



NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES
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Drones and US Grand Strategy in the Contemporary World

Francis N. Okpaleke

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New Security Challenges

Series Editor

George Christou, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK

The security agenda has become increasingly complex in recent years, with the war in Ukraine that began in February 2022 reminding us that we cannot take sustainable peace for granted, and that traditional concerns focusing on the state, war and military defence that came with the Cold War, remain important. It has also highlighted, however, the interconnectedness of the traditional and issues that are now of equal and indeed more significance to the security of the collective and the individual in the 21st Century, including, for example, human, food, cyber, health, environmental, economic, and energy security. Such issues have also seen a proliferation of a multiplicity of actors – state and non-state – as well as institutions at different levels – local, national, regional, global – in the performance of security. Moreover, the construction, contestation and practice of security is increasingly playing out across many new ‘spaces’ and ‘sites’ to address new types of risks and threats that are far from straightforward, including bioterrorism, cyber-attacks, climate change, interference in democratic processes and global pandemics. The increasing complexity and dynamism of the unfolding security agenda is what the *New Security Challenges* series seeks to capture and reflect, whilst not neglecting the importance of the relationship between the traditional and the new, for the contemporary global security environment.

For an informal discussion for a book in the series, please contact the series editor George Christou (G.Christou@warwick.ac.uk), or Palgrave editor Lucy Everitt (lucy.everitt.1@palgrave.com).

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PREFACE

This book delves into the role of drones in US grand strategy, exploring their use by successive US administrations post 9/11 in “targeted states” (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya) while pursuing different typologies of grand strategies. Although drones have proven effective in targeted killing operations and dismantling terrorist organizations, their tactical benefits have unintended consequences that extend beyond the battlefield. These consequences include negative impacts in targeted states, and a compromise of US strategic objectives. Surprisingly, these issues have not been adequately addressed in the existing literature.

Addressing this gap, the overarching research question of the book is to investigate how drones both support and undermine US grand strategy. In doing so, the book seeks to determine the broader strategic ramifications of drone use for US grand strategy, transcending their short-term tactical significance. Additionally, it examines the political and strategic goals that drones supposedly advance, as well as the consequences of drone proliferation for US strategic objectives on both national and global scales. The book draws on publicly available data sets on drone strikes in targeted states since 9/11 and utilizes international relations theories such as realism, liberalism, and security dilemma theory to explain drone use and its intersection with US grand strategy. To address these, the book analyses the utility and impact of drones in facilitating the grand strategy of successive US administrations before and after 9/11. It undertakes case analyses of the aftermath of drone usage in Afghanistan and Pakistan

and evaluates the impact of continued drone diffusion among state and non-state actors.

The central thrust of the book is that the continued use of drones as a central counterterrorism tactic and offensive war strategy in targeted states undermines US grand strategy. While drones successfully eliminate terrorists, they also inadvertently cause anti-American sentiments, lead to the deaths of non-combatants, and generate unintended blow-back. Consequently, the tactical use of drones has strategic ramifications that compromise US grand strategy in the long term. This book sheds light on the evolving nature of modern warfare and its intersection with powerful emerging technologies like drones. As these new technologies play an increasingly significant role in statecraft and warfighting, there is a pressing need for a more robust assessment and debate about their long-term strategic implications.

Auckland, New Zealand

Francis N. Okpaleke

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This book would not have been possible without the invaluable contributions, encouragement, and support of my friends, family members, and several individuals that time will fail me to mention. Their presence in my academic and personal life has been a true blessing.

PRAISE FOR *DRONES AND US GRAND STRATEGY IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD*

“Modern warfare has a lot to do with disruptive strategy and technology. The arrival of drones as an instrument of warfare is changing the way wars are planned, prosecuted, won, or lost. This development holds salient implications for statecraft globally. Francis Okpaleke’s book (*Drones and US Grand Strategy in the Contemporary World*) is a timely and modest contribution to the emerging scholarship on the strategic import of dronification in the context of the rapidly evolving international praxis of warfare. I strongly recommend the book for all stakeholders of the global community of Defence and Strategy.”

—Al Chukwuma Okoli, Ph.D, *Associate Professor of Political Science and Security Studies, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria*

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ABBREVIATIONS

Af-Pak	Afghanistan-Pakistan
AFRICOM	Africa Command
AGM-114	Air-to-Ground Missile-114
AGM-65	Air-to-Ground Missile-65
AI	Amnesty International
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AQIA	Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
AUMF	Authorization for the Use of Military Force
BDA	Battle Damage Assessment
C4ISR	Command, Control, Computer, Communication, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNAS	Center for New American Security
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CPLA	Chinese People Liberation Army
CPOST	Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CT	Counterterrorism
DoD	Department of Defense
DSG	Defense Strategic Guidance
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FDD	Federation for the Defense of Democracy
FY	Fiscal Year

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GJ-1	Gong-Ji-Wu-Ren-Ji
GNA	Internationally Recognized Government (Libya)
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
HGVs	Hypersonic Glide Vehicles
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
HVTs	High Value Targets
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IMINT	Image Intelligence
ISIS	Islamic State in Syria
ISKP	Islamic State in Khorasan Province
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Commands
LVTs	Low Value Targets
LWJ	Long War Journal
MiG-21	Mikoyan-i-Gurevich-21 Soviet Aircraft
MLP	Muslim League Party
NAF	New American Foundation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCC	National Counterterrorism Center
NCW	Network Centric Warfare
NSCT	National Strategy for Combating Terrorism
NSS	National Security Strategy
NWFP	North Western Frontier Province
NWO	New World Order
OCO	Overseas Contingent Operations
PPG	Presidential Policy Guidance
PSP	Principles, Standards and Procedures
PTSD	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SAM	Surface-to-air-Missile
SCS	South China Sea
SDI	Strategic Defense Initiative
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SSBNs	Ballistic Missile Submarines
TBIJ	The Bureau of Investigative Journalism
TFG	Transnational Federal Government
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TTP	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan

UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
VVF	Military Air Forces of Russia
WHO	World Health Organization
WJ-1	Wu-Zhuang Wu-Pen
WMDs	Weapon of Mass Destruction
WOT	War on Terror
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

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Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The lethal weaponization of drones as part of the broader US' counterterrorism (CT) strategy in the “war on terror” (WOT) can be described as a tale of “Two Cities.” For one “City” (the United States, referred to henceforth as “US”), drones are tactical instruments for facilitating leadership decapitation and targeted killing operations while minimizing the cost and risk of warfare. In the other “City” (targeted states—especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, which make up the core focus of this book), drones elicit adverse reactions due to collateral damage, territorial violations, and the blowback of anti-Americanism in the aftermath of targeted strikes. However, while drones effectively achieve the short-term goals of US CT operations, the broader strategic implications of their continued use, due to their countervailing impacts in targeted states, raise critical considerations for US grand strategy.

Furthermore, while drones have caused a great deal of controversy, they have come to be seen as valuable military assets. These present a paradox and research problem that is worth investigating. States intend to pursue the advancement of drone technology; however, there are various fears that they can destabilize international relations, create powerful surveillance tools, and increase in profoundly dangerous ways for US security. In this way, while drones may present tactical benefits and be

attractive for modern militaries, the unintended consequences of their use, the negative impacts, and how they could destabilize international politics and US strategic objectives are problems in need of further investigation.

1.2 DRONES IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD POLITICS

Drones, also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), are pilotless, remotely controlled, precise munitions with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities (Johnson, 2020). Since the September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks, armed drones have been deployed as part of the US' standoff weaponry and multidimensional counterterrorism (CT) strategy in targeted states—which in this chapter, specifically refers to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In these countries, the US has conducted continuous drone strikes against al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their affiliates following 9/11. The legal foundation for the use of drones both within and outside declared battlefields is based on the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF)—a joint resolution ratified by the US Congress on 18 September 2001 and has since been employed by successive US administrations since 9/11. The resolution grants the US president the authority:

To use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001, or harboured such organizations or persons, to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons (US Senate Joint Resolution, 2001).

Drones introduce what Samuel Moyn refers to as “riskless warfare” (Moyn, 2013) and, according to Russell Christopher’s conceptualization of the AUMF, they foster “imminence in justified targeted killings” (Christopher, 2012) within the ongoing War on Terror (WOT). As noted by Horowitz et al., (2016) “one reason to prefer killing over capturing a suspected terrorist is that arresting militants in war zones and unstable areas where they are found is far riskier for US forces than employing unmanned drones.” The advantages of drones in counterterrorism (CT) operations arise from a diverse array of capabilities, including rapid decision-making, manoeuvrability, combat readiness, situational awareness, remote-sensing, battlefield damage assessment abilities,

and their capacity to track, monitor, and eliminate terrorist targets in hard-to-reach regions (Horowitz et al., 2016). The precision and remote capabilities of drone weaponry have been argued to reduce the risk of soldier casualties by avoiding perilous deployments, minimizing the cost and hazards of warfare, and providing US military commanders with asymmetric advantages in conducting warfare from a distance, contrasting with the traditional boots-on-the-ground approach that characterized past conflicts (Boyle, 2015).

US presidents, officials, military commanders, policy analysts, and scholars have strongly advocated for the use of drones due to their tactical benefits and effectiveness in eliminating high-value terrorist targets (HVTs) and supporting broader US counterterrorism (CT) operations. For instance, Leon Panetta, a former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), boldly declared in 2009 that drones are the “only game in town” (Panetta, 2009) for controlling, disrupting, and dismantling terrorist leaders and organizations. Similar views were shared by American University Professor Audrey Cronin, who asserted that “the US is safer when drones take out high-level terrorist leaders and groups” (Cronin, 2013). However, beyond the tactical advantages of drones and the arguments for their continued use as a CT weapon and instrument of statecraft, the broader political and strategic implications for US strategic objectives within and outside targeted states remain a matter of contention.

This book aims to address several critical aspects related to drone usage. First, the specific roles drones play in advancing US security objectives in the post-9/11 environment are not entirely clear in the existing US drone policy. While current studies have focused on the tactical and operational uses of drones for US CT operations, the broader strategic ramifications have been largely overlooked in the literature. This book seeks to unpack the strategic impacts and contribute to the discussion by addressing these gaps.

Second, much of the official data on CIA covert drone operations in targeted states remains classified and hidden from public and Congressional scrutiny. This lack of transparency makes empirical assessment of the actual effects of drone strikes speculative, as argued by Hazelton (2017). While the Obama administration declassified and established new operating procedures for drones in 2013 based on the Presidential Policy Guidance (PPG), the Trump administration reversed course and broadened the latitude for CIA covert drone operations through the Principles,

Standards, and Procedures (PSP). This perpetuates the institutionalization of covert targeted killings away from international legal attention and exempts the CIA from declaring its operations to the American public as required under the US military's Title 10 code (Fuller, 2018).

Third, the precedent set by US CT operations using drones suggests that negative impacts on modern warfare, interstate military balance, and strategic competition may arise due to the ethical, moral, and legal concerns they raise within and outside targeted states. This book will investigate the long-term strategic implications, especially as drone technology continues to diffuse among non-state actors and US rival and regional competitors in the post-9/11 environment.

Fourth, the controversial aspects of the US drone programme, resulting from civilian deaths, territorial violations, and sovereignty issues in targeted states, also raise questions about its utility as a CT tool for achieving broader US strategic objectives and promoting US soft power as a global promoter of liberal democracy. Claims made by David Kilcullen and Andrew Exum that drones engender a “death from above and outrage down below” (Kilcullen & Exum, 2009) highlight the potential for political and public opposition, as well as terrorist retaliation and insurgencies against drones in targeted states. Further investigation is necessary to assess the impact of these issues on US strategic objectives.

Understanding the intersection of drones with US grand strategy is a crucial aspect of this book because drones have strategic, not just tactical, implications. Scholars in academic literature have underappreciated the impact of US grand strategy. For instance, Kilcullen and Exum argue that the US drone campaign is a strategic error against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. They contend that drone strikes make it harder to secure local partnerships with civilians, organizations, tribes, and relevant authorities on the ground in targeted states, which are necessary for effectively uprooting and defeating terrorism and terrorist groups in the long term. Therefore, while drones may be tactically relevant as a CT tool, addressing the strategic ramifications of their use (as successive US administrations since 9/11 have continued to rely on them) is timely and imperative in understanding the broader utility of this weaponry.

MIT Professor Barry Posen conceptualizes grand strategy as “a nation-state's theory about how to produce security for itself, primarily against military threats” (Posen, 2014), encompassing the military means to achieve it. Since 1945, the US grand strategy has undergone two major

transitions in response to external threats and changes in the international security environment. The first transition occurred during the early Cold War era and lasted until the 1990s, moving from a containment strategy aimed at preventing the spread of Communism to a defensive liberal strategy, seeking to preserve US hegemony, maintain its preeminent power position, and engage in democratic promotion in the post-Cold War era. The second transition followed the aftermath of 9/11, championing forced democratization and global intervention missions, as reflected in the 2002 Bush Doctrine and the 2003 Iraq invasion (Miller, 2010). This strategy has undergone further changes and adaptations during the presidencies of Obama, Trump, and now Biden (as later explored in this book). Throughout these transitions, drones have remained a prominent tool in the US counterterrorism arsenal, deployed against terrorist organizations in targeted states.

However, comprehending the precise political and strategic utility of drones within the framework of US grand strategy is complex. Grand strategy is not fixed; it often reflects decision-makers' perceptions, beliefs, threats, idiosyncrasies, and inclinations (Miller, 2010). This indicates that while articulating a clear grand strategy is crucial, its efficacy relies on the successful use of military power to secure and advance its objectives. Flaws or sub-optimal tactics and strategies can render statecraft (the use of diplomatic and military means to advance a state's interests) counterproductive or ineffective, affecting the accomplishment of strategic objectives through the military instrument (Posen & Ross, 1993).

A grand strategy's effectiveness depends on the alignment between the means employed and whether they lead to the desired strategic ends, specifically how political ends and military means achieve core national security objectives. When examining US counterterrorism operations in targeted states and the concerns raised by drone usage, such as civilian deaths, militant retaliation, and anti-American sentiments, questions arise about whether drones ultimately serve as a benefit or detriment to US security interests. As White House CT Adviser John Brennan stated, "an action that eliminates a single terrorist but causes civilian casualties can inflame local populations and create far more problems—a tactical success but a strategic failure" (Brennan, 2010). Additionally, some evidence suggests that "rather than tackling the real drivers of extremism, drones create an ideal environment for al-Qaeda to grow and propagate" (Cronin, 2013). Although drones have proven effective in leadership decapitation and disrupting terrorist organizations, they have

not led to the complete eradication of terrorist groups or the prevention of replacing deceased terrorist leaders. This brings up the question of whether drones are considered a defensive or offensive tool for US statecraft within and outside targeted states. Ambiguity in the stated US drone policy further adds complexity to understanding whether drones serve as crucial military assets, a strategy for power projection, or tools of coercive diplomacy—the actual or threatened use of force to achieve state security objectives. To gain deeper insights, this book examines US drone policy and the extent to which it specifically outlines the role of drones and what they can and cannot achieve, making a more profound inquiry into the role of drones in US grand strategy all the more critical.

1.3 KEY CONSIDERATIONS: DRONES AND US GRAND STRATEGY?

The contemporary use of drones in targeted states has sparked significant considerations with profound political and strategic implications for US grand strategy. These considerations serve as the central focus of this research. The first consideration revolves around the effects of drones on targeted states, as mounting public objections and frustrations arise concerning their utilization and impact on US grand strategy. Scholars (Boyle, 2015; Shah et al., 2022) argue that drone strikes elicit vehement opposition, offending the sensibilities of targeted states, fostering instability, and engendering a legitimacy crisis through their persistent use. This book delves into the literature on the blowback effect of drones in targeted states, exploring the consequences of anti-Americanism, anti-drone protests, and terrorist retaliation for the grand strategy of successive US administrations after 9/11.

In a study examining the impact of drone strikes in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), researchers reported that the aftermath of these strikes “damaged the social fabric of FATA” (Aslam, 2011), contributing to an atmosphere of lawlessness and chaos that incentivizes terrorism and militancy (Shah, 2018). However, conflicting perspectives exist in the literature regarding the actual impact of drones in targeted states (Hazelton, 2017; Shah, 2018). Available evidence suggests that drone killings engender a desire for revenge against the US, supported by four key points. First, unintended civilian casualties fuel antipathy towards drone use, as each

civilian death creates a new source of animosity and recruits for militant movements (Kilcullen & Exum, 2009).

Second, the death of a militant leader often triggers reprisal attacks and encourages further militant recruitment and terrorist violence. Third, drones' violation of territorial sovereignty generates countervailing outcomes within domestic politics, fuelling support for visceral anti-American sentiments. The fourth aspect emanates from hostilities against governments in targeted states that endorse US drone operations (Boyle, 2013). While this evidence highlights a nexus between public anger and drone use in targeted states, further investigation is needed. This book aims to provide a comprehensive inquiry into how such effects impact US grand strategy, shedding light on the evolving role of drones in contemporary international affairs.

The political utility of drones as a tool of statecraft in targeted states comes under scrutiny, raising concerns about potential backlashes for the US. The continuation of targeted killings through drones may inadvertently sow seeds of discontent in targeted states, leading to unintended consequences. Rather than effectively decimating and dismantling terrorist organizations, the use of drones can catalyse upheaval, erode support for US counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) efforts, and even result in what Gallarotti (2011) termed the “disempowerment of US foreign policy in the Middle East.”

The second consideration centres on the implications of civilian deaths following drone strikes in targeted states and its impact on US grand strategy. While several studies have explored the ramifications for US CT operations, there remains a dearth of literature on how these events affect US grand strategy. Drones, known for their precision and minimal collateral damage in comparison to manned aircraft, are supposed to precisely eliminate intended targets while avoiding harm to non-combatants (Boyle, 2015). The process involves real-time confirmation of target identities by military, intelligence, and legal officials before a strike order is executed to prevent accidental deaths. However, evidence based on the most accurate publicly available data indicates that drone strikes have continued to cause an increase in the deaths of non-combatants in targeted states under successive US administrations post-9/11 (see Table 1.1).

These critical considerations urge further investigation into the implications of drone use in targeted states on US grand strategy, highlighting

Table 1.1 Drone Civilian Casualty figures from 2001–2020

<i>US Administration</i>	<i>Strikes</i>	<i>Total Killed</i>	<i>Civilian Casualty</i>
Bush (2001–2008)	56	397	101–138
Obama (2009–2016)	4125	4850–5160	924–1124
Trump (2017–2021)	13,358	5300–11,340	732–1921

Source Comparative data reports from The Bureau of Investigative Journalism and New American Foundation

the potential challenges and ethical dilemmas that arise from their deployment. Understanding the broader impact of drones on US strategic objectives is essential to crafting effective and coherent grand strategies in the ever-evolving landscape of international security and diplomacy.

The official data regarding the CIA secretive drone strikes in targeted states remains classified and heavily redacted when released to the public, presenting a narrative of minimal accidental kills or collateral damage. However, contrasting evidence provided by reputable sources such as The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ), Air Wars, Long War Journal (LWJ), the New American Foundation (NAF), and others based on local accounts of drone strikes in targeted states reveals a different story. These investigative bodies estimate that between 1550 to 2560 non-combatants may have lost their lives due to drone strikes from 2002 to 2020. These figures, however, do not represent an exact count of civilian deaths, as they do not always account for collateral damages and are often reliant on local intelligence reports.

The complexity of obtaining accurate civilian casualty figures from drone strikes underscores the challenges in assessing the true impact of these covert operations. While the data presented by various investigative sources may not provide precise statistics, it highlights the need for greater transparency and a more comprehensive understanding of the human costs of drone warfare. As we strive to unravel the hidden truth behind drone strikes, a deeper investigation is required to shed light on the actual number of civilian casualties in targeted states. Such insights will contribute to a more informed and nuanced debate on the ethical implications and strategic considerations surrounding the use of drones as a tool of statecraft.

The accuracy of civilian casualty counts resulting from drone strikes is marred by a significant challenge, as pointed out by Fuller (2018), “the determination of when an individual transitions from being a civilian to an enemy combatant, and thereby a legitimate target for drone strikes.” Currently, the US government designates individuals in targeted states as “enemy combatants” based on factors like travel, training, association, or affiliation with any terrorist group or network, irrespective of their specific role. This problematic definition, as noted by Wood and Kathman (2015), gives rise to several issues contributing to the mounting toll of civilian casualties. First, it contradicts the delineation of non-combatants in the Geneva Conventions. Second, it increases the likelihood of accidental kills and collateral damage. Third, it reflects a totalitarian perspective on drone use, neglecting fundamental principles of war. These aspects will be thoroughly explored in subsequent sections of this book.

Another critical consideration pertains to drone use against American citizens abroad and the potential risk of domestic discontent. Polling data from Pew Research (2015), Gallup (2013), and the Centre for New American Security (CNAS, 2016) indicates support for drone strikes in targeted states among Americans, a lack of follow-up surveys since 2012 has left critical gaps in American public understanding of the risks associated with the lethal drone programme (Schneider & McDonald, 2016). As drone operations are influenced by domestic politics and shaped by their repercussions in targeted states, these findings raise further questions concerning the overall benefits and implications of drone usage.

The third consideration delves into the phenomenon of drone proliferation post-9/11. Scholars argue that US counterterrorism (CT) operations employing drones have highlighted their efficacy as a valuable technological asset, capable of reshaping military balance and strategic competition (Johnson, 2019). As described by Kilcullen and Exum,

the US has taken down a formidable adversary but now grapples with an array of challenging adversaries akin to poisonous snakes in a jungle. The technological deployment of drones in conflicts like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq has showcased how the US wages modern warfare, providing potential near-peer competitors with a blueprint to counter core capabilities that underpin US military superiority (Kilcullen & Exum, 2009).

The proliferation of armed drones in the international arena, once limited primarily to the US and Israel, has now expanded to encompass rival

competitors like Russia and China, regional players such as Iran, and even non-state actors like Hezbollah. This growing trend poses significant risks to US grand strategy due to the potential uncertainties, vulnerabilities, and emerging dynamics associated with the unchecked diffusion of drone technology. The implications of this unchecked proliferation are vast, ranging from the risk of unprovoked strikes to the use of drones against non-combatants in conflict zones and the ominous spectre of rogue states fitting drones with nuclear weapons. Such scenarios carry dangerous and costly consequences for the US, shaping long-term political and strategic ramifications. Beyond the implications for strategic competition and great power rivalry in the international security landscape, non-state actors such as al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, ISIS, and the Taliban in targeted states could exploit drones to launch retaliatory attacks on US bases and interests globally. This multifaceted proliferation challenge thus demands a comprehensive understanding of its broader impact on US grand strategy.

Despite the US government's efforts to develop unilateral and multi-lateral policies aimed at curbing uninhibited drone proliferation and safeguarding its strategic interests, the reality remains that international control over access to, export, and technological advancement of drones has proven elusive. Evidence points to four significant factors contributing to this phenomenon. First, local militias have demonstrated the capability to weaponize off-the-shelf commercial drones with explosives, showcasing the democratization of drone technology (Gettinger, 2019). Second, China's more relaxed drone export policy has allowed states to acquire drones at affordable prices, circumventing the stringent conditions often attached to US drone exports, such as compliance with international laws and restrictions on sales to non-democratic regimes. Third, the forces of globalization have facilitated drone development and sales across the global arms market (Boyle et al., 2018). Fourth, the race among nations to acquire drones has become emblematic of national prestige and status (Horowitz et al., 2016). The intricate interplay of these factors calls for a deeper investigation into how the broader questions surrounding drone proliferation impact US grand strategy. This critical analysis forms the core of this book, seeking to illuminate the complex implications of drone proliferation on the US's position in the global security landscape and the challenges it poses for crafting effective grand strategic responses.

This book advances the proposition and explores central inquiries to address the role of drones in the US grand strategy. It seeks to assess whether drones bolster or undermine US grand strategic objectives and