited criminal jurisprudence. Without statutory clarity and judicial engagement, enforcement agencies will remain constrained, relying on a patchwork of general laws. Strengthening this area is essential for deterrence, consistency, and doctrinal development in Indian criminal law.

5. Comparative Approaches: US, EU, UK, and Select Others

Drone-related offences are not unique to India; across the world, jurisdictions are grappling with the challenge of integrating drones into civil, commercial, and security domains while ensuring public safety. A survey of comparative legal frameworks highlights a spectrum of responses ranging from detailed statutory criminalization to administrative enforcement, providing useful lessons for India.

5.1 United States

The United States has one of the most developed drone regulatory systems, overseen by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) under the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act, 2012 and subsequent rules.¹⁴ The FAA regulates registration, operational limits, and licensing through Part 107 Rules, which apply to small unmanned aircraft. Violations of operational rules (e.g., flying in restricted airspace, exceeding altitude limits, or reckless endangerment) can attract civil penalties and, in some cases, criminal liability under federal law.

In *Huerta v. Pirker*¹⁵, the National Transportation Safety Board clarified that drones fall within the definition of "aircraft," subjecting them to FAA regulations. Criminal prosecutions have arisen in cases of drones interfering with firefighting aircraft, endangering manned flights, or

¹⁴ Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act, 2012.

¹⁵ *Huerta v. Pirker*, NTSB, 2014.

being used for drug delivery across the US Mexico border.¹⁶ State-level laws further criminalize voyeurism, trespass, and harassment using drones.¹⁷ The layered approach federal oversight combined with state criminal laws provides strong deterrence.

5.2 European Union

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has developed a harmonized regulatory framework under the EU Drone Regulation (2019/947 and 2019/945).¹⁸ These rules classify drone operations into open, specific, and certified categories, with risk-based requirements. Criminal liability is left largely to member states, but serious violations such as endangering aircraft or breaching privacy are criminalized under national laws.¹⁹ Countries like France and Germany have enacted penal provisions specifically criminalizing unauthorized drone flights near sensitive sites such as nuclear plants or military zones.²⁰ Data protection and privacy laws, particularly the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), also intersect with drone misuse, especially in cases of unlawful surveillance.²¹

5.3 United Kingdom

The United Kingdom regulates drones under the Air Navigation Order 2016, as amended after high-profile incidents such as the Gatwick Airport disruption in 2018, where drone sightings led to mass flight cancellations.²² Operators violating drone flight rules, such as entering restricted zones around airports or flying recklessly, can face imprisonment of up to five years.²³ In *R v. Tappin*²⁴, a drone operator was convicted for endangering aircraft by flying near Heathrow. The UK also emphasizes drone registration, pilot competency tests, and active enforcement.

5.4 Canada and Australia

Canada regulates drones through the Canadian Aviation Regulations, requiring registration and

¹⁶ US Department of Justice, "Drone-Related Criminal Prosecutions," 2020.

¹⁷ National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), "Drone State Laws Overview," 2022.

¹⁸ Regulation (EU) 2019/947; Regulation (EU) 2019/945.

¹⁹ EASA, EU Drone Regulation Guidance Material, 2020.

²⁰ French Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC), "Drone Safety and Penal Sanctions," 2021; German Federal Ministry of Transport, "Drone Law Amendments," 2020.

²¹ European Data Protection Board, "Drones and GDPR Compliance," 2020.

²² UK Civil Aviation Authority, Air Navigation Order 2016 (as amended).

²³ UK Home Office, "Drone Safety and Criminal Penalties," 2021.

²⁴ *R v. Tappin*, UK Crown Court, 2019.

pilot certification for drones over 250 grams.²⁵ Violations can lead to administrative fines or criminal prosecution under the Aeronautics Act, especially if safety is endangered. Canadian courts have prosecuted cases of drones interfering with aircraft, with penalties including fines and imprisonment. Similarly, Australia regulates drones through the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), which enforces operational limits and penalizes unsafe flying.²⁶ Criminal charges apply for reckless endangerment and breaches of air safety under the Civil Aviation Act, 1988.

5.5 Israel and Select Others

Countries facing heightened security threats, such as Israel, have adopted stringent drone laws. Drones near border areas or sensitive installations are tightly controlled, with violations attracting severe penalties under national security statutes.²⁷ Similarly, China requires real-name registration of drones and has criminalized unauthorized aerial photography of military and strategic facilities.²⁸ These frameworks highlight the securitization of drone governance in high-risk contexts.

5.6 Lessons for India

From these comparative approaches, several lessons emerge for India: -

- **Explicit criminalization:** Many jurisdictions criminalize reckless or malicious drone use, particularly when it endangers aircraft, national security, or public safety.
- **Layered enforcement:** Combining aviation regulatory oversight with general criminal law (e.g., trespass, privacy, drug smuggling) creates deterrence.
- **Judicial precedents:** Active case law in the US and UK demonstrates the role of courts in clarifying drone liability, which India currently lacks.
- **Technological integration:** Countries like Israel and China incorporate technological enforcement (real-name registration, counter-drone systems) with legal frameworks.

²⁵ Canadian Aviation Regulations, Part IX (Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems)

²⁶ Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), Drone Safety Rules, 2020.

²⁷ Israel Ministry of Justice, "Drone Legislation in National Security Context," 2021.

²⁸ Xinhua News, "China Mandates Real-Name Registration for Drones," 2017.

India can draw on these experiences to develop a hybrid model that integrates regulatory clarity, explicit criminal liability, and judicial engagement, tailored to its unique socio-political and security environment.

6. Doctrinal and Theoretical Gaps in Indian Criminal Law

While India has made notable progress in regulating drones through the Drone Rules, 2021 and the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, its criminal law framework remains ill-equipped to address the unique challenges posed by drone-related offences. The inadequacies are not merely legislative but extend to deeper doctrinal and theoretical gaps within the structure of Indian criminal jurisprudence.

6.1 Absence of Drone-Specific Criminal Offences

Current criminal law provisions are largely technology-neutral, crafted at a time when drones did not exist. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, for example, criminalizes trespass, nuisance, or mischief, but these categories fail to capture the complexity of drone-enabled misconduct such as aerial surveillance, automated contraband delivery, or coordinated swarming attacks. The absence of drone-specific offences creates ambiguity for enforcement agencies and courts, who are forced to stretch existing provisions beyond their original intent.

6.2 Regulatory Criminal Divide

Indian drone law is presently rooted in a regulatory paradigm. Violations of drone rules are treated as administrative breaches, punishable by fines or suspension of licenses.²⁹ However, when the misuse of drones results in significant harm such as smuggling narcotics, endangering air traffic, or infringing privacy administrative sanctions appear inadequate. This blurring of the line between regulatory violation and criminal conduct undermines deterrence and fails to reflect the gravity of potential harms.³⁰

6.3 Doctrinal Uncertainty in Applying General Criminal Law

Doctrinal gaps arise when general criminal law is applied to drones:

²⁹ Ministry of Civil Aviation, Drone Rules, 2021.

³⁰ V. Rao, "Drone Rules 2021: The Regulatory–Criminal Divide," *National Law Review of India*, 2024.

- **Trespass and property law:** Traditional notions of trespass under Section 329 BNS involve physical intrusion, but drones often traverse low-altitude airspace, raising unresolved questions about whether such over flight constitutes trespass.
- **Privacy and surveillance:** Indian criminal law does not expressly recognize a right to privacy violation as a criminal offence. Following Justice *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*³¹, privacy is a fundamental right, yet its protection is primarily constitutional, with no penal statute addressing drone-based voyeurism or surveillance.
- **Mens rea and autonomous systems:** Doctrinal challenges also arise when drones operate autonomously or semi-autonomously. Questions of criminal intent (*mens rea*) and liability attribution become complex if an operator is only indirectly controlling the device.

6.4 Evidentiary and Procedural Gaps

Indian criminal procedure, governed by the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, does not yet account for drone-specific evidentiary issues. Drones can carry payloads, record data, and transmit signals, yet there are no standard protocols for forensic examination, chain of custody, or admissibility of drone-derived electronic evidence. This lacuna creates hurdles in both investigation and trial, as courts require reliable evidence that often cannot be adequately produced.

6.5 Fragmented Institutional Responsibility

Another theoretical gap lies in institutional allocation. Drone enforcement is shared between the DGCA, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, and state police forces. The absence of a centralized criminal enforcement agency for drone offences results in fragmented responsibility and diluted accountability. Comparative jurisdictions such as the US FAA or UK CAA coordinate more effectively with law enforcement, providing models India could emulate.

6.6 Theoretical Underpinnings: Crime, Risk, and Technology

On a theoretical level, Indian criminal law has yet to fully engage with the criminological

³¹ 10 SCC 1 (2017)

implications of drones. Drones blur the line between physical and cyber domains, enabling new forms of “techno-crime” that combine attributes of cybercrime, terrorism, and conventional criminality.³²

Indian scholarship has traditionally focused on either cybercrime or physical offences, with limited engagement on hybrid technologies like drones. This gap leaves policymakers without a coherent doctrinal foundation to classify, penalize, and prevent drone crimes.

6.7 The Way Forward

Addressing these doctrinal and theoretical gaps requires:

- Enacting drone-specific penal provisions within the BNS or a separate Drone Offences Act.
- Clarifying the threshold between regulatory breaches and criminal offences.
- Developing evidence-handling protocols for drone-related forensics.
- Enhancing institutional coordination between aviation regulators and criminal law enforcement.
- Encouraging scholarly engagement on the theoretical dimensions of drones as a category of crime.

Unless addressed, India risks treating drone misuse as a minor regulatory matter instead of a serious criminal law issue with significant security, privacy, and safety implications.

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The rapid growth of drones in India brings both benefits and risks. They offer advantages in agriculture, disaster relief, logistics, and surveillance, but their misuse for smuggling, espionage, terrorism, and privacy violations poses serious challenges for criminal law. While the Drone Rules, 2021, and the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, provide important

³² A. Mehra, “Drones and the Evolution of Techno-Crime,” *Indian Criminology Review*, 2023

regulatory frameworks, they are largely administrative and do not fully address criminal law concerns.

This research highlights that India's current approach has doctrinal gaps, limited enforcement, and no clear criminalization of drone-related offences. Relying on older laws like the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, the Arms Act, 1959, and the Explosives Act, 1884, stretches their intended scope, creating ambiguity and weak deterrence. Although border security, prisons, and aviation authorities have faced serious drone incidents, prosecutions remain limited, fragmented, and often treated as regulatory violations rather than criminal offences.

7.1 Core Findings

- **Doctrinal inadequacy:** Indian criminal law does not specifically recognize drone-related offences, forcing enforcement agencies to rely on outdated provisions.
- **Regulatory criminal divide:** Drone violations are mostly treated as administrative breaches, which weakens deterrence against serious harms.
- **Evidentiary and procedural gaps:** The lack of drone-specific forensic and evidentiary protocols hinders investigations and trials.
- **Institutional fragmentation:** Overlapping responsibilities among DGCA, MHA, BSF, and state police create coordination challenges.
- **Comparative lessons:** Countries such as the US, UK, and EU have enacted clear criminal provisions, promoted judicial involvement, and used technology-driven enforcement from which India can take aspirations.

7.2 Policy Recommendations

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed to develop a robust criminal law framework for drone offences in India:

- **Enactment of a Drone Offences Act:** Introduce a dedicated law defining and criminalizing drone misuse, including offences like unauthorized entry into restricted zones, smuggling, endangering aircraft, privacy violations, and weaponization.

- **Integration with Criminal Procedure:** Amend the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, to include protocols for drone seizure, data extraction, admissibility of electronic evidence, and chain of custody.
- **Institutional coordination:** Set up a central nodal agency for drone crime enforcement to ensure smooth cooperation among aviation regulators, law enforcement, and security forces.
- **Counter-drone technology:** Provide legal backing for jamming, interception, and neutralization technologies, with clear accountability safeguards to prevent misuse.
- **Privacy protection:** Criminalize drone-based voyeurism and unauthorized surveillance, balancing public safety with the constitutional right to privacy.
- **Judicial and academic engagement:** Promote specialized judicial training and academic research on drone crimes to build doctrinal clarity and jurisprudence.
- **Graduated penalties:** Distinguish between minor regulatory breaches, like flying without registration, and serious offences, like smuggling or endangering aircraft, to ensure proportional sentencing

7.3 Long-Term Vision

India is at a point where drones are increasingly shaping its economic and security landscape. A solely regulatory approach is insufficient; a hybrid model combining regulatory oversight with clear criminal liability is needed. This framework should be forward-looking, technologically adaptive, and sensitive to rights. By creating drone-specific criminal laws, strengthening enforcement, and developing legal doctrine, India can turn the challenge of drone crimes into an opportunity to modernize its criminal justice system.

The goal is not to hinder innovation, but to use drones for development while protecting national security, public safety, and individual rights. A forward-looking criminal law framework will be key to maintaining this balance.

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