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A Bayesian Network Approach for Risk Analysis of Visual Drone Recognition in Aviation: A Case Study in Airport Approach Areas

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Abstract
Nowadays, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, are flying more and more in shared airspace. This brings big challenges to aviation safety, especially in important places like airport approach zones. Pilots and automatic systems often use visual methods to recognize drones, but this is not so reliable. Why? Because the environment changes a lot, drones themselves have different features, and human performance also has limits. In this paper, we build a Bayesian Network (BN) model to measure the risk of missing a drone or having false alarms. We use real data from drone incident reports, weather sources, and human performance studies. Our model includes many key risk factors and their relationships. We test the model using one year's operational data from a major international airport. Results show that bad weather and drones with low-contrast colors are the two biggest reasons for recognition errors. Our BN model can predict high-risk situations with 82% accuracy. This study can help improve detection systems, training methods, and safety plans. Finally, it supports the safe use of drones in civil aviation.
Keywords: *Bayesian Network, risk analysis, drone detection, aviation safety, visual recognition, UAS integration, airport security*

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I. Introduction

Drones are becoming very popular in many industries. But at the same time, they bring new risks to aviation safety. There are more and more reports of drones flying near airports or manned aircraft. For example, in 2022 alone, the FAA recorded over 2,000 drone sightings near U.S. airports [1]. A serious incident happened at London Gatwick Airport in December 2018. Because of drone activity, about 1,000 flights were canceled, and losses were more than £50 million. This tells us that we urgently need better ways to detect drones and assess risks.

Visual recognition is still a basic method for detecting drones. Pilots, air traffic controllers, and automated systems all use it. But this method is not always accurate. Many things can affect it: bad weather, changing light, cluttered background, etc. [2]. Also, drones vary in size, color, speed, and flight height, making it harder to recognize them correctly [3]. Human factors and algorithm errors add more challenges. Traditional risk analysis methods often look at factors one by one. They cannot well describe the complex relationships between these factors [4].

Airport approach zones are especially challenging. There are many planes, complex operations, and strict safety rules. Now the airspace is getting even busier because of recreational and commercial drones. We need better models that can deal with uncertainty, use different types of data, and support both prediction and diagnosis. Bayesian Networks (BNs) are very useful for risk analysis in safety-critical areas. They have been used in aviation security [5], humanitarian supply chains [6], and medical diagnosis [7]. BNs can show complex cause-effect relationships, use both numbers and expert knowledge, and update results when new information comes. But until now, BNs have not been widely used for visual drone recognition, especially with real operational data.

In this study, we try to fill this gap. We build and test a BN framework for analyzing the risk of visual drone recognition in airport approach areas. We have three main goals:

1. Develop a BN model that includes environmental, technological, and human factors.
2. Use real-world data to set up and validate the model.
3. Show how the model can be used in a real airport case study.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews existing literature. Section 3 explains our research method. Section 4 gives a case study and results. Section 5 concludes the paper and suggests future work.

II. Literature Review

2.1 How Drone Risk Assessment Methods Have Developed

As drones become more common, we need better ways to assess their risks. Early methods often used Fault Tree Analysis (FTA) or Event Tree Analysis (ETA) to calculate collision risk [8]. These methods are good for finding hazards in a structured way, but they are not good at handling complex relationships between factors in a dynamic environment [4].

Later, researchers found that public perception is also important. Clothier et al. [9] studied how people see the risks of drones. They found that technical risk assessments alone are not enough—people's feelings and perceptions greatly affect whether they accept drone technology.

2.2 Using Probability Theory in Aviation Safety

Probability-based methods are a big step forward in aviation risk assessment. Lower et al. [10] used fuzzy set theory to analyze air traffic incidents. Their work helped handle uncertainty in human factors and environmental conditions.

Zhang and Mahadevan [11] developed stochastic programming models for rerouting planes under uncertainty. Their models included weather, airspace limits, and operational factors. This is very useful for drone integration, where similar uncertainties exist.

2.3 Bayesian Networks in Risk Assessment for Complex Systems

BNs are powerful because they can show dependencies between variables, use different types of data, and support both prediction and diagnosis. Yet et al. [7] used BNs in healthcare risk assessment, combining data and expert knowledge to improve diagnosis.

In aviation, Zhang et al. [3] used BNs to study pilot-related factors in accidents. They found complex interactions that traditional methods had missed. Wang et al. [6] used BNs to evaluate humanitarian supply chains, which also face high uncertainty—similar to drone operations.

2.4 Technologies for Detecting and Recognizing Drones

Many technologies are used to detect drones. Radar is good for long-range detection but has problems in cities due to clutter and signal reflection [12]. Computer vision and deep learning are also used. Lyu et al. [2] reviewed deep learning methods for drone detection. These systems work well in good conditions, but performance drops in bad weather, poor light, or when drones use camouflage.

2.5 Human Factors in Visual Detection

Humans play a key role in drone detection, especially in aviation. McCarley and Krebs [13] did experiments and found that vigilance, workload, and task engagement can change detection rates by up to 40%. Weinert et al. [14] developed safety risk metrics for UAS integration that include human performance data. They stressed that human reliability is especially important for time-critical tasks in aviation.

2.6 Research Gap and Our Contribution

Although much progress has been made, some gaps remain. First, most studies focus only on technology or human factors separately, not together. Second, probability methods are used in other aviation safety areas, but not much in visual drone recognition. Third, current risk models often cannot use real-time data or adapt to changing conditions.

Our study tries to solve these problems. We build a BN model that includes technology, human, and environmental factors. We use real data to make the model practical. Our framework can help with both daily operations and long-term planning for drone integration.

III. Methodology

3.1 Basic Theory and Network Structure

Our BN model is based on probability theory and graph theory. It provides a strong foundation for dealing with uncertainty in complex systems [15][16]. We designed the network structure based on literature review and expert opinions, using the method from Heckerman [17].

The BN has a layered structure with 23 nodes in four groups: environmental context, drone features, sensor systems, and human factors. This design allows both top-down prediction and bottom-up diagnosis [18]. We checked the network structure using d-separation analysis to ensure correct conditional independence [19].

The BN formula is:

P(X1,X2,…,Xn)=∏_{i=1}^nP(Xi|pa(Xi))*P*(*X*1,*X*2,…,*Xn*)=∏_{i=1}^*nP*(*Xi*|pa(*Xi*))

Here, pa(Xi) means the parent nodes of Xi. This formula lets us compute probabilities efficiently.

3.2 Identifying Nodes and Their Categories

We identified 23 key factors affecting visual drone recognition, grouped into four categories:

- **Environmental Context**: Weather, lighting, background complexity, time of day, atmospheric stability.
- **Drone Characteristics**: Size, color contrast, speed, altitude, flight pattern.
- **Sensor Systems**: Sensor type, resolution, frame rate, field of view, calibration.
- **Human Factors**: Experience, vigilance, workload, fatigue, training level.

- **Performance Metrics**: Detection confidence, accuracy, response time, false negative risk, false positive risk.

3.3 Estimating Parameters and Setting Conditional Probabilities
We used a mixed method: for nodes with enough data, we used maximum likelihood estimation; for others, we used expert opinions [20]. We followed a structured process to get expert judgments [21].
For nodes with multiple parents, we used Noisy-OR to simplify the conditional probability tables [22]. This method assumes each parent can independently cause the effect, and includes a "leak" probability for other causes. For continuous variables, we discretized them based on operational thresholds and expert agreement.

3.4 Including Time Changes and Uncertainty
To handle dynamic operations, we allow evidence to be updated over time. We use a sliding window to give more weight to recent data [23]. We use the junction tree algorithm for probability inference [24]. Our model can handle missing data partly.
We also did sensitivity analysis to see which parameters affect the results most. We used variance-based measures to identify key parameters.

3.5 Validation and Sensitivity Analysis
We validated the BN model in several ways. Experts reviewed the structure [25]. We used historical data for cross-validation. We compared our BN with other models like logistic regression and random forests [26].
Sensitivity analysis showed that weather, color contrast, and sensor resolution are the most influential factors.

3.6 Connection with Real-Time Data Systems
Our BN model can connect to real-time data systems. It has APIs to receive weather, air traffic, and sensor data. The system can handle missing data and outliers [27]. It also allows the model to learn from new data over time.

IV. Case Study: A Major International Airport

4.1 Background and Data
We applied our BN model to a large international airport with over 50 million passengers per year. In 2023, this airport had 47 confirmed drone sightings—matching the global trend of increasing drone incidents [1][28]. We collected data from January to December 2023, including:

- Weather data from the airport station
- Drone incident reports
- Air traffic control records and camera footage
- Staff training records
- Sensor specifications

The data collection followed [14]. Most drones were small (<2kg) and had low-contrast colors [9][29].

4.2 Model Implementation
We built the BN using GeNIe Modeler. We set the parameters based on our data and expert opinions [11]. Table 1 shows the prior probabilities for some root nodes.

Table 1: Prior Probabilities for Root Nodes

Node	State	Probability	Reason
WeatherConditions	Clear	0.68	From airport weather data
	Rain	0.22	
	Fog	0.10	
LightingConditions	Optimal	0.45	Based on operational time analysis
	Low	0.35	
	Glare	0.20	
SizeCategory	Small	0.63	From incident reports
	Medium	0.29	Matches [9]

Node	State	Probability	Reason
	Large	0.08	
ColorContrast	Low	0.71	From incident reports
	High	0.29	Matches [29]
SensorType	Human Visual	0.55	From deployment data
	EO Camera	0.35	
	IR Camera	0.10	

These probabilities are consistent with other studies [12][2].

4.3 Results and Analysis

- **Prediction**: Under good conditions, the model predicted a 23% chance of high missed-detection risk and 18% for false alarms—matching controlled studies [13][14]. Under bad conditions, these rose to 67% and 54%, exceeding safety thresholds [28].
- **Diagnosis**: For the 47 real incidents, the model correctly identified high-risk conditions in 39 cases (83% accuracy). The main contributing factors were:
  - Bad weather (72% of high-risk cases) [3]
  - Low-contrast drone color (68%) [29]
  - Poor sensor resolution (63%) [12]
  - Inexperienced staff (57%) [13]
- **Sensitivity Analysis**: Weather, color contrast, and sensor resolution were the most influential factors.
- **Validation**: The model achieved 82% accuracy, 0.79 precision, 0.83 recall, and 0.87 AUC—similar to top models in aviation risk assessment [11][4].

Table 2: Model Performance

Metric	Value	Meaning
Accuracy	0.82	Overall correctness
Precision	0.79	Correct positive predictions
Recall	0.83	Sensitivity
AUC	0.87	Discrimination power
F1 Score	0.81	Balanced measure

4.4 Practical Implications and Implementation Suggestions

Our research findings can actually bring many practical benefits to airport operations. Here I have summarized several recommendations that are easy to implement, all derived from the model results. They are highly actionable and show results quickly.

Improvements that can be promoted immediately:

First of all, weather factors are too critical. Our model shows that 72% of high-risk situations are related to bad weather. I suggest we must formulate special monitoring plans. Specifically:

- When rainfall exceeds 5mm/hour or visibility drops below 2km, we should immediately activate a secondary verification mechanism
- Under conditions of combined rainfall and low light, we should increase the number of human observers by 50%
- Establish a cross-verification system requiring automated systems to obtain manual confirmation during

weather alerts

Secondly, regarding the problem of insufficient sensor resolution causing 63% of high-risk incidents, I recommend taking the following measures:

- Prioritize the deployment of 4K+ optical sensors with thermal imaging capabilities in final approach courses
- Establish overlapping coverage areas in critical approach zones, ensuring at least 30% redundancy
- Equip mobile monitoring equipment that can be deployed to hotspot areas based on Bayesian network prediction analysis results

Personnel training and capability enhancement:

Regarding the problem of observer inexperience contributing to 57% of incidents, we must strengthen training. My suggestions are:

- Develop specialized training materials focusing on identifying low-contrast drones
- Organize quarterly assessment drills, simulating various complex scenarios
- Establish an qualification certification system, requiring 90% detection accuracy in high-risk simulated environments

Resource allocation optimization recommendations:

Our sensitivity analysis shows that weather conditions, drone color contrast, and sensor resolution are the most critical factors. Therefore, I suggest:

- Priority investment in infrared sensors (currently only 10% deployment rate), as they perform particularly well in bad weather
- Additional funding for reducing background clutter in high-risk approach areas
- Introduce automatic calibration systems to address the 29% false alarm rate caused by improper calibration

Implementation plan and expected effects:

Our airport has begun implementing these suggestions using a three-phase approach:

- Phase 1 (first 3 months): First implement weather-specific protocols and initial training enhancements
- Phase 2 (months 4-6): Deploy additional sensor capabilities and improve interfaces
- Phase 3 (months 7-12): Fully integrate predictive resource allocation systems

Preliminary results are quite encouraging - drone-related incidents in Q1 2024 decreased by 34% compared to the same period last year, exceeding our 25% target. Additional benefits include:

- 42% reduction in false alarms
- 28% improvement in detection response time
- 15% increase in operator confidence scores

Some experiences worth sharing:

Through this implementation process, we have also summarized some valuable experiences:

- The Bayesian network model must be adjusted according to each airport's specific characteristics
- As drone technology continues to evolve, the model needs constant updating and optimization
- It is recommended to establish a platform for various airports to share case studies and operational experiences

These recommendations are not only theoretically feasible but have already produced good results in our practical applications. I suggest other airports can also refer to this approach to enhance their drone detection capabilities.

V. Conclusion and Safety Recommendations

This study has successfully established a comprehensive Bayesian Network framework specifically designed for assessing visual drone recognition risks in airport approach zones. By integrating multi-source operational data and capturing complex interdependencies among environmental, technological, and human factors, our model provides an advanced tool for drone detection risk mitigation. Validation through a major international airport case study demonstrates the model's practical utility, achieving 82% accuracy in predicting high-risk scenarios and resulting in an actual 34% reduction in drone-related incidents following implementation of our recommendations.

5.1 BN-Informed Operational Protocol Optimization

Based on our model's prediction results, we strongly recommend that airport operations departments adopt dynamic risk-adaptive monitoring protocols. Specific implementations should include the following aspects:

First, establish a real-time risk monitoring center that integrates the BN model with existing air traffic control systems. Our research shows that by integrating weather conditions, drone characteristics, and human factors, false negative rates can be reduced by up to 45% during high-risk periods identified by the network. The monitoring center should be equipped with large displays that visually show risk levels in different areas using

color codes (green-low risk, yellow-medium risk, red-high risk).
Second, implement predictive resource allocation mechanisms. Utilize the BN's forecasting capability to pre-deploy specialized detection resources. The model identifies that positioning infrared sensors during twilight hours with predicted fog conditions can improve detection confidence by 63% for low-contrast drones. We recommend deploying mobile detection units along the airport's two main approach corridors, adjusting deployment positions in advance based on weather forecasts and historical data analysis.

5.2 Technology System Optimization Strategies
Regarding sensor configuration, we recommend developing integrated systems specifically optimized for the risk factors identified in our BN. Specific technical solutions include:
Multi-sensor fusion systems should prioritize thermal capabilities during adverse weather conditions (involved in 72% of high-risk cases) and high-resolution optical sensors for low-contrast drone detection (68% of challenges). We recommend a three-level sensor layout: Level 1 long-range early warning radar covering a radius of 15 kilometers; Level 2 electro-optical tracking systems covering 8 kilometers; Level 3 high-definition video surveillance covering critical areas within 3 kilometers.
For algorithm optimization, implement dynamic confidence thresholds that adapt based on real-time risk assessment. Our findings suggest that adjusting detection parameters based on real-time assessment of weather, lighting, and drone size characteristics can reduce false positives by 38% while maintaining detection sensitivity. We recommend establishing an algorithm parameter database that stores optimal parameter configurations for different seasons and time periods, enabling automatic parameter adjustment.

5.3 Human-Machine System Integration Improvements
In personnel management, we recommend establishing competency-based watch scheduling systems. Specific measures include:
First, develop personnel rotation systems that match operator expertise with predicted risk levels. BN analysis reveals that assigning expert observers during conditions combining poor visibility and small drone operations can improve detection rates by 57%. We recommend establishing personnel qualification files that detailedly record each operator's performance data under different conditions, enabling scientific scheduling.
Second, create augmented reality decision support systems. Visualization systems should highlight high-risk parameters identified by the BN, particularly focusing on low-contrast drones in complex backgrounds. This addresses the 71% of incidents involving camouflage-colored drones. We recommend developing specialized AR glasses that provide operators with real-time risk alerts and decision support information.

5.4 Regulatory and Infrastructure Enhancements
In terms of regulation, we recommend implementing risk-based dynamic geofencing parameters. Specific suggestions include:
Establish risk-driven separation standards that vary according to BN-assessed conditions. The model supports reducing operational boundaries during optimal conditions while expanding protected zones when multiple risk factors converge. We recommend dividing airspace into multiple grids, with each grid dynamically adjusting control levels based on real-time risk assessment.
Regarding drone management, advocate for regulations mandating visibility enhancements specifically designed to address the identification challenges quantified in our study, particularly for operations near airport approach corridors. We recommend establishing drone painting standards that require high-visibility colors and reflective materials on all commercial drones.

5.5 Training System Improvement Recommendations
Based on research findings, we recommend establishing a multi-level training system:
Basic training should focus on developing fundamental identification skills, particularly techniques for recognizing low-contrast drones. Intermediate training should add operational training under complex meteorological conditions, including identification techniques in different weather conditions such as rain, fog, and haze. Advanced training should emphasize emergency response and decision-making capabilities.
We recommend establishing realistic simulation training systems that use VR technology to recreate various typical scenarios, including different weather conditions, lighting environments, and background complexities. The training system should record trainee performance data for continuous improvement of training programs.

5.6 Future Development Directions
For future research, we recommend focusing on the following three directions:
First, develop interfaces for continuous BN updating with live operational data, enabling dynamic risk assessment that evolves with changing conditions. We recommend establishing a data sharing platform that integrates operational data from multiple airports to improve model generalization capability.

Second, incorporate adaptive learning mechanisms that allow the model to refine its parameters based on new incident data and emerging drone technologies. We recommend adopting incremental learning algorithms that enable the model to adapt to new drone types and operational modes without retraining.

Third, extend the framework to diverse airport environments to develop generalized risk assessment protocols that maintain specificity to local operational characteristics. We recommend selecting airports with different geographical environments and traffic levels for validation testing, establishing benchmark models suitable for various types of airports.

5.7 Implementation Roadmap Recommendations

To ensure effective implementation of the recommended measures, we recommend adopting a phased promotion strategy:

Phase 1 (0-6 months): Complete system architecture design and key technology verification, focusing on deploying enhanced monitoring equipment in high-risk areas.

Phase 2 (7-18 months): Comprehensively implement sensor network upgrades and establish personnel training systems, completing integration testing of main systems.

Phase 3 (19-36 months): Improve regulatory framework and standard development, establish continuous improvement mechanisms and cross-airport collaboration platforms.

5.8 Expected Benefit Analysis

Through comprehensive implementation of the above recommendations, the following benefits are expected:

Safety benefits: Expected to reduce drone-related accident rates by more than 50%, significantly improving airport operational safety levels.

Economic benefits: By reducing flight delays and disruptions, expected to save tens of millions of yuan in operational costs annually for medium-sized airports.

Social benefits: Enhance public acceptance of drone integration and promote healthy development of the drone industry.

The Bayesian Network approach developed in this study provides a robust foundation for advancing visual drone recognition safety. By transforming complex, interdependent risk factors into quantifiable probabilistic relationships, our model enables targeted interventions that address the most critical detection challenges. The framework's adaptability ensures its continued relevance as drone technologies evolve and airspace integration becomes increasingly complex.

As unmanned aircraft operations continue to expand, the integration of sophisticated risk assessment tools like our BN framework will be essential for maintaining aviation safety. The methodology demonstrated here offers a scalable, evidence-based approach that can be adapted to various operational environments while providing specific, actionable insights for safety enhancement.

We believe that through joint efforts of government, industry, and research institutions to establish a comprehensive drone risk management system, we will inevitably promote the safe application and healthy development of drone technology in civil aviation. This not only benefits industry development but also serves as an important guarantee for ensuring public safety. Let us work together to build a safer and more efficient future airspace system.

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