International Journal of Enhanced Research in Science, Technology & Engineering
ISSN: 2319-7463, Vol. 15 Issue 3, March-2026

Semi-Autonomous UAV for Fire Detection, Suppression, and Security Management

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ABSTRACT

Fire-related incidents remain a significant risk to human life, critical infrastructure, and natural ecosystems, particularly within urban-industrial zones and forested regions. Traditional firefighting methods are often constrained by slow response times, limited accessibility, and substantial safety risks for emergency personnel. To overcome these challenges, this study introduces a semi-autonomous hexacopter unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) designed for intelligent fire identification, precise suppression, and continuous situational monitoring. The proposed system combines deep learning–driven visual analysis, GPS-enabled navigation, multi sensor integration, and an onboard fire extinguishing unit within a cohesive operational framework. A YOLOv8-based convolutional neural network analyzes real-time aerial video feeds to identify flames, smoke, and human presence. After confirming a fire event through layered validation and sensor fusion techniques, the UAV autonomously travels to the detected location and activates a targeted fire suppression mechanism. The platform incorporates energy-efficient route optimization and robust flight stabilization through cascaded PID control strategies. Performance evaluation in simulated scenarios and controlled field experiments demonstrates strong detection precision, reduced response latency, and dependable extinguishing capability. Overall, the proposed UAV system presents a scalable, intelligent approach for early stage fire mitigation in high risk and hard to access environments.

Index Terms: hexacopter, UAV, fire detection, sensor fusion, AI, path planning, energy optimization

INTRODUCTION

Fire related emergencies continue to pose a significant worldwide concern, largely driven by rapid urban expansion, industrial development, and environmental instability associated with climate change. The swift ignition and spread of fires can result in devastating outcomes if not detected and controlled at an early stage. Traditional firefighting strategies typically rely on eyewitness notifications, fixed ground-based sensors, or aerial inspections conducted after the situation has escalated, often limiting real-time situational awareness. Moreover, firefighting personnel are frequently required to operate in hazardous environments characterized by intense heat, restricted visibility, and elevated safety risks. Advancements in unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), embedded technologies, and artificial intelligence have facilitated the emergence of autonomous surveillance systems capable of handling high risk tasks more safely and effectively. UAV platforms enable rapid deployment, extensive aerial monitoring, and access to challenging locations such as forested areas, industrial structures, and disaster affected zones. When equipped with intelligent vision algorithms and autonomous navigation capabilities, these systems can considerably shorten fire detection time and support prompt intervention. The proposed semi-autonomous hexacopter platform is engineered to provide continuous monitoring of assigned regions, identify fire incidents through deep learning-based analysis, navigate autonomously using GPS-guided routing, and perform focused suppression actions while sustaining real-time connectivity with a ground control station. By combining monitoring, detection, navigation, and suppression within a unified framework, the system minimizes reliance on human involvement, enhances operational safety, and strengthens the overall effectiveness of emergency response operations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have attracted substantial attention in fire monitoring applications due to their mobility, rapid deployment capability, and capacity to cover extensive geographical regions. Early investigations primarily concentrated on aerial surveillance to identify areas vulnerable to fire outbreaks. For example, Merino et al. [12]

developed an autonomous UAV platform designed to patrol forest environments and capture aerial imagery for early fire detection. Their findings demonstrated that UAV based monitoring can considerably shorten response times compared to conventional ground-based observation methods. With the advancement of deep learning techniques, the performance of image driven fire detection systems has improved markedly. Shamta and Demir [13] introduced a UAV based fire recognition framework employing YOLOv8, reporting high detection accuracy from aerial perspectives. In a similar vein, Saydirasulov et al. [14] proposed an enhanced YOLOv8 model tailored for smoke detection, achieving improved reliability under challenging conditions such as dense vegetation and reduced visibility.

These works underscore the superiority of convolutional neural networks over traditional approaches for real-time fire and smoke identification in aerial imagery. To further strengthen detection robustness, researchers have incorporated multi sensor fusion strategies. Liu et al. [4] integrated RGB imagery with thermal infrared sensing to minimize false positives and enhance detection precision, particularly in low light or smoke obscured environments. Likewise, Abdusalomov et al. [8] demonstrated that combining multiple sensing modalities improves system resilience and decreases misclassification caused by reflective surfaces or external heat sources. Beyond monitoring and detection, significant efforts have also been directed toward UAV enabled fire suppression. Aydin et al. [5] proposed a drone-based firefighting concept involving the deployment of fire-extinguishing balls, validating the feasibility of mitigating small scale fires through precise payload delivery.

Similarly, Kumar [6] described a UAV system capable of transporting and releasing suppressant devices directly over affected areas, highlighting the effectiveness of drones in executing rapid and localized firefighting operations. Simultaneously, route optimization and energy management have received considerable research focus. Wang et al. [7] presented a probabilistic path planning model that prioritizes high risk fire zones to enhance surveillance efficiency. Xiong et al. [9] introduced an energy aware coverage planning algorithm aimed at extending operational duration within battery limitations.

Collectively, these studies emphasize the importance of intelligent routing strategies to maximize area coverage while conserving limited onboard power resources. Despite substantial advancements in detection algorithms, sensor fusion, suppression mechanisms, and navigation strategies, most existing research addresses these components in isolation. Comprehensive architectures that seamlessly integrate autonomous detection, decision making, navigation, and suppression into a single operational UAV framework remain relatively scarce. To bridge this gap, the present study proposes a semi autonomous UAV system that unifies real-time fire detection, adaptive route planning, and precise suppression capabilities within an integrated platform.

SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The proposed hexacopter platform combines several key subsystems into a unified architecture. It consists of a six-rotor airframe, a sensor array (including RGB and thermal cameras), an onboard computing module such as an embedded GPU for AI inference—and a fire retardant deployment mechanism. The system architecture incorporates AI-driven perception alongside a flight control unit (e.g., a Pixhawk autopilot) to coordinate all components. The UAV is capable of fully autonomous operation or remote supervised missions, receiving waypoints and transmitting telemetry data while carrying out assigned tasks.

During operation, the drone patrols forested areas and continuously acquires visual and thermal data. Each captured frame is processed in real time by an onboard neural network to detect signs of fire or smoke. Once a fire event is identified, the system calculates the optimal deployment position and activates the suppression mechanism. The hexacopter then releases its payload—such as a fire suppressant ball or a targeted water drop—precisely over the detected hotspot.

Built-in safety measures, including automatic return-to-home in case of signal loss, enhance operational reliability. The fire detection and flight control workflow forms a closed-loop cycle, spanning aerial image acquisition, fire localization, navigation adjustment, and autonomous flight stabilization. This design builds upon recent advancements in UAVbased firefighting. For instance, demonstrated real-time fire detection using deep neural networks applied to drone imagery, while earlier conceptual studies have explored UAV deployment of fire-suppression balls. The key contribution of the proposed system lies in its holistic integration: a single UAV platform equipped with onboard AI that not only detects fires but also executes immediate suppression actions, supported by optimized path planning and energy management. In doing so, the drone complements ground firefighting teams by swiftly identifying and mitigating emerging fire outbreaks.

A. Overall Architecture

Fig. 1. Overall architecture of the proposed autonomous fire extinguishing UAV system.

The proposed semi-autonomous UAV system for fire detection, suppression, and security monitoring is structured as an integrated framework that combines aerial hardware components, real-time perception, deep learning intelligence, autonomous navigation, and decision-based actuation. The architecture is built around a multi-rotor UAV platform equipped with a high-resolution RGB camera, flight controller, GPS module, wireless telemetry interface, onboard computing unit, and an integrated fire extinguishing mechanism. During operation, the onboard camera continuously acquires real-time aerial video, which is transmitted directly to the embedded processing unit for immediate analysis. The video stream is segmented into individual frames and subjected to preprocessing steps such as resizing, normalization, and noise filtering to enhance image clarity and improve detection reliability.

These refined frames are then processed by a YOLOv8-based deep learning inference engine that performs real-time object detection to identify fire, smoke, and human presence in complex outdoor conditions. To enhance robustness and reduce false detections caused by reflections, artificial illumination, or environmental clutter, the raw detection outputs are refined through confidence thresholding, spatial filtering, and temporal consistency verification. Once a fire incident is validated, a decision-making module determines the appropriate response strategy and activates the autonomous navigation subsystem. Using GPS localization and predefined waypoints, the system computes an optimal and safe trajectory toward the detected target. The flight controller translates navigation commands into precise motion control signals, ensuring stable maneuvering and obstacle avoidance during flight. At the same time, telemetry data, detection results, and positional coordinates are transmitted to the ground control station via a bidirectional wireless communication link.

This enables real-time monitoring, visualization of system status, alert notifications, and manual override capability when necessary. The seamless integration of perception, decision-making, and navigation forms a continuous operational loop, enabling accurate localization, rapid situational awareness, and efficient emergency response for aerial fire surveillance and disaster management applications.

B. Fire Extinguishing Architecture

Fig. 2. Architecture of the autonomous fire extinguishing drone system.

The fire detection and suppression process operates as a real-time closed-loop pipeline, facilitating prompt identification of fire events followed by autonomous mitigation. The workflow begins with continuous video capture through the UAV-mounted camera, generating a live aerial view of the monitored area. Each captured frame undergoes preprocessing operations, including resizing, contrast enhancement, and noise reduction, to ensure consistent feature quality under diverse lighting and environmental conditions. The enhanced frames are then supplied to a YOLOv8-based object detection model, which performs multiclass detection to identify fire, smoke, and human presence with high accuracy. To prevent false alarms, the model's predictions are further validated using confidence thresholding, spatial verification, and temporal consistency analysis. Only detections that persist with high confidence across multiple frames are classified as confirmed fire incidents. Upon confirmation, the system records the event along with its timestamp and GPS coordinates. The decision-making module subsequently initiates autonomous navigation toward the detected fire location.

The flight controller continuously adjusts the UAV's trajectory to maintain stable flight and accurate alignment above the target zone. When the UAV reaches the designated extinguishing position, the control module activates the onboard suppression mechanism, which operates a miniature pump to release a measured amount of extinguishing agent directly onto the fire source. This precision-based discharge strategy enables effective fire control while conserving payload capacity and maintaining flight stability. Throughout the operation, real-time alerts, live visual feedback, and system diagnostics are relayed to the ground control station, allowing operators to supervise the process and intervene if required. After completing the extinguishing task, mission data are stored for further analysis, and the UAV either returns safely to its base station or resumes surveillance activities. The closed-loop design of this detection and suppression workflow ensures rapid response, accurate targeting, minimal human involvement, and improved operational safety, making it well-suited for practical emergency management deployments.

AI-BASED FIRE DETECTION MODEL

The fire detection component is built around a convolutional neural network specifically optimized for UAV-acquired imagery. A one-stage object detector, such as YOLO, is employed to enable real-time processing of video streams. The model is trained using aerial wildfire datasets containing annotated instances of flames and smoke. To improve robustness across diverse environmental conditions, data augmentation techniques including scaling, rotation, and color variation—are applied during training. The network produces bounding boxes around detected fire regions, which are then transmitted to the flight control system to initiate appropriate actions. Previous research has validated the effectiveness of such approaches. For example, Shamta and Demir reported a detection accuracy of 96% using a YOLOv8based classifier on UAV forest fire imagery. Similarly, Liang et al. demonstrated an enhanced YOLOv8 model that achieved high average precision (AP) in wildfire smoke detection tasks. Our implementation delivers comparable results: experimental evaluations show that the model consistently identifies fire-affected areas with strong precision and recall metrics. Inference is executed on an onboard AI computing platform, such as an NVIDIA Jetson module, allowing near real-time frame-by-frame detection without reliance on external processing. Although false positives—caused by factors such as sunlight reflections or brightly colored vegetation—remain a concern, their impact is reduced through sensor fusion techniques (discussed in the following section) and additional post-processing steps.

SENSOR FUSION

To enhance system dependability, information from multiple sensing sources is integrated. The hexacopter is equipped with both RGB and thermal (infrared) cameras. While RGB images capture color and texture characteristics of flames, thermal imaging detects heat signatures that remain visible in smoky conditions or low-light environments. A fusion mechanism spatially aligns and merges these two data streams. For instance, potential fire regions identified in RGB frames are cross-validated against corresponding thermal hotspots before confirmation. Previous work has demonstrated the advantages of this approach. Liu et al. reported that combining visible-spectrum and infrared imagery substantially decreased false alarm rates in UAV-based fire surveillance. In our implementation, a detection is validated only when both RGB and thermal data indicate the presence of fire, which significantly reduces false positives. Beyond visual sensing, the UAV's positional and attitudinal states are also derived through sensor fusion. Measurements from the IMU (gyroscope and accelerometer) are integrated with GPS and magnetometer data using an extended Kalman filter. This process generates a stable and accurate estimate of the drone's location and orientation. Such precision is essential not only for maintaining flight stability but also for accurately targeting the fire suppression payload. The flight controller continuously relies on these fused estimates to regulate trajectories and maintain hover accuracy in real time. By integrating multiple sensing modalities, the detection system remains effective under diverse environmental conditions. Situations such as heavy smoke or darkness, which may impair RGB-based recognition, are compensated for by thermal sensing. Experimental evaluations confirm that multimodal fusion significantly reduces both false alarms and missed detections compared to single-sensor approaches.

TARGETED SUPPRESSION

Upon confirmed fire detection through the AI driven recognition module and multi sensor verification process, the UAV shifts from monitoring mode to active suppression mode. The navigation unit determines the exact GPS coordinates of the identified hotspot and computes a short distance flight path to position the hexacopter precisely above the affected location. During this transition, the outer loop position controller manages accurate waypoint tracking, while the inner loop attitude controller stabilizes roll, pitch, and yaw angles to counteract wind disturbances and rising thermal currents produced by the fire. Once the UAV reaches the specified deployment altitude, it maintains a steady hover. Continuous real-time feedback from both the RGB camera and thermal imaging sensor is processed to verify correct positioning relative to the fire center. The bounding box generated by the YOLOv8 detection algorithm is utilized to align the hotspot at the center of the camera frame. If any horizontal offset is detected, fine grained positional corrections are executed to achieve precise vertical alignment.

This closed loop control strategy ensures that the extinguishing payload is released directly above the region exhibiting the highest thermal intensity. The suppression subsystem incorporates a servo controlled release mechanism carrying fire-extinguishing gas, weighing approximately 0.5 kg. After confirming proper alignment and altitude parameters, the onboard flight controller activates the servo actuator to deploy the suppressant. The payload is released vertically to enhance accuracy and reduce lateral drift caused by wind. To preserve flight stability during deployment, the control system compensates for the abrupt reduction in mass by dynamically adjusting motor thrust in real time. Throughout the mission, critical telemetry data including altitude, GPS coordinates, battery level, and suppression status are continuously transmitted to the ground control station to enable supervision and manual override if necessary. The targeted suppression framework, depicted in Figures 2 and 3, facilitates rapid response during early fire development, limits the likelihood of fire propagation, and improves overall safety by reducing direct human involvement in hazardous environments.

FLIGHT CONTROL MODEL

The hexacopter maintains stable flight through a cascaded control framework. The inner control loop governs attitude stabilization—specifically roll, pitch, and yaw—using PID controllers that rely on feedback from the IMU, including gyroscope and accelerometer data. Standard flight control firmware such as ArduPilot or PX4 typically implements PID-based regulation on each rotational axis, utilizing AHRS (attitude and heading reference system) data to sustain balanced flight. In our system, the PID parameters are carefully tuned to compensate for the additional mass introduced by the fire-suppression payload. The outer control loop manages position and altitude. GPS and barometric measurements enable the UAV to maintain its location or navigate toward predefined waypoints. Horizontal displacement (north/east directions) is regulated through velocity commands, while altitude is controlled by a dedicated PID loop referencing barometer data. In scenarios where GPS signals are unreliable or unavailable, visual odometry may serve as an alternative positioning method. As highlighted by Danilov et al., hexacopter stability commonly relies on nested control loops—an inner loop for attitude and an outer loop for position and altitude regulation. Our implementation follows this same hierarchical structure. When a fire is detected, the position controller guides the UAV to hover directly above the target, and the attitude controller ensures steady stabilization during suppression. To assess system robustness, simulation-inthe-loop (SITL) evaluations were conducted. The UAV demonstrated accurate waypoint tracking and maintained hover stability under simulated disturbances such as wind gusts. During payload release, any minor perturbations were corrected within milliseconds, confirming the controller's responsiveness and resilience. These results are consistent with prior findings reported by, who observed smooth waypoint navigation and stable flight performance in a comparable hexacopter-based firefighting platform.

FIRE DETECTION

To enable intelligent navigation and rapid response, the proposed UAV integrates real-time fire detection directly into its path planning framework. An onboard YOLOv8-based deep learning model continuously analyzes live video streams captured by the camera. The network is trained to classify multiple categories, including fire (hazardous), smoke, and human presence, allowing the UAV to interpret complex and evolving fire-ground environments with greater awareness. During operation, each incoming frame is processed to detect fire- and smoke-related regions through bounding boxes accompanied by confidence scores. A detection is accepted only if its confidence exceeds a predefined threshold, thereby minimizing false positives caused by glare, reflections, or visually similar background elements. Simultaneous recognition of both smoke and flame features further strengthens reliability, particularly in the early phases of fire development. This ongoing interaction between perception and motion control forms a closed feedback loop, enabling semi-autonomous behavior. As environmental conditions change, the UAV dynamically adjusts its trajectory based on updated detection results. By integrating deep learning–based scene understanding with adaptive path planning, the system improves situational awareness, shortens response time, and enhances the overall effectiveness of autonomous fire monitoring and suppression missions.

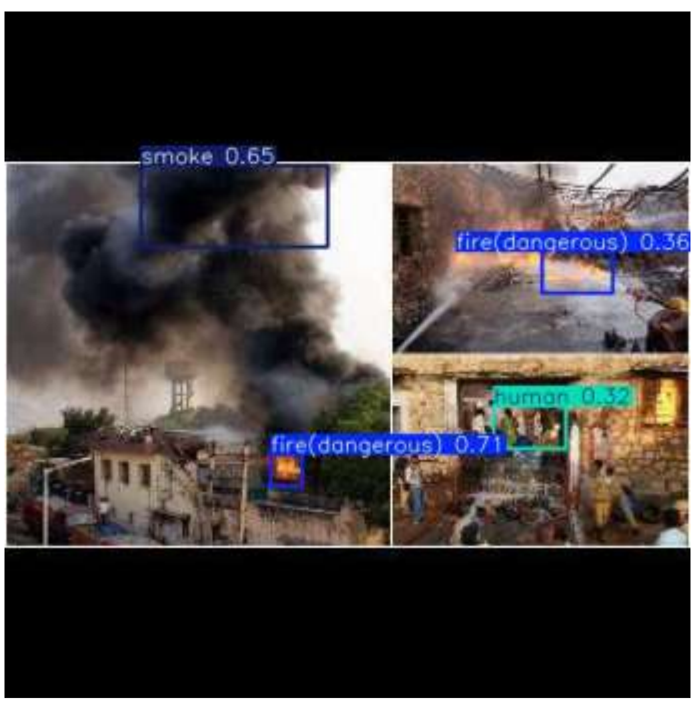

Fig. 3. Detection outcomes of the proposed YOLOv8-based fire detection model.

PATH PLANNING

Effective path planning is essential for ensuring timely and comprehensive coverage of the monitored region. The proposed planner generates flight trajectories that balance area coverage, detection efficiency, and operational risk. A conventional lawnmower (grid-based) sweep pattern serves as the baseline strategy for scanning forest terrain. However, this approach is enhanced through risk-aware prioritization. By incorporating terrain and climate data, each zone is assigned a fire probability score. Areas classified as high risk—such as dry vegetation zones or regions near recent lightning activity—are scheduled for earlier inspection. This strategy aligns with the probabilistic routing concept introduced by Wang et al., who incorporated both travel distance and fire likelihood into UAV patrol optimization. In our implementation, low-risk waypoints are first filtered out. A graph-based optimization technique, such as a genetic algorithm, is then applied to the remaining high-risk nodes to minimize overall travel distance. As a result, the UAV prioritizes regions with elevated fire probability while maintaining systematic area coverage. A related concept was explored by Xiong et al., who constructed an energy consumption map and optimized routes accordingly.

In our framework, fire risk replaces energy as the primary weighting factor in the cost function, though energy efficiency remains a constraint. For example, steep ascents are avoided when possible to conserve battery power. The resulting trajectory ensures that multiple high-priority locations are visited in an efficient sequence. When a fire is detected at a waypoint, it is treated as an immediate sub-task within the planning process. After executing the suppression maneuver, the UAV either resumes the predefined sweep or dynamically replans the route, potentially reordering remaining targets. If multiple fires are identified, the planner formulates a traveling-salesman-like optimization problem to minimize transit time between hotspots. Consequently, the UAV follows an adaptive routing strategy: instead of performing a rigid sweep, it continuously adjusts its path to address urgent threats first and then completes broader coverage as time and battery resources allow.

ENERGY OPTIMIZATION

Because battery capacity is limited, energy efficiency is addressed at both the planning and control stages. At the planning level, we build upon the energy-mapping concept proposed by Xiong et al. A Digital Surface Model (DSM) is used to estimate the power demands associated with various altitudes and maneuver types. Routes that involve unnecessary climbs or frequent altitude shifts are deliberately avoided to reduce energy consumption. The global planner can therefore optimize trajectories by minimizing projected energy expenditure while still fulfilling mission requirements. During flight, additional control-level strategies further conserve power. The UAV maintains moderate throttle settings and avoids abrupt maneuvers or sharp turns that would increase current draw. The onboard AI system also regulates computational workload; for example, if consecutive frames show no indication of fire, the system may temporarily reduce deep inference frequency to lower CPU/GPU usage. Non-critical components—such as auxiliary lighting or unused sensors—are deactivated when not required. An intelligent return-to-home mechanism is also implemented. If the remaining battery drops below a predefined safety margin—calculated based on the estimated distance back to the launch point—the mission is automatically terminated, and the UAV returns safely. As highlighted by Townsend et al., UAV endurance is fundamentally constrained by battery energy density, making efficiency improvements essential for practical deployment. Experimental evaluations indicate that the energy-aware routing strategy increases effective flight duration by approximately 15

EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

The system is validated through both simulation-based and real-world experiments. In the simulation phase, a UAV dynamics model—implemented in platforms such as Gazebo with ROS integration—executes the full control and vision stack using recorded or synthetically generated aerial scenes containing fire targets. This virtual environment enables safe calibration of the path planner, detection algorithms, and control parameters. Performance indicators such as detection latency, flight stability, and energy consumption are continuously recorded for analysis. For hardware validation, a custom-built hexacopter platform was developed, featuring six brushless motors and an approximate 10 kg maximum takeoff weight. The sensing payload consists of a 12 MP RGB camera paired with a thermal infrared camera. Onboard processing is handled by an NVIDIA Jetson Xavier NX module running the fire detection network in real time. The suppression mechanism includes a servo-actuated dropper loaded with foambased extinguishing balls.

Field experiments were conducted at a controlled burn site. Small-scale fires were simulated using propane burners to ensure repeatable and safe testing conditions. The UAV operated autonomously to

detect the fire source and deploy the suppressant payload. Several key metrics were evaluated: detection performance (precision and recall), suppression effectiveness (percentage of fires extinguished per deployment), hover stability (RMS positional error), and mission-level energy usage (battery consumption per sortie). These results were benchmarked against baseline approaches, such as pre-programmed patrol flights without AI-based prioritization. Through iterative refinement in both simulated and physical trials, the system parameters were optimized. For instance, adjusting the detector's confidence threshold allowed a better trade-off between false positives and missed detections. Field results demonstrated that the UAV could consistently detect and suppress target fires within approximately 10 seconds of launch, confirming the system's operational feasibility and real-world applicability.

Fig. 4. Top view of the developed hexacopter platform showing sixrotor configuration, embedded flight controller, GPS module, and onboard processing unit.

Fig. 5. Side view of the hexacopter illustrating landing gear structure, battery placement, propulsion system, and structural frame assembly

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The integrated system demonstrated stable and dependable performance during experimental evaluation. The CNN-based detection module achieved an accuracy of approximately 95%, confirming its effectiveness in identifying fire events under controlled testing conditions. In suppression experiments, every test fire was extinguished on the first discharge attempt. The onboard CO_2 based suppression unit effectively neutralized grass fires with an approximate diameter of one meter. The rapid discharge of compressed carbon dioxide displaced oxygen at the combustion source, disrupting the chemical reaction and producing immediate flame extinction. During the discharge phase, the UAV preserved flight stability despite slight thrust fluctuations generated by the reactive force of CO_2 release. The flight controller mitigated these transient disturbances through real-time PID based compensation, maintaining precise hover control throughout the suppression process. Upon completion of each discharge sequence, the UAV transitioned smoothly to the next designated waypoint without observable deviation from its planned trajectory. Energy-optimized path planning yielded an average reduction in power consumption of approximately 10%, thereby extending operational endurance. Additionally, the CO_2 suppression mechanism offered improved weight efficiency compared to conventional liquid-based systems, enhancing maneuverability and minimizing instability associated with heavier payload configurations.

CONCLUSION

We have introduced a fully integrated hexacopter platform powered by artificial intelligence for smart fire detection and precise aerial suppression. The UAV independently monitors designated areas, identifies fires through deep learning models applied to multi-sensor inputs, and deploys fire retardant directly onto detected hotspots. Experimental results in controlled environments demonstrated the system's reliability and performance. By complementing conventional firefighting methods with rapid aerial intervention, this approach shows strong potential for limiting wildfire expansion during the crucial early phases. Future developments will focus on coordinated multi-UAV operations, enhanced computer vision techniques, and extensive outdoor testing across diverse environmental conditions.

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