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The Role of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Drones) in US Grand Strategy

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To my late father, John Clifford Okpaleke.

ABSTRACT

This Ph.D. thesis examines the role of drones in US grand strategy based on their use by successive US administrations post 9/11 in 'targeted states' (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya) in pursuant of different typologies of grand strategies. Since 9/11, drones have been used for targeted killing operations and for dismantling terrorist organizations. However, while drones on the battlefield present tactical benefits and are attractive to modern militaries and political decision-makers, their use has several unintended consequences. These include the negative impact in targeted states, destabilizing international politics and, undermining US strategic objectives. These are real problems that have not been adequately explored in the existing literature on the topic. To address this gap, the overarching research question of the thesis investigates how drones support or undermine US grand strategy. In doing so, the thesis attempts to determine the broader strategic ramifications of drone use for US grand strategy beyond their short-term tactical relevance.

Furthermore, it probes the political and strategic goals they supposedly advance and the consequences of drone proliferation for US strategic objectives at the national and global level. The thesis draws on publicly available data sets on drone strikes in targeted states since 9/11. It utilizes the international relations theories of realism, liberalism, and security dilemma theory to explain drone use and their intersection with US grand strategy.

To examine the research questions, the utility and impact of drones in facilitating the grand strategy of successive US administrations before and after 9/11 are analyzed. Case analyses of the aftermath of drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan are undertaken, and the impact of continued drone diffusion among state and non-state actors is assessed. The thesis finds that continued use of drones by the US as a central counterterrorism tactic and an offensive war strategy in targeted states undermines US grand strategy. It does so by creating contradictory outcomes: on the one hand, it eliminates terrorists, but on the other, it causes anti-Americanism, the death of non-combatants, and generates unintended blowback. The significance of this thesis is that it supports the contention that the tactical use of drones has strategic ramifications that serve to undermine US grand strategy in the long term. These speak to a broader point about the evolving nature of modern warfare and its intersection with powerful emerging technologies. As these new technologies are integrated into warfighting and come to play an ever-larger role in statecraft, there needs to be a much more robust assessment and debate about their long-term strategic implications.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgment.....	iv
List of Figures.....	xii
List of Tables.....	xiii
List of Abbreviation.....	xiv
Chapter One: Introduction	
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the Study.....	2
1.2 Research Themes and Issues.....	7
1.3 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions.....	11
1.4 Research Hypothesis.....	12
1.5 Significance of the study.....	12
1.6 Methodology.....	14
1.7 Chapter Outline.....	15
Chapter Two: Conceptualizing US Grand Strategy and Theoretical Review	
2.0 Introduction.....	18
2.1 Conceptual Review.....	18
2.1.1 The Meaning of Grand Strategy.....	18
2.1.2 Elements of an Effective Grand Strategy.....	20
2.1.3 Challenges and Limitations of Grand Strategy.....	22
2.1.4 Does the United States have a Grand Strategy?.....	24
2.2 Theoretical Review.....	27
2.2.1 Realism.....	27
2.2.2 The Security Dilemma.....	30
2.2.3 Liberalism.....	32
2.2.4 US Grand Strategy: Betwixt Offense and Defense.....	34
2.3 Chapter Summary.....	35
Chapter Three: Typologies of US Grand Strategy and Literature Review	
3.0 Introduction.....	37

3.2 Typologies of US Grand Strategy and Drones.....	37
3.2.1 Primacy and Drones.....	37
3.2.2 Restraint and Drones.....	40
3.2.1.1 Offshore Balancing.....	41
3.2.1.2 Retrenchment.....	42
3.2.1.3 The Utility of Drones in the Grand Strategy of Restraint.....	43
3.2.3 Deep Engagement, Selective Engagement, and Drones.....	44
3.2.3.1 What Roles do Drones Play in a World of Selective/ Deep Engagement?.....	46
3.2.4 Cooperative Security as a Grand Strategy and Drones.....	46
3.2.5 Drones and US Grand Strategy: The Nexus.....	48
3.2.6 Tactical, Operational and Strategic Use of Drones.....	49
3.2.7 Doctrine vs. Tactics vs. Strategy.....	50
3.3 Literature Review.....	51
3.3.1 Moral and Ethical Dilemma of US Drone Warfare.....	51
3.3.1 Drones and Blowback.....	55
3.3.2 Civilian Casualty and Drones.....	57
3.3.3 Drone Proliferation.....	60
3.3.5 Chapter Summary.....	61

Chapter Four: Drones and US Grand Strategy: A Historical Analysis

4 Introduction.....	62
4.3 The Evolutionary Phases of Drone Development (1909-1917)	62
4.4 UAVs in the Interwar Period (1918-1938)	64
4.5 UAVs, World War II and US Grand Strategy (1939-1945)	66
4.6 UAVs and US Grand Strategy in the Early Cold War (1947-1950)	68
4.7 US Grand Strategy under Harry Truman and the Militarization of Containment. 69	
4.8 Drone use during the Early Cold War.....	71
4.9 Drones, US Grand Strategy in Vietnam, and Korean Wars.....	72
4.9.1 Richard Nixon's Vietnamization Policy.....	73
4.9.2 The Efficacy and Utility of Drones in the Korean and Vietnam Wars	74
4.10 Drones, Détente, and the Second Cold War.....	77
4.11 Drones, George H.W. Bush Administration, and the Persian Gulf War	78

4.12	Drones, Network Centric Warfare, and the Persian Gulf War.....	80
4.13	Drones, Clinton's Grand Strategy, and the Bosnian War.....	82
4.14	Chapter Summary.....	84

Chapter Five: Drones, Bush Administration and US Grand Strategy

5	Introduction.....	85
5.3	Bush Foreign Policy Before and After 9/11.....	86
5.4	Grand Strategy after 9/11 and the Role of Neo-Conservatism.....	87
5.5	The Evolution of Bush Drone Warfare (2001-2008)	90
5.6	Explaining Drone Use during the Bush Administration.....	93
5.7	The Dilemma of Drone Warfare for Bush Grand Strategy.....	95
5.8	Chapter Summary.....	101

Chapter Six: Drones, Obama Administration and US Grand Strategy

6	Introduction.....	102
6.3	The Making of the Obama Doctrine.....	103
6.3.1	Did Obama have a Doctrine?.....	103
6.4	Deciphering Obama's First Doctrine.....	104
6.4.1	Disengagement from Iraq.....	105
6.4.2	Broader Escalation of Counterterrorism.....	106
6.4.3	Promoting Washington's Exemplarism.....	106
6.4.4	Pivot to Asia.....	107
6.4.5	Multilateral Engagement.....	109
6.5	Obama's Second Term and the Rise of Neo-Realism.....	110
6.5.1	An Era of Pragmatism.....	110
6.5.2	The Rise of Neo-realism.....	111
6.5.3	Obama's Hybrid Defensive Grand Strategy.....	112
6.6	The Elements, Character, and Phases of Obama's Drone Warfare.....	113
6.6.1	Obama's Drone Warfare.....	113
6.6.2	Elements of Obama's Drone Warfare.....	114
6.6.2.1	Signature Strikes.....	114
6.6.2.2	Systematization of Targeting Killing and Kill Lists.....	117
6.6.2.3	Expansion of the Authorization for the Use of Military Force.....	117

6.6.2.4	Legitimization of Targeted Killing.....	117
6.6.2.5	Targeting American Citizens.....	118
6.6.3	Phases of Obama's Drone Warfare.....	119
6.6.3.1	Peak Phase.....	120
6.6.3.2	Expansion Phase.....	120
6.6.3.3	Staggered Phase.....	122
6.6.3.4	Denouement Phase.....	123
6.7	The Utility of Drones in Obama's Grand Strategy.....	124
6.7.1	Instrument of Statecraft.....	124
6.7.2	Casualty Aversion Tool.....	126
6.7.3	Broadening the Latitude of Counterterrorism Operations.....	128
6.7.4	Leverage Tools.....	129
6.8	The Dilemma of Obama's Drone Warfare for US Grand Strategy.....	130
6.8.1	Violation of Territorial Sovereignty and Anti-Americanism.....	130
6.8.2	Terrorist Recruitment and Retaliation.....	134
6.8.3	Mounting Civilian Casualty.....	137
6.8.4	Counterterrorism Paradox.....	138
6.8.5	Drone Proliferation among Non-state Actors.....	141
6.8.6	The Restraint Paradox.....	142
6.9	Chapter Summary.....	143
Chapter Seven: Trump Administration, Drones and US Grand Strategy.....		145
7	Introduction.....	145
7.3	Deciphering Trump's Doctrine.....	145
7.3.1	How Coherent was Trump's Doctrine?.....	149
7.4	The Grand Strategy of the Trump Administration.....	150
7.4.1	Framing Trump's Grand Strategy.....	150
7.4.2	'America First' and 'Fortress America' as Grand Strategy.....	151
7.5	Trump's Drone Warfare.....	153
7.5.1	Continuities in Trump's Drone Warfare Strategy.....	154
7.5.2	Discontinuities in Trump's Drone Warfare Strategy.....	155
7.5.2.1	Return of Covert Strikes.....	155
7.5.2.2	Reporting of Civilian Deaths.....	156
7.5.2.3	Deregulation of Drone Warfare.....	156

7.5.2.4 A New Authorization for the AUMF.....	157
7.5.2.5 A New Afghan Strategy.....	158
7.6 Phases of Trump's Drone War.....	159
7.7 Roles of Drones in Trump's Grand Strategy.....	162
7.7.1 Dronification as an America First Approach.....	163
7.7.2 Drones and Fortress America.....	164
7.7.3 Instrument of Post 9/11 Statecraft.....	165
7.8 The Dilemma of Drone Warfare for Trump's Grand Strategy.....	166
7.8.1 The Outsourcing Quagmire.....	166
7.8.2 Civilian Casualty.....	167
7.8.3 Soft Power Declinism and Global Leadership.....	169
7.8.4 Hegemonic Overreach.....	170
7.9 Chapter Summary.....	171

Chapter Eight: The Dialectics and Dilemma of Drone Warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan

8 Introduction.....	172
8.3 US Drone Targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan.....	172
8.3.1 Drone Targets in Pakistan.....	173
8.3.2 Drone Targets in Afghanistan.....	176
8.4 Geopolitics of US Drone Pact in Afghanistan and Pakistan.....	177
8.5 Arguments for Drone Use in Targeted States.....	180
8.6 Arguments Against Drone Use in Targeted States.....	181
8.7 Assessing the Impact of Drone Strikes in Targeted States.....	184
8.7.1 Blowback Question.....	185
8.7.1.1 Do Drones cause Blowback in Targeted States?.....	186
8.7.2 Civilian Casualty Question.....	190
8.7.3 Quagmire of Anti-Americanism.....	195
8.7.4 Drones and Counterterrorism Paradox.....	201
8.8 'Illusion' of US Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan.....	203
8.9 Chapter Summary.....	205

Chapter Nine: The Implications of Drone Proliferation for US Grand Strategy

9 Introduction.....	206
9.3 Drone Proliferation.....	207

9.4 US Drone Policy on Proliferation.....	211
9.5 Proliferation and US Grand Strategy: A Self-Inflicted Wound.....	213
9.6 Implications of Drone Proliferation for US Grand Strategy.....	217
9.6.1 Global Security Level.....	217
9.6.1.1 Near-Peer Competitors.....	220
9.6.1.2 Vulnerabilities and Susceptibilities.....	220
9.6.1.3 Non-state Actors.....	223
8.4.2 National Security Level.....	226
8.5 Chapter Summary.....	228
 Chapter Ten: Conclusion, Research Findings, Agenda for Future Research	
10 Introduction.....	229
10.3 Research Findings.....	230
10.4 Drones and the Future of US Grand Strategy.....	236
10.5 Avenue for Further Research.....	237
 Bibliography.....	 240

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	US Procurement Budget 1989-2017.....	44
Figure 2	Trends in Retaliatory Attacks in Pakistan following US Counterinsurgency operations.....	100
Figure 3	CIA Drone Strikes in Pakistan (January 2009 – January 2011)	120
Figure 4	Total Drone Strikes in Pakistan in Obama's Phase Two.....	121
Figure 5	Drone Strikes in Pakistan 2004-2018.....	122
Figure 6	US Military Spending under Obama in relation to GDP.....	126
Figure 7	FATA Residents support for drone strikes.....	131
Figure 8	FATA Residents for US Military compared to other entities.....	133
Figure 9	Drone Strikes and Terrorist Retaliation in Pakistan and Afghanistan.....	135
Figure 10	Annual Suicide Attacks in Pakistan by Province.....	135
Figure 11	Trump Drone Strikes in Afghanistan (January 2017 – March 2020).	160
Figure 12	Trump Drone Strikes in Yemen (January 2017 – June 2019)	161
Figure 13	Trump Drone Strikes in Somalia (January 2017 – February 2020)	162
Figure 14	Map showing the Proximity of FATA with Afghanistan.....	175
Figure 15	Percentage of Drone Strikes in Pakistan and Successive US Administration since 9/11.....	179
Figure 16	FATA Residents who Support or Oppose Military Action against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in their Region.....	188
Figure 17	Pew Research on US Opinion in Pakistan.....	197
Figure 18	FATA residents who support or Oppose the Presence of Various Entities in FATA.....	199

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Estimated Drone Civilian Casualty Figures 2001 – 2020.....	9
Table 2	Goals of Realism on the Use of Force and Approach to Power and Security.....	29
Table 3	Goals of Liberalism on the Use of Force and Approach to Power and Security.....	32
Table 4	US Drone Capabilities.....	40
Table 5	Comparison of Manned F-16s vs. Drone Procurement Costs.....	43
Table 6	Typologies of US Grand Strategy, Its Core Objectives and View on the Use of Force.....	48
Table 7	Phases of Bush Drone Warfare.....	90
Table 8	Drone Strikes and Casualty Figures in the Bush Era.....	90
Table 9	Drone Strikes Against High-Value Targets in the Third Phase of Bush Drone Warfare.....	91
Table 10	National Defence Budget of Bush and Obama Administration.....	125
Table 11	Non-state Actors and Drone Capabilities.....	142
Table 12	Civilian Casualty Deaths from Drone Strikes under Trump (2017-2020)	168
Table 13	Threshold of Blowback.....	189
Table 14	Estimate of Civilian Casualty between the CIA and other sources.....	192
Table 15	Contradictory US Statements on Drone Strikes (September 2010- April 2012).....	193
Table 16	States Operating Armed Drones.....	207
Table 17	Non-state Actors with Drone Capabilities.....	225

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Af-Pak	Afghanistan-Pakistan
AFRICOM	Africa Command
AGM-114	Air-to-Ground Missile-114
AGM-65	Air-to-Ground Missile-65
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AI	Amnesty International
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
GTD	Global Terrorism Database
GNA	Internationally Recognized Government (Libya)
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
NWO	New World Order
NSCT	National Strategy for Combating Terrorism
NSS	National Security Strategy
NWFP	North Western Frontier Province
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
TTP	Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
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

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues."¹

1.0 Introduction

The lethal weaponization of drones as part of the broader United States' 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 in the rest of the thesis 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 in this thesis), 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.

This introductory chapter provides the basic context, assumptions, research themes, questions, and the hypothesis that informs the research investigation. The chapter sets the scene for examining the controversial aspects of drones and how their continued use by successive US administrations since 9/11 raises questions around their utility for furthering US strategic objectives. The chapter is organized into five parts. The first part provides the background that informs the research inquiry. The second part explores the research themes and issues underpinning the investigation throughout the thesis. The study's research aim, objectives, and

¹ Arendt, H. (1970). *On violence*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

rationale are outlined and discussed in the third part. The fourth part examines the study's methodology, and the final part summarizes the chapter organization for the rest of the thesis.

1.1 Background to the study

Drones, also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), are pilotless, remotely controlled, precise munitions with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.² Since the September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks, armed drones have been deployed as part of US standoff weaponry and multidimensional CT strategy in targeted states – which in this thesis, refers to Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the US has conducted continuous drone strikes against al-Qaeda, the Taliban and their affiliates following 9/11. The legal architecture for the use of drones within and outside declared battlefields is predicated 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 used by successive US administrations since 9/11. The resolution authorizes the US president:

"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 harbored such organizations or persons, to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."³

Drones introduce what Samuel Moyn terms "riskless warfare"⁴ and, based on the interpretation of the AUMF, engender what Russell Christopher conceptualized as "imminence in justified targeted killings"⁵ in the ongoing WOT. As Horowitz and colleagues note, "one reason to kill rather than capture a suspected terrorist is that arresting militants in war zones and unstable areas where they are found is far riskier for US forces than killing through an unmanned drone."⁶ The benefits of drones in CT operations stem from a range of capabilities, including quick decision making, maneuverability, combat readiness, situational awareness, remote-sensing, battlefield damage assessment capabilities, and its ability to track, monitor, and

² Johnson, J. (2020). Artificial Intelligence, Drone Swarming and Escalation Risks in Future Warfare. *The RUSI Journal*, 1-11.

³ Senate Joint Resolution 23 107th Congress, September 18, 2001 in Congressional Record, 147 (2001), <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ40/PLAW-107publ40.pdf> (Accessed February 15, 2020).

⁴ Moyn, S. (2013). Drones and imagination: a response to Paul Kahn. *European Journal of International Law*, 24(1), 227-233.

⁵ Christopher, R. (2012). 'Imminence in Justified Targeted Killings,' in Finkelstein et al., *Targeted Killing*, 256

⁶ Horowitz, M. C., Kreps, S. E., & Fuhrmann, M. (2016). Separating fact from fiction in the debate over drone proliferation. *International Security*, 41(2), 7-42.

eliminate terrorist targets in hard-to-reach areas.⁷ The precision and remote capabilities of drone weaponry have been argued to lower the risk of soldier deaths by preventing dangerous deployments, minimizing the cost and risk of warfare, and giving US military commanders asymmetric advantages in waging war from a distance relative to the traditional boots-on-the-ground that defined past wars.⁸

US presidents, officials, military commanders, policy analysts, and scholars have made strong arguments in favor of their use due to their tactical benefits and efficacy in eliminating high-value terrorist targets (HVTs) and broader US CT operations. For example, Leon Panetta, a former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in 2009, boldly declared that drones are the "only game in town"⁹ for controlling, disrupting, and dismantling terrorist leaders and organizations. American University Professor, Audrey Cronin, shared similar views, asserting the "US is safer when the drones take out high-level terrorist leaders and groups."¹⁰ However, beyond the tactical utility of drones and the defense for their continued use as a CT weapon and an instrument of statecraft, their broader political and strategic implications within and outside targeted states for US strategic objectives remain a contested issue.

First, it is not clear from the existing US drone policy what specific roles drones play in furthering US security objectives in the post 9/11 environment. Current studies have focused on the tactical and operational uses of drones for US CT operations; however, the broader strategic ramifications have remained an underappreciated area in literature. This thesis is an effort to unpack the strategic impacts and contribute to the discussion by plugging the gaps in this overlooked area.

Second, much of the official data on CIA covert drone operations in targeted states have remained classified and hidden away from the public and Congressional scrutiny. While it may be necessary to classify certain military operations as top secret, as Jacqueline Hazelton argues, covert drone operations have made "empirical assessment of the actual effect of drone strikes speculative due to limited evidence from the US government."¹¹ Although the Obama administration, on 22 May 2013, declassified and established new operating procedures for

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Boyle, M. J. (2015). The legal and ethical implications of drone warfare; Hazelton, J. L. (2012). Drones: what are they good for? *Parameters*, 42(4/1), 29.

⁹ Panetta, L. (2009) ACPAK Drone strikes are the only game in town. *New Perspectives Quarterly* <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2009.01090.x> (Accessed 14 May 2019)

¹⁰ Cronin, A. K. (2013). Why drones fail: when tactics drive strategy. *Foreign Affairs*, 92, 44.

¹¹ Hazelton, J. L. (2017). Drone strikes and grand strategy: Toward a political understanding of the uses of unmanned aerial vehicle attacks in US security policy. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40(1-2), 68-91.

drones in areas of active hostilities based on the *Presidential Policy Guidance* (PPG), the Trump administration reversed course. Further, it broadened the latitude for CIA covert drone operations through the *Principles, Standards, and Procedures* (PSP).¹² This has perpetuated the institutionalization of covert targeted killings away from international legal attention and exempted the CIA from declaring its operations to the American public as required under the US military's Title 10 code.¹³

Third, the precedent set by US CT operations using drones suggests it will engender negative impacts for modern warfare, interstate military balance, and strategic competition – due to the ethical, moral, and legal concerns they cause within and outside targeted states – that are difficult to dispel. Furthermore, as drone technology continues to diffuse among non-state actors and US rival and regional competitors in the post 9/11 environment, the long-term strategic implications are worth investigating to ascertain the potential impact for US grand strategy. As Michael Boyle avers, "there remains a strong need for the US to engage in a serious analysis of the strategic costs and consequences of in the use of drones, both for its security and the rest of the world."¹⁴ This thesis will consider the arguments for and against drone proliferation and its impacts on US grand strategy in later chapters.

Fourth, the controversial aspects of the US drone programme resulting from civilian deaths, territorial violations, and sovereignty issues in targeted states also question their utility as a CT tool for accomplishing broader US strategic objectives in targeted states and for US soft power as a global promoter of liberal democracy. As David Kilcullen and Andrew Exum posit, drones engender a "death from above and outrage down below"¹⁵ There are suggestions in the literature that this triggers political and public opposition and spurs terrorist retaliation and insurgencies in targeted states against drones. However, further investigation of these shreds of evidence is necessary to ascertain their impact on US strategic objectives.

Understanding the intersection of drones with the US grand strategy is a vital aspect of this thesis because drones have strategic and not just tactical implications, and understanding how

¹² Executive Office of the President, "Presidential Policy Guidance: Procedures for Approving Direct Action Against Terrorist Targets Located Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities," https://www.justice.gov/oip/foialibrary/procedures_for_approving_direct_action_against_terrorist_targets/download (Accessed 11 June 2019)

¹³ Fuller, C. (2018). The CIA's Drone War and the civilianization of warfare. In, Barros, Andrew and Thomas, Martin (eds.) *The Civilianization of Warfare*. Great Britain. Cambridge University Press, pp. 221-240. <https://doi:10.1017/9781108643542.012> (Accessed 16 June 2019)

¹⁴ Boyle, M. J. (2013). The costs and consequences of drone warfare. *International affairs*, 89(1), 1-29.

¹⁵ Kilcullen, D., & Exum, A. M. (2009). Death from above, outrage down below. *New York Times*, 16, 529-35.

they support or undermine security, scholars in academic literature have underappreciated 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 claim that drone strikes make it harder to secure local partnerships with civilians, organizations, tribes, and relevant authorities on the ground in targeted states, that are necessary to uproot and defeat terrorism and terrorist groups in the long term.¹⁶ Thus, while drones may be tactically relevant as a CT tool, plugging the gap on the strategic ramifications of their use (as successive US administrations since 9/11 have continued to rely on it) is timely and imperative in understanding the broader utility of its 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,"¹⁷ including the military means for accomplishing it.¹⁸ (the broader conceptual debates and definitions of grand strategy are explored in the next chapter). Since 1945, the US grand strategy has undergone two major transitions in response to external threats and systemic changes in the international security environment. The first transition took place during the early period of the Cold War and lasted till the 1990s. This was a change from a containment strategy – focused on preventing the spread of Communism to a defensive liberal strategy – that sought to preserve Washington's hegemony, its preeminent power position in the post-Cold War, and its willingness to engage in democratic promotion. The second transition took place in the aftermath of 9/11. The emergent strategy in this period championed forced democratization and global intervention missions as reflected in the 2002 Bush Doctrine and the 2003 Iraq invasion.¹⁹ This strategy underwent further changes and modifications during the Obama and Trump Presidency (later explored in chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis). Irrespective of the grand strategic vision pursued by these different administrations after 9/11, drones have continued to feature prominently in the quiver of the US CT arsenal deployed against terrorist organizations in targeted states.

However, understanding the precise political and strategic utility of drones within the ambit of US grand strategy is tricky. First, grand strategy is not cast in stone. Often, it is reflective of decision makers' perception of beliefs and threats, quirks, and inclinations.²⁰ This indicates that

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Posen, B. R. (2014). *Restraint: A new foundation for US grand strategy*. Cornell University Press

¹⁸ Ibid (Posen, B. R., 2014)

¹⁹ Miller, B. (2010). Explaining changes in US grand strategy: 9/11, the rise of offensive liberalism, and the war in Iraq. *Security Studies*, 19(1), 26-65.

²⁰ Ibid.

while articulating a clear grand strategy is essential, it often relies on military power to secure and advance its goals. When the use of that power – the tactics and strategy – is flawed or sub-optimal, it makes statecraft (the use of diplomatic and military means to advance a states' interest) counterproductive or ineffective, which affects the efficacy of the military instrument in accomplishing strategic objectives.²¹

Second, a grand strategy's effectiveness depends on the relationship between the means utilized and whether they successfully lead to desired strategic ends. More precisely, how the political ends and military means achieve core national security objectives.²² Linking this with US CT operations in targeted states and the concerns that drones have raised various moral and political concerns due to civilian deaths, militant retaliation, and anti-American sentiments, questions whether drones are beneficial or adverse for US security interests. As John Brennan, a White House CT Adviser, put it, "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."²³ Furthermore, as some evidence suggests, "rather than tackling the real drivers of extremism, drones create an ideal environment for al-Qaeda to grow and propagate."²⁴ Though shreds of evidence suggest that drones have been effective for leadership decapitation²⁵ and in disrupting terrorist organizations²⁶, they have not led to the demise of terrorist groups or completely prevented the replacement of a dead terrorist leader. This lead to the next point concerning drones as either a defensive or offensive tool for US statecraft within and outside targeted states. The bottom line here is that stated US drone policy is at best ambiguous on whether drones are crucial military assets, a strategy for power projection, or tools of coercive diplomacy – the actual or threatened use of force in accomplishing state security objectives. To better understand, this thesis considers US drone policy and the degree to which it specifically outlines the role of drones and what they do and do not achieve. Thus, making deeper inquiry into the role of drones in US grand strategy all the more critical.

²¹ Posen, B., & Ross, A. L. (1993). *Competing US Grand Strategies*. Defense and Arms Control Studies Program, Centre for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

²² Ibid

²³ John Brennan (2010) quoted in Enemark, C. (2011). Drones over Pakistan: secrecy, ethics, and counterinsurgency. *Asian Security*, 7(3), 218-237.

²⁴ Boyle, M. J. (2015). The legal and ethical implications of drone warfare.

²⁵ Jordan, J. (2009). When heads roll: Assessing the effectiveness of leadership decapitation. *Security Studies*, 18(4), 719-755.

²⁶ Cronin, A.K., (2012). *Ending terrorism: Lessons for defeating al-Qaeda*. Routledge. 114

The following section explores the research themes and issues that provide the study's analytical boundaries.

1.2 Research Themes and Issues

Drones, before 9/11, were mainly used for ISR purposes. The contemporary use of drones in targeted states raises several critical considerations for US grand strategy with underlying political and strategic implications. These considerations form the overarching thrust of this research.

The first consideration is the effect drones generate in targeted states due to mounting public objections and frustration about their use and impact on US grand strategy. This is due to the perception that "drone strikes excite vehement opposition in targeted states by offending deepest sensibilities, fostering instability, and engendering a legitimacy crisis through its persistent use."²⁷ This thesis addresses this consideration by exploring literature on the blowback effect of drones in targeted states. Precisely, it examines the impact of anti-Americanism, anti-drone protests, and terrorist retaliation and its ramifications for the grand strategy of successive US administrations after 9/11.

In a study on the impact of drone strikes on the people of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP), it was reported that the aftermath of drone strikes "damaged the social fabric of FATA"²⁸ and the "negative effects contribute to the atmosphere of lawlessness and chaos which incentivize terrorism and militancy."²⁹ However, there are divergent perspectives in the literature on their actual impact in targeted states.³⁰ Available evidence claim that drone killings create a desire for revenge against the US based on four points. First is the notion that unintended deaths of civilians cause greater antipathy to drone use. As Kilcullen and Exum note, "every one of these dead non-combatants represents an alienated family, a new desire for revenge, and more recruits for a militant movement that has grown exponentially even as drone strikes have increased."³¹

²⁷ Nathaniel C. Fick, David J. Kilcullen, John A. Nagl, and Vikram J. Singh, "Tell Me Why We're There? Enduring Interests in Afghanistan (and Pakistan)," Centre for 24 2010 Special Operations Essays a New American Security, 22 January 2009. <https://www.cnas.org/node/675> (Accessed March 10, 2019)

²⁸ Aslam, M. W. (2011). A critical evaluation of American drone strikes in Pakistan: legality, legitimacy, and prudence. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 4(3), 313-329.

²⁹ Ibid 324

³⁰ Shah, A. (2018). Do US drone strike cause blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and beyond. *International Security*, 42(04), 47-84; Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2011). Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the US Drone Programs in Pakistan. *Foreign Aff.*, 90, 12.

³¹ Kilcullen, D., & Exum, A. M. (2009). Death from above, outrage down below. *New York Times*, 16, 529-35.

Second, the notion that the death of a militant leader triggers reprisal attacks and encourages militant recruitment and terrorist violence. Third, the idea that drones violate the territorial sovereignty of targeted states and generate countervailing outcomes within the domestic politics that fuel support for visceral anti-American sentiments.³² The fourth emanates from the hostilities against the government of targeted states that support the machinery of US drone operations.³³ While this evidence suggests there is nexus between public anger and drone use in targeted states, further inquiry is needed. This thesis will seek to provide a fuller investigation to ascertain how it impacts US grand strategy.

This further calls into question the political utility of drones as a tool of statecraft in targeted states. This is premised on the view that the continuation of targeted killings potentially backfires on the US by sowing seeds of discontent in targeted states. As a result, rather than decimate and dismantle terrorist organizations, it catalyses more upheaval, loss of support for US counterinsurgency (COIN) and CT efforts, and engenders what Gallarotti Guilio termed the "disempowerment of US foreign policy in the Middle-East."³⁴

The second consideration relates to the implications of civilian deaths in the aftermath of drone strikes in targeted states for US grand strategy. Several studies have explored this ramification for US CT operations, but there is a shortage of literature on the impact on US grand strategy. Compared to manned aircraft, drones can precisely eliminate their intended targets with minimal collateral damage.³⁵ This is against the backdrop that drone strikes rely on their ISR capabilities, and before a targeted strike order, the identity of the targeted person is confirmed in real-time by military, intelligence, and legal officials to prevent accidental deaths.³⁶ This has, however, not been the case, as evidence based on the most accurate publicly available data sets on the casualty figures suggests that drone strikes have continued to increase the death of non-combatants in targeted states in successive US administrations post 9/11 (a reference to table 1 below).

³² Okpaleke, F. N., & Okoli, A. C. (2020). The strategic efficacy of drones for US grand strategy. *AUSTRAL: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 9 (18).

³³ Boyle, M. J. (2013). The costs and consequences of drone warfare. *International affairs*, 89(1), 1-29; Hudson, L., Owens, C. S., & Flannes, M. (2011). Drone warfare: Blowback from the new American way of war. *Middle East Policy*, 18(3), 122-132.

³⁴ Gallarotti, G. M. (2011). Soft power: what it is, why it is important, and the conditions for its effective use. *Journal of Political Power*, 4(1), 25-47.

³⁵ Boyle, M. J. (2015). The legal and ethical implications of drone warfare. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 19(2), 105-126.

³⁶ Ibid (Boyle, M. J., 2015).

Table 1: Drone Civilian Casualty figures from 2001- 2020

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

Source: Comparative data reports from The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.³⁷

Official data of CIA secretive strikes in targeted states are classified and are heavily redacted when published, with low civilian casualty figures. This gives the impression that its clandestine drone operations result in minimal accidental kills or collateral damage. On the contrary, anecdotal evidence published by The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ), Air Wars, Long War Journal (LWJ), and the New American Foundation (NAF) and other sources based on the local account of drone strikes in targeted states, reveal otherwise. The average civilian casualty figure from these investigative bodies estimates that 1550-2560 non-combatants have died from drone strikes from 2002-2020. Yet, these data do not reflect the exact figures of civilian deaths in targeted states. Most reports do not consider collateral damages and are usually based on local intelligence reports³⁸ (more evidence and analysis later in the thesis). However, this does not suppose that civilian casualty figures are based on a calculated guessing game; instead, it is indicative that available data sets may provide different statistics that approximate the actual casualty figures.

Furthermore, as Christopher Fuller notes, "the accuracy of civilian casualty count is further complicated by unanswered questions regarding at what point an individual transition from being a civilian to an enemy combatant and thus, a legitimate target for drone strikes."³⁹ Presently, the US government assigns the status of "enemy combatants" in targeted states where drones are deployed to anyone who travels, trains, associates or is affiliated with any terrorist group or network regardless of their particular role.⁴⁰ However, this definition is problematic for some reasons, and it contributes to the rising toll of civilian casualty.⁴¹ First, it is contra to the Geneva Conventions delineation of non-combatants. Second, it increases the likelihood of accidental kills and collateral damage. Third, it projects a totalitarian view of drones that ignores the principles of war (all these points are further examined later in chapter 8). Related

³⁷ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2020). Drone warfare.

<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/projects/drone-war>. Accessed 11 October 2020.

³⁸ Ibid (Boyle, 2013)

³⁹ Ibid (Fuller, C., 2018) pp. 221

⁴⁰ Ibid (Fuller, C., 2018) pp. 233

⁴¹ Woods, C. (2014). Covert drone strikes and the fiction of zero civilian casualties. *Precision Strike Warfare and International Intervention: Strategic, Ethico-Legal and Decisional Implications*, 95-113.

to this is drone use against American citizens abroad and the risk it engenders domestic discontent in the US against their use. Though polling data from Pew Research⁴², Gallup⁴³, and the Centre for New American Security⁴⁴ (CNAS) show that Americans support the use of drone strikes in targeted states – at 62%, 65%, and 62%, respectively⁴⁵ - there has been no follow-up survey conducted by these pollsters since 2012. A 2016 CNAS report, however, found "critical gaps in American public understanding of the risks associated with the lethal drone programme."⁴⁶ Considering that drone operations are affected by domestic politics and shaped by its aftermath in targeted states, these findings raise further questions regarding the benefit of drones.

The third consideration is drone proliferation post 9/11. Scholars argue that US CT operations using drones have reinforced its efficacy as a valuable technological asset capable of altering military balance and strategic competition.⁴⁷ As Kilcullen and Exum note:

"...The US has slain a large dragon but now lives in a jungle filled with a bewildering variety of poisonous snakes. In dealing with these snakes, as evident from US technological deployment in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, it has demonstrated how it fights modern wars, and as such, giving potential near-peer competitors a blueprint for how to counter the core capabilities that underpin US military superiority."⁴⁸

The continued proliferation of armed drones (which before 9/11 were limited to the US and Israel) among rival competitors such as Russia and China, regional competitors such as Iran, and non-state actors such as Hezbollah has an impact on US grand strategy. This is due to the potential uncertainties, vulnerabilities, and new dynamics associated with unchecked diffusions of drone technology – such as the risk of unprovoked strikes, use of drones against

⁴² Pew Research (2015) Public continues to back US drone attacks <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/05/28/public-continues-to-back-u-s-drone-attacks/> (Accessed 8 August 2019)

⁴³ Gallup (2013) New Gallup poll on support for drone strikes <https://www.lawfareblog.com/new-gallup-poll-support-drone-strikes> (Accessed 9 August 2019)

⁴⁴ Schneider and McDonald, (2016) Public support for US drone strikes: when do Americans prefer manned over unmanned platforms? Center for New American Security <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/u-s-public-support-for-drone-strikes> (Accessed 19 July 2019)

⁴⁵ Ibid (Pew Research, 2015; Schneider and McDonald, 2016).

⁴⁶ Schneider and McDonald, (2016) Public support for US drone strikes: when do Americans prefer manned over unmanned platforms? Center for New American Security <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/u-s-public-support-for-drone-strikes> (Accessed 19 July 2019)

⁴⁷ Johnson, J. (2019). Artificial intelligence & future warfare: implications for international security. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 35(2), 147-169.

⁴⁸ Ibid (Kilcullen and Exum, 2009)

non-combatants in conflict zones, and rogue states fitting drones with nuclear weapons – all of which are potentially 'dangerous and costly' for the US due to the long-term political and strategic implications. Furthermore, apart from the likely impact of drone proliferation for strategic competition, great power rivalry, and international security, non-state actors such as al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, ISIS, and the Taliban in targeted states, can potentially use drones to conduct retaliatory attacks on US bases and interests globally.

Although the US has crafted unilateral and multilateral policies to reduce uninhibited drone proliferation in ways that protect its strategic interests, these policies have been unable to control access to, export, and advancement of drones at the international level.⁴⁹ Evidence suggests four factors account for this: First, local militias are weaponizing off-the-shelf commercial drones with explosives.⁵⁰ Second, China's relaxed drone export policy allows states to purchase drones at affordable prices and without the stringent conditionalities that the US attaches to its drone exports – such as requiring recipient states to comply with international laws and not selling to non-democracies.⁵¹ Third, the impact of globalization on the international arms market – which encourages drone development and global sales.⁵² Fourth, the 'race' to acquire drones among countries symbolizes national prestige and status.⁵³ These factors require further investigation to examine how broader questions surrounding drone proliferation impact US grand strategy – this is one thing that makes this original and unique.

The above considerations underscore a gap in the literature in ascertaining how unintended civilian deaths, unchecked drone proliferation, and the controversial aspects of drones in targeted states impact US grand strategy. These issues form the main focus of this thesis.

1.3 Research Aim, Objectives, and Questions

In the context of the issues raised so far in this chapter, this thesis's overarching aim is to critically examine the role of drones in the US grand strategy. The goal is to unpack what drones achieve for the US in a political and strategic sense. Currently, this is an overlooked aspect in international relations and security studies literature.

Specifically, the study intends to achieve the following central objectives:

⁴⁹ Ibid (Johnson J., 2020)

⁵⁰ Ibid (Gettinger, 2019)

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Boyle, M. J., Horowitz, M. C., Kreps, S. E., & Fuhrmann, M. (2018). Debating drone proliferation. *International Security*, 42(3), 178-182.

⁵³ Horowitz MC, Kreps S.E and Fuhrmann M (2016) Separating fact from fiction in the debate over drone proliferation. *International Security* 41(2): 41–44.

- i. To assess if drones support or undermine US grand strategic objectives.
- ii. To examine the political and strategic benefit of drones for US grand strategy.

In achieving these objectives, the thesis explores the following research questions:

- i. Do drones facilitate or undermine US grand strategy?
- ii. What is the political and strategic utility of drones for US grand strategy?
- iii. What is the impact of drone proliferation on US grand strategy?

These questions will attempt to demonstrate whether the continued use of drones since 9/11 is beneficial or harmful for US strategic objectives based on their use by successive US administrations since this period. Furthermore, apart from the acknowledged tactical uses of drones, this question unearths drones' political and strategic utility and the impact of drone proliferation for US grand strategy.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis is advanced to address the above research question: *continued use of drones by the US as a counterterrorism tactic and an offensive war strategy in targeted states undermines US grand strategy. It does so by creating contradictory outcomes: on the one hand, it eliminates terrorists, but on the other, it causes anti-Americanism, the death of non-combatants, and generates unintended blowback.*

This hypothesis is tested in this thesis by examining:

- (i) The evolutionary drone development and its role in facilitating US grand strategy before 9/11
- (ii) How successive US administration post 9/11 have used drones to facilitate their strategic objectives
- (iii) Case analyses of the aftermath of drones in targeted states and,
- (iv) The implication of drone proliferation for US grand strategy at the national and global level.

1.5 Significance of the study

There are several reasons why this thesis is essential:

First, although scholarship has examined the typologies of US grand strategy before and after 9/11, there is currently no study except by Jacqueline Hazelton⁵⁴ that has attempted to decipher

⁵⁴ Ibid (Hazelton J., 2017)

the political utility of drones for US grand strategy. Several studies⁵⁵, however, have analysed the different versions of US grand strategy and their underlying security implications but present no further discussion on the role of drones in supporting them. Also, while several studies⁵⁶ have assessed the impact of drone use in targeted states and its broader security ramifications, they fail to underscore the precise political goals they accomplish for the US. This study bridges this gap by assessing the political utility of drones as an instrument of statecraft for US grand strategy.

Second, studies have often neglected investigation into the strategic utility of drones. Much of the discussion has focused on the tactical side. The few studies⁵⁷ that have attempted an assessment from a strategic perspective omit to contextualize it within US grand strategy. Hazelton's work comes close to making a deductive assessment from the lens of the grand strategies of *selective engagement* and *restraint*. Her analysis, however, precludes two other dominant typologies of grand strategy: *primacy* and *neo-isolationism*, and does not capture the strategic utility of drones in successive US administrations post 9/11. By analysing drone use in reference to the grand strategies of respective post 9/11 administrations, this study deductively examines the strategic utility of drones.

Third, while several studies⁵⁸ have examined the impact of drone strikes in targeted states and their security ramifications, these studies do not analyse or assess its impact on US grand strategy. Though an important sub-literature on drones establishes a nexus between new technologies and how they challenge the mainstream understanding of warfare and non-combatants hitherto, there is a shortage of scholarship on the long-term implications for US grand strategy in the post 9/11 security environment. This thesis moves beyond the moral and

⁵⁵ Posen, B. R. (2002). The struggle against terrorism: Grand strategy, strategy, and tactics. *International Security*, 26(3), 39-55; Art, R. J. (2013). *A grand strategy for America*. Cornell University Press; Brands, H. (2014). *What good is grand strategy: Power and purpose in American statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. Cornell University Press.

⁵⁶ Ibid (see Enemark C., 2011; Boyle M., 2013; Kreps & Zenko, 2014; Boyle M., 2016)

⁵⁷ Chamayou, G. (2015). *Drone theory*. Penguin UK; Gusterson, H. (2016). *Drone: Remote control warfare*. MIT Press; Sauer, F., & Schörnig, N. (2012). Killer drones: The 'silver bullet' of democratic warfare? *Security Dialogue*, 43(4), 363-380; Shaw, I. G. (2013). Predator empire: The geopolitics of US drone warfare. *Geopolitics*, 18(3), 536-559.

⁵⁸ Ibid (Kilcullen D., & Exum A., 2009; Boyle M., 2016; Fuller, C., 2018) Also see: Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2011). Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the US Drone Programs in Pakistan. *Foreign Aff.*, 90, 12; Sharkey, N. (2011). The automation and proliferation of military drones and the protection of civilians. *Law, Innovation and Technology*, 3(2), 229-240; Mégret, F. (2013). The humanitarian problem with drones. *Utah L. Rev.*, 1283; Figueroa, A. (2018). License to Kill: An Analysis of the Legality of Fully Autonomous Drones in the Context of International Use of Force Law. *Pace Int'l L. Rev.*, 31, 145.

ethical questions about drone strikes to examining how the continued reliance on drones as a CT tactic affects US grand strategy in the long-term due to their lethal use in targeted states.

Lastly, the international sphere is constantly in a state of flux, and understanding the roles drones play has become all the more important in ongoing efforts to appreciate the intersection of politics with technology and how to strike a balance between the use of force as an instrument of statecraft in response to emerging and ongoing threats. Given that there is little research on drone proliferation that assesses its utility for grand strategy, there is a critical need for further study on this subject.

1.6 Methodology

This study draws extensively from the literature on drones and grand strategy from various sources, including peer-reviewed journals, think-tank research publications, policy briefs, official US records, and other relevant documentary sources. Considering that data on CIA drone strikes are mainly classified (explained later in the thesis), the study draws data from several academic and journalistic databases such as TBIJ, NAF, LWJ, CNAS, and Air Wars, assessing the aftermath of drone strikes in targeted states. Others included data sources from the Brookings Institution, National Counterterrorism Center, Congressional Research Service, and Human Rights Watch. These data sets complement the qualitative nature of this study and analyze the research hypothesis.⁵⁹

To make sense of the qualitative data, the study adopts a deductive evaluation technique – which applies previously tested theories to a research endeavour to enable further empirical analysis and testing of the research hypothesis.⁶⁰ A qualitative research approach ensures conclusions reached in a study are predicated and substantiated by relevant data.⁶¹ Considering the impracticalities of obtaining primary data using surveys and interviews in targeted states such as Afghanistan and Pakistan (due to the potential risks and ethical concerns), the researcher adopted a qualitative approach for this research. This approach is best suited for this study due to its conceptual and methodological utility in explaining the intersection between the research phenomenon. Analysing the thesis from this prism is helpful for several reasons. First, it allows for a deductive analysis of the different US grand strategies based on the underlying theories that underpin them. This provides the analytical premise for establishing

⁵⁹ Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (Vol. 3). Sage.

⁶⁰ Silverman, D. (2019). *Interpreting qualitative data*. Sage Publications Limited.

⁶¹ Silverman, D. (2011). *A Guide to the Principles of Qualitative Research*.

the intersection between the research variables. Second and relatedly, the deductive approach helps to clearly distinguish between normative approximations and social scientific claims from the lenses of different theories.⁶² This facilitates better research understanding by separating claims based on objective causal relationships and normative preferences. Third, it provides a valuable way for conceptualizing the research to approximate the ideal of evidence-based research.⁶³ This is due to its important role in suggesting possible relationships, causes, effects, and dynamic processes based on empirical data.⁶⁴ Fourth, it allows the research to speak more directly by making sense of many existing and recent studies. Analysing the role of drones in US grand strategy this way aids in identifying critical gaps, underpinning the research needs, and highlighting the agreement in literature.⁶⁵ Furthermore, it enables the researcher to pose fundamental questions about the phenomenon comparable with empirical findings that suggest new questions based on apriori analysis.⁶⁶

Applying the research approach to this thesis implied the following: First, it assesses theories that explain the intersection between drones and US grand strategy. Second, it explores different academic literature on the typologies of US grand strategies, and its core aspects are assessed together with its intersection with drones. Next, the grand strategies of successive US administrations post 9/11 are examined, and the role of drones in supporting or undermining them is analysed. This is assessed against the backdrop of drones' political and strategy utility within US grand strategy. Then, the aftermath of drones in targeted states and the broader implications for US grand strategic objectives are appraised. Lastly, key findings are deduced based on critical analyses of relevant theories, empirical data, and critical literature.

1.7 Chapter Outline

The thesis is divided into ten chapters:

Chapter 1 has provided the introductory background and the key research themes of this thesis. The next chapter, Chapter 2, contains the conceptual and theoretical review relevant to the thesis. The theory section applies the realist and liberalist theories as the analytical compass

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Mayer, I. (2015). Qualitative research with a focus on qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Sales, Retailing & Marketing*, 4(9), 53-67.

⁶⁴ Ibid (Silverman, D., 2016)

⁶⁵ Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.

⁶⁶ Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

for explaining the utility of drones for US grand strategy. The conceptual review section assesses the key concepts relevant in the thesis – US grand strategy and drones.

Chapter 3 is in two parts. The first part contains an assessment of the typologies of US grand strategy that identifies its main elements and intersection with drones. The second part is a literature review section highlighting the gaps in the available literature on drones and US grand strategy.

Chapter 4 establishes the historical context of this thesis and traces the utility of drones in the US grand strategy from World War I to the Clinton administration. The chapter examined the evolutionary development of drone technology and its application in previous wars that have aided US strategic objectives. The main argument is that though drone technology was at its embryonic stages before 9/11, its utility in the Vietnam and Korean Wars set a precedent that highlighted the tactical uses of its weaponry.

Chapter 5 is on drone use during the Bush administration and its implication for US grand strategy. This chapter unpacks the efficacy of drones in accomplishing the strategic objectives of the Bush era. This included assessing the Bush doctrine before and after 9/11, his drone warfare and policies, and its impact in shaping US WOT. The main argument of this chapter is that though drones played a crucial role in facilitating the Bush administration's offensive unilateral post 9/11 grand strategy, they inadvertently set a negative precedent in targeted states that hampered US grand strategy.

Chapter 6 examines Obama drone warfare vis-à-vis US grand strategy. The chapter assesses the Obama doctrine, the changes in US drone policy under his administration, the political and strategic ends of his drone warfare in targeted states, and the overall ramifications for US grand strategy. The main thrust of this chapter is that, though drones served as a double-edged strategy for facilitating the defensive neo-realist hybrid grand strategy of the Obama administration, like its predecessor, the aftermath of drones in targeted states engendered a paradox of security and restraint that served to undermine US grand strategy.

Chapter 7 focused on drones under the Trump administration and its intersection with his grand strategy. The chapter deciphers the Trump doctrine, his grand strategy, and analyses the continuities and discontinuities of his drone warfare in targeted states. The overarching argument of this chapter is that although drones serve valuable purposes in espousing the 'America First' grand strategy of the Trump administration, like the administrations before it,

the aftermath of drone strikes continued to engender negative outcomes within and outside targeted states that undermine US grand strategy.

Chapter 8 takes an in-depth analysis of the drone dilemma in two targeted states – Afghanistan and Pakistan. It conducts a critical assessment of the impact of drones in these states and how it has shaped and influenced US grand strategic objectives. It explores critical themes relating to civilian casualties, anti-Americanism in targeted states, militant recruitment, and terrorist violence resulting from drone strikes.

Chapter 9 assesses drone proliferation among near-peer competitors, regional competitors, and non-state actors and the implications for US grand strategy at the national and global level. The main argument of this chapter is that the continued proliferation among these actors engenders negative ramifications for US grand strategy.

Chapter 10 is the conclusion, summary of findings, and critical analysis chapter. The chapter undertakes a rigorous re-examination of the critical issues assessed in the study and re-litigates the relevant findings.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptualizing US Grand Strategy and Theoretical Framework

"Strategy is the central political art. It is the art of creating power."⁶⁷

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the concept of grand strategy and gauges relevant theories that provide the critical lens for the entire study. The theoretical literature establishes the nexus between grand strategy and drones by highlighting how the tactical use of force or new technologies can have an impact on grand strategy. The chapter is organized into two sections: In the first section, a conceptual review of grand strategy is undertaken. This includes an appraisal of its meaning, its core objectives, key instruments, and its intersection with drones. Next is the theory section – which examines relevant theories in international relations that provide the analytical utility for establishing the nexus between drone use and US grand strategy.

2.1 Conceptual Review

In this section, the concept of grand strategy is examined. Specifically, this section assesses the following questions: What does available literature say about grand strategy? What elements make for an effective and coherent strategy? What are the challenges and limitations of grand strategy? Does the US pursue a grand strategy, and if so, what are the different types? What are the core objectives of these variants of grand strategy, and how do drones function within their frame? These questions form the overarching focus of this section, and answering them provides the conceptual groundwork for understanding and exploring the role of drones in the US grand strategy.

2.1.1 *The Meaning of Grand Strategy*

Academic literature on grand strategy is expansive, so also is the manifold definitions of the concept. Definitions of grand strategy range from those that conceive it from strictly a militaristic perspective, more precisely, "as a confluence of hierarchical military interactions with varied external relations."⁶⁸ To others that think grand strategy represents "an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies with the goal of "linking a country's ways,

⁶⁷ Freedman, L. (1987). *Strategic defence in the nuclear age*. International Institute for Strategic Studies.

⁶⁸ Luttwak, E. N. (2016). *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century CE to the Third*. JHU Press.

means and ends."⁶⁹ This is closely related to Christopher Layne's view that it refers to "the process by which a state matches ends and means in pursuit of security."⁷⁰ For Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, it is "a chain of political ends and military means whose effectiveness is highly dependent on the extent to which the ends and means are related to one another."⁷¹

Contemporary definitions of the concept have not varied remarkably from definitions of the 1990s and early 2000s (that are defined in the preceding paragraphs). A definition put forward by Colin Gray, a well-known American strategic studies writer in recent decades, conceives the term as "a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it achieves it."⁷² For Gray, the utility of a strategy is dependent on the role it plays between bridging purpose and action with military force as the main actor.

Nina Silove, on the other hand, views grand strategy as a conceptual minefield that can be construed from three perspectives: as a variable, a process, and a blueprint.⁷³ As a variable, the grand strategy sets the agenda for understanding the origins of state behaviour, particularly how agency and structure interact to produce grand-strategic outcomes. As a process, it places emphasis on the need for strategic planning in decision-making, and lastly, as a blueprint, it is construed as the broad vision that moderates and influences future governmental behaviour.⁷⁴ The definition put forward by Hal Brands is perhaps the best applied to the context of this research inquiry and used as the operative definition for the entirety of this thesis. For him, grand strategy "Is the highest form of statecraft, which when reduced to its essence, forms the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy and the logic that helps states navigate a complex and dangerous world."⁷⁵

The overarching point made by Brands here is that any given grand strategy should outline a country's national interests, the potential threats, as well as policies that defend them.⁷⁶ Meaning, it should comprise "an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, that provides

⁶⁹ Kennedy, P. (1991). Grand strategy in war and peace: Toward a broader definition. *Grand strategies in war and peace*, 1-7.

⁷⁰ Layne, C. (2007). *The peace of illusions: American grand strategy from 1940 to the present*. Cornell University Press.

⁷¹ Posen, B. R., & Ross, A. L. (1997). Competing visions for US grand strategy. *International Security*, 21(3), 5-53.

⁷² Gray, C. S. (2013). *War, peace, and international relations: an introduction to strategic history*. Routledge.

⁷³ Silove, N. (2018). Beyond the Buzzword: The three Meanings of "grand strategy". *Security Studies*, 27(1), 27-57.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Brands, H. (2014). *What good is grand strategy? Power and purpose in American statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. Cornell University Press.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

the principles that guide a state's foreign policy and a country's theory about how it will obtain security and defend its national interests."⁷⁷

Having examined the meaning of grand strategy, it is important to determine what elements account for an effective and coherent grand strategy.

2.1.2 Elements of an Effective Grand Strategy

The saliency of a coherent grand strategy lies in its utility for effective statecraft. However, devising an effective strategy is challenging (this is examined later in this chapter). Several analysts⁷⁸ perceive the concept as too formulaic and constrictive, particularly for the ever-changing international security environment. Yet, the importance of a well-formulated grand strategy lies in the advantage it gives states in leveraging on their strengths and exploiting the weakness of their rivals while furthering core national objectives.

There are different key elements that account for an effective grand strategy. First, it must provide clarity on the nature of the international environment. This requires identification of a country's highest goals, its main threats, efficacious utilization of scarce resources in dealing with these threats, and establishing priorities in state response. As Posen and Ross aver, "grand strategy identifies potential threats to a state's security and devises the political, economic and military remedies to those threats while ensuring that the most appropriate military instrument is selected to achieve the political ends in view."⁷⁹

This, however, does not translate to grand strategy being an extension of foreign policy – which is the overall government strategy a state pursues when dealing with other nations to achieve its core national objectives. Grand strategy is rather the 'mother' of foreign policy due to its broader scope and encapsulates the international 'vision' pursued by the foreign policy of a state. While it is possible to formulate foreign policy without a grand strategy and vice versa, the imperative of a grand strategy lies in its capacity to shape and influence the conduct of

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Lissner, R.F., (2019) Military Intervention and the future of American grand strategy in *New Voices in Grand Strategy*. Center for New America Security pp.49; Drezner, D. W. (2011). Does Obama have a grand strategy? Why we need doctrines in uncertain times. *Foreign Affairs*, 57-68; Brands, H. (2012). *The Promise and Pitfalls of Grand Strategy*. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute Carlisle Barracks Pa.

⁷⁹ Ibid (Posen and Ross, 1997) pp. 221

foreign policy by urging the maximization of core national interests or how a nation safeguards and preserves its national interest.⁸⁰

Second, an effective grand strategy is aspirational and forward-looking. This means it must have a degree of clarity of the short, medium, and long-term goals that can help states in determining where they want to go, how they intend to get there, and how leaders devise appropriate responses to security threats as they unfold.⁸¹ Third, it establishes a nexus between means and ends and the objectives and capabilities involved in identifying and dealing with state threats. As Inor Sloan avers, "grand strategy must be able to achieve equilibrium between means and ends, combining the former to achieve the latter, but also adjusting the latter so as not to burden the former."⁸²

Fourth and relatedly, it must be adaptable to the changing nature of the threats, multidimensional competition, and interaction prevalent in the international system. From this lens, an effective grand strategy is expected to demonstrate a capability to influence and be influenced by the behaviour of other states.⁸³ Fifth, it must ensure that limited resources – military, economic, and national – are prioritized in its usage to such an extent that it mitigates the pursuit of contradictory goals inimical to national security interests.⁸⁴ This is because states can be "caught" by the seemingly important needs of the moment and thus overlook the broader trends and growing long-term threats. For instance, US obsession with the Middle East after 9/11 (the muscular hard power approach to 9/11 and then disastrous decision to invade Iraq) led them to take their eye off the ball, which is the great power competition with China and Russia.

Sixth, an effective grand strategy must be operable in both peacetime and wartime in accomplishing a state's core national interests. Lastly, it must espouse the saliency of a purposeful approach to the pursuit of stated goals that prevent flaws in statecraft.⁸⁵ Although grand strategy may not be formally articulated in the national security strategy document at all times, due to the behavioural aspect of statecraft (this is elaborated in the next sub-heading), it

⁸⁰ Minar, S. J. (2018). Grand Strategy and Foreign Policy: How Grand Strategy Can Aid Bangladesh's Foreign Policy Rethinking? *Journal of Social Studies*, 4(1), 20-27.

⁸¹ Brands, H. (2019). Grand strategy for a new twilight struggle. *New Voices in Grand Strategy*, Michael J. Zak Lecture Series, 13-22.

⁸² Sloan, I. (2002). Beyond Primacy. *Int'l J.*, 58, 303.

⁸³ Avey, P. C., Markowitz, J. N., & Reardon, R. J. Disentangling Grand Strategy: International Relations Theory and US Grand Strategy. *Texas National Security Review*, 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Posen and Ross, (1997) pp. 221

must, however, establish a coherent set of thoughts and actions geared towards the accomplishment of core long-term objectives.

The elements outlined above are, however, not all-encompassing as the making of a grand strategy is invariably a "daunting task given the limits of human wisdom and the chaotic nature of global affairs."⁸⁶ Thus, while a grand strategy may be essential for effective statecraft, the problem of cohering around and implementing a particular grand strategy faces significant obstacles.⁸⁷ Some of these challenges are examined in the next sub-section.

2.1.3 Challenges and Limitations of Grand Strategy

There are several limitations to forging a grand strategy that emanates from its manifold conceptual interpretations. First, the making of a grand strategy is often acknowledged as a difficult task. This is because it requires a holistic and multidimensional view of the interests, threats, and prioritization in the utilization of resources – that places an enormous burden on the ability of political leadership – on how to think out and effectively implement it.⁸⁸ As Layton avers, "grand strategy often proffers a complicated and colluded view of the international events, and how a country's response to these events ought to be conditioned."⁸⁹ This can be harmful to states in a complex international environment, as it limits their response to single overarching frameworks that are not always amenable to changing realities.

Related to the above, forging a grand strategy requires a willingness on the part of states to make hard decisions about their priorities and trade-offs. Doing so, however, necessitates a critical consideration of a country's highest and enduring interests. This is, however, an onerous task due to the chaos and unpredictable nature of the international sphere that negates holistic perspectives and a "one-size-fits-all" approach to world affairs.

Another limitation relates to the task of problematizing grand strategy from a disciplinary standpoint. On one side, scholars construed the concept from an ecological standpoint to denote its holistic utility for understanding the international sphere.⁹⁰ Others view it from a reductionist lens due to its ability to compel leaders to have "a sense of order and coherence of

⁸⁶ Gaddis, J. L. (2019). *On grand strategy*. Penguin Books. 51-53

⁸⁷ Gray, C. S. (1999). *Modern strategy* (Vol. 42). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 13-15

⁸⁸ Nye Jr, JS (2016). *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. Basic books. 19-22

⁸⁹ Layton, P. (2012). The idea of grand strategy. *The RUSI journal*, 157(4), 56-61.

⁹⁰ Brands, H. (2014). *What good is grand strategy Power and purpose in American statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. Cornell University Press.

a complicated international environment."⁹¹ However, grand strategy is hardly forged in the best of situations; rather, under considerable restraints and pressure that subject it to human fallibilities, overblown threat perception, and exaggerations of state capacity to respond to events. Thus, making human intelligence, value, experience, worldview, ideologies, and decisions critical determinants of what becomes a grand strategy – than disciplinary interpretations.⁹²

Apart from the human component of grand strategy making that hinders its articulation and implementation, the bureaucratic system in which a country operates is also a significant factor.⁹³ This is because while bureaucracies are designed to provide expertise and direction for the robust implementation of a country's stated goals in world affairs, they are often hostile and inadaptably to change in the face of threats to the overarching interests a state pursues. This has played out between the neoconservatives (offensive liberal) and the liberal democrats (defensive liberals) in the US policy circle – that share different conceptions of the use of America's power and how it responds to international threats.

Thus, what policymakers desire and what is implemented by the bureaucracy can exist as contrasting ideas. The arising conflict between these two spheres can hinder the effective articulation and implementation of an overarching grand strategy.⁹⁴ In the event the bureaucracy implements the visions of the political leadership, the bottleneck surrounding the transmission process from high-level officials – that plan and craft the strategic concept – to the lower hierarchy that implements it risks causing policy disarticulation.⁹⁵

The third limitation borders on the suitability of grand strategy within the American political system – due to the constraints of democratic norms impeding its efficacious implementation for statecraft. This is because grand strategy is often predicated on covert and surprise elements, which may be deleterious for the openness, transparency, and accountability required by democratic systems and institutions.⁹⁶ Though Russell Mead contends that "democracy is good for the long-term health of grand strategy due to its internal mechanism for aggregating interests and correcting flawed policies which are necessary for preserving the latter"⁹⁷ –

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Lissner, R. F. (2018). What Is Grand Strategy? Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield (November 2018). *Texas National Security Review*.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Gray, C. S. (2010). *The strategy bridge: theory for practice*. Oxford University Press.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Art, R. J. (2013). *A grand strategy for America*. Cornell University Press.

⁹⁷ Mead, W. R. (2013). Grand Strategy: The End of History Ends. *The American Interest*, 2.

international threats do not always conform to democratic ‘lapels’ or the projections of experts. Just like the 9/11 attacks, they required expediency in state response that may bypass democratic norms. During the George W. Bush administration, this culminated in a change from a defensive liberal strategy to an offensive liberal strategy that championed the goals of forced democratization and more assertive use of America’s power in defeating and dismantling terrorist organizations globally. Likewise, during Obama’s administration, it ushered in an era of CIA covert drone strikes.

All these point to one thing that cohering around a grand strategy is a daunting task that requires a dynamic and resilient response in the face of new and emerging threats and opportunities in the international sphere.⁹⁸ The challenge of ‘doing’ grand strategy have made US officials, policy strategist and scholars to ask the perennial question on the possibility of having a consistent, purposeful grand strategy, due to the limitations of the concept itself.⁹⁹ Colin Gray described this as the “grandiosity of grand strategy” to explain the perplexities in operationalizing the concept in an applied sense.¹⁰⁰ While the criticisms of grand strategy may say much about the individuals who define it than the constraints of the concept itself, the dilemmas associated with the concept have remained a ubiquitous challenge for successive US administrations. This leads to the next question of whether the US has a grand strategy.

2.1.4 Does the US have a Grand Strategy?

International relations analysts share differing opinions on whether the US needs a grand strategy or even pursues one in the first place. Those who share the pessimism that America has no grand strategy argue that it is impracticable.¹⁰¹ They share the view that grand strategy is a slippery concept that requires the formulation of several strategies to deal with new and emerging threats in global affairs.¹⁰² This, in their analysis, makes the pursuit of a grand strategy unrealistic for America due to changing perception of threat in international affairs. Also, while in theory, grand strategies should sit above political leadership and be, essentially, the default strategy of a state given geographic and overarching political imperatives, this is

⁹⁸ Silove, N. (2018). Beyond the Buzzword: The three Meanings of “grand strategy”. *Security Studies*, 27(1), 27-57.

⁹⁹ Posen, B. R., & Ross, A. L. (1997). Competing visions for US grand strategy. *International Security*, 21(3), 5-53. See also: Gaddis, J. L. (2002). A grand strategy of transformation. *Foreign policy*, 50-57. Drezner, D. W. (2011). Does Obama have a grand strategy? Why we need doctrines in uncertain times. *Foreign Affairs*, 57-68. Dombrowski, P., & Reich, S. (2017). Does Donald Trump have a grand strategy? *International Affairs*, 93(5), 1013-1037.

¹⁰⁰ Betts, R. K. (2019). The Grandiosity of Grand Strategy. *The Washington Quarterly*, 42(4), 7-22.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Gray C.S, (1999); Brands, H, (2012); Drezner, D.W, (2011); Fuchs, M. H. (2019). America does not need a grand strategy. *Foreign Policy*, 40-45.

¹⁰² Ibid.

not always the case. For instance, successive US administrations since the Cold War have pursued different grand strategies in response to the changing nature of the international system. This reiterates the argument made by Fuchs that “no single grand strategy is capable of defining the whole of America’s purpose in the world.”¹⁰³ There is also the view that formulating a grand strategy for America is extraneous, as, given its powers, it can unilaterally exert its preeminent power position in reassuring partners and allies of its core goals and interests in the international sphere.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, as Fuchs opines, “the strong gravitational pull for policymakers and experts to develop an overarching vision for America’s role in the world is misguided and dangerous”¹⁰⁵ as it “forces a simplification of a complicated world and justifies some of the counterproductive US policies.”¹⁰⁶ This is analogous to what Samuel Huntington referred to as the ‘Lippman gap’ – to describe the gap that occurs between America’s stated goals and its capacity to deliver on them to be the catalyst for dangerous policy formulations.¹⁰⁷ However, to accept the above arguments is to be dismissive of the historic grand strategies that the US has pursued from the World Wars period to the post-Cold War era.

Aspects of modern US strategy can, arguably, be linked all the way back to George Kennan’s long telegram in 1946 that detailed his views on the Soviet Union and articulated US policy towards Communism. His view that the Soviets needed to be controlled by a policy of strong resistance provided the influential underpinnings for what later became America’s Cold War policy of containment – which focused on preventing the spread of Communism and limiting the sphere of influence of the Soviet’s Red Army in regions pivotal to America interest. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of America as the sole superpower or what Charles Krauthammer describes as the ‘unipolar moment’¹⁰⁸, American policymakers and analysts became preoccupied with finding an ideal grand strategy for the US after the Cold War. This has been termed ‘Kennan sweepstakes’ – a conscious effort to find a post-Soviet statement of purpose to rival George Kennan’s early Cold War concept of

¹⁰³ Ibid Fuchs, M.H, (2019).

¹⁰⁴ Dueck, C. (2004). Ideas and alternatives in American grand strategy, 2000-2004. *Review of International Studies*, 511-535.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Huntington, S. P. (1987). Coping with the Lippmann gap. *Foreign Affairs*, 66(3), 453-477.

¹⁰⁸ Krauthammer, C. (1990). The unipolar moment. *Foreign Aff.*, 70, 23.

‘containment’ of Communism.¹⁰⁹ These produced calls for a variety of grand strategies, from ‘neo-isolationism’ to ‘primacy,’ to ‘retrenchment’ to ‘offshore balancing,’ with various suggestions and ideas on how the US can maintain its unilateralism, preeminent power position and navigate the murky waters of the international sphere.

Since the denouement of the Cold War, successive US administrations have sought to move beyond containment to a new strategic vision for the US. This led to George H. W. Bush’s ‘New World Order’ and Bill Clinton’s ‘Engagement and Enlargement’ strategies, each espousing a grand strategy of its vision for America’s role in the world, albeit with their particular characteristics. The New World Order (NWO) strategy, as authored by the then Secretary of Defence, Dick Cheney, espoused the need for US leadership to establish and protect a new order that would prevent aggression from potential US potential competitors.¹¹⁰ George H. W. Bush defines the NWO as “the peaceful settlement of disputes, solidarity against aggression, reduced and controlled arsenals and just treatment of people.”¹¹¹

Clinton’s ‘Enlargement and Engagement,’ on the other hand, focused on democratic promotion, global humanitarian intervention, and multilateralism and preventing the need for aggression from potential US competitors. Under George W. Bush, prior to the 9/11 attacks, the US embraced the strategy of ‘Democratic Globalism,’ and like his predecessors, espoused limited democratic interventions and the ideals of global democratic promotion.

The 9/11 attacks, however, led to a change in the perception of threat in the international environment and, consequently, a change in US grand strategy. This was due to new and emerging threats in the post 9/11 international security environment, which included: the presence of rogue and autocratic states, some with nuclear capabilities and others that potentially aspired to acquire them; the threat of failed states and transnational actors that operate within them; and transnational Islamic insurgency. As a result, successive US administrations, post 9/11, formulated a grand strategy with an embedded CT component as part of its core objectives. This has been reflected in post 9/11 Bush’s doctrine of ‘Primacy,’ Barack Obama’s ‘Restraint’ and in Donald Trump’s ‘America First.’ For example, during the Bush and Obama administrations, their National Security Strategy (NSS) documents reiterated

¹⁰⁹ Dumbrell, J. (2005). *Evaluating the foreign policy of President Clinton, or Bill Clinton: between the Bushes*. British Library.

¹¹⁰ Homolar, A. (2011). How to last alone at the Top: US strategic planning for the Unipolar Era. *Journal of strategic studies*, 34(2), 189-217.

¹¹¹ Bush cited in Nye, J. S. (1992). What new world order? *Foreign Affairs*, 71(2), 83-96.

the goal of dismantling al-Qaeda and its abettors as one of its main goals. Likewise, President Trump and especially his officials (in the NSS, National Defence Strategy (NDS), and in multiple statements) claims to have elevated great power competition and defeating radical Islamic terrorism to the forefront of US strategy. A notable common instrument of statecraft in the facilitation of the CT aspect of post 9/11 US grand strategies has been the use of lethal drones. In the next section, the typologies of US grand strategies are outlined and analysed with a view to identifying how they intersect with drones.

2.2 Theoretical Review

There is currently no single all-encompassing theory that can sufficiently explain every phenomenon in the field of International Relations (IR). A simple analogy that comes to mind is the half-full and half-empty view of a glass of water filled halfway. Thus, using one theoretical position may establish that the glass is half-full when it may appear half-empty from another theoretical lens. This justifies the need for an eclectic theoretical approach that considers examining and applying different theoretical perspectives in advancing an explanation for the role of drones in US grand strategy. To this end, this thesis adopts the realist and liberalist theories as helpful lenses to enhance the understanding of the research question.

2.2.1 Realism

Realism is a dominant theory in IR that advances an explanation for the behaviour and interaction of states in the international realm. Realists make two main assumptions about the concept of power in international affairs. One, it is a relational concept, hence necessitating an interaction between state actors for the exercise of power. Two, it is a relative concept, meaning the power capabilities of states need to be measured against the power of other state actors.¹¹² The theoretical anchor of realism is predicated on three core elements: self-help, statism, and survivalism.¹¹³ Statism is the view that states are the most important actor in international politics. Survivalism espouses the notion that the goal of states is to ensure their preservation or survival in an international order characterized by the absence of international sovereign to moderate the behaviour and interaction of states. Lastly, self-help means that states must rely on themselves to guarantee their own security in the absence of a higher authority to counter

¹¹² Baylis, J. (2020). *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations*. Oxford University Press, USA.

¹¹³ Ibid

the use of force. These theoretical anchors are reflected in the different perspectives of realism advanced by scholars.

Classical realists like Hans Morgenthau and Edward H. Carr construe IR from the lens of human nature, which, according to them, is self-interested and flawed. According to Hans, “politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.”¹¹⁴ This means that state behaviour is determined by human nature. Structural realists (neo-realists) like Kenneth Waltz, however, differ from this position and argue, “it is the structure of the international system that determines the behaviour of states.”¹¹⁵ For Waltz, “in anarchy, security is the highest end.”¹¹⁶ This construes states as security maximisers seeking to preserve the relative power distribution in the international realm than upset it. Hence, states are defensive actors that will not seek greater power if it jeopardizes their own security. This has also been referred to as defensive realism. Defensive realists express an aversion for hegemonic expansionism due to its tendency to upset a state’s predisposition to guarantee its own security, upend the balance of power logic and undermine its capacity to challenge any hegemonic affront to its own sovereignty.¹¹⁷

On the contrary, Mearsheimer, in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, advances an opposing view to Waltz’s. This view has been referred to as offensive realism, and it is rooted in the assumption that “great powers are constantly in search for opportunities to gain powers (power maximizers) over their rivals, with hegemony as the ultimate goal.”¹¹⁸ This is distinct from defensive realism, which holds that states are security maximizers with minimal propensity to engage in conflict or predatory behavior towards others. As Mearsheimer posits, the inclination to be aggressive is not inherent in states; rather, it is a result of a constant search for survival in a changing international realm characterized by uncertainties and offensive military capabilities.¹¹⁹ To ascertain the validity of offensive realism, Mearsheimer tests his claims based on the past behaviour of states against several questions ascertaining: (i) if states are likely to engage in aggression and expansion as their relative power increases, (ii) the conditions that determine how great powers deal with threats from an aggressor, and (iii) whether war is more likely in bipolarity or in multipolarity.

¹¹⁴ Morgenthau, H. J. (2006). Six principles of political realism. *Classic Readings of International Relations*, 34-38.

¹¹⁵ Waltz, K. (2004). Neorealism: Confusions and criticisms. *Journal of Politics and Society*, 15(1), 2-6.

¹¹⁶ Waltz, K. N. (1990). Realist thought and neorealist theory. *Journal of International Affairs*, 21-37.

¹¹⁷ Ibid (Miller, 2010).

¹¹⁸ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W.W. Norton & Company

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Offensive realism holds that “the goal of a state is to achieve a hegemonic position in the international system.”¹²⁰ Offensive realists perceive aggressive state behaviour as enactments of self-help and the importance of states exercising their relative power advantages with the aim of becoming a global hegemon. For Mearsheimer, there are three elements in the international system that warrants this. One is the absence of a central authority that can protect states from one another. Two is the fact that states always possess offensive military capabilities, and three is the apprehension that states can never be certain about other state’s intentions. Thus, given this fear, there is a cognizance that the more powerful a state is relative to its rivals, the better its chances of survival.¹²¹ Offensive and defensive realism provide a useful analytic lens in understanding the motivations for the use of drones in facilitating US CT objectives in targeted states and its grand strategy at large. Table 2 below summarizes the goals of realism on the use of force and approach to power and security.

Table 2: Goals of realism on the use of force and approach to power and security

Objectives	Realism	
	Offensive Realism	Defensive Realism
Use of force	Maximalist/Unilateral	Minimalist/Multilateral
Approach to power and security	Focus on superiority, power maximisation, hegemony, and unilateralism	Focus on security maximisation through balancing, deterrence, arms control. Aversion for aggressive expansionism.

Source: Author’s adaptation

The theoretical anchors of realism offer valuable insight for explaining the rationale for drones in targeted states. First, it manifests self-help in that drones are used as tools of preemptive warfare against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the aftermath of 9/11. This is based on the premise that the US must constantly seek to maximize its relative power position in preserving and guaranteeing its own self-interest and security in the international realm. Embedded in the concept of self-help is the requirement that states must rely on their own capabilities in devising strategies that project their power and defends their territorial sovereignty. As Waltz notes, “states operating in a world of self-help, states almost always act according to their own self-interest and do not subordinate their interests to those of other states or to the interests of the so-called international community.”¹²²

¹²⁰ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. WW Norton & Company.

¹²¹ Ibid (Mearsheimer, J., 2001)

¹²² Ibid (Waltz K., 1990).

This makes the lethal weaponization of drones characterizes this depiction, more precisely, in expressing US unilateral offensive capabilities against terrorist organizations in targeted states. This is evident in the drone deployments post 9/11 for several tactical and strategic purposes, namely: thwarting attacks by terrorist groups, dismantling terrorist organizations' growth and spread, preventing terrorist groups from seizing control of states, and circumventing the expansion of terrorist influence. This has also included the empowerment of local security forces in defeating the central nodes of terrorist activities and safe havens, providing air support for covert combat missions, and aiding coordinated attacks.¹²³

Second, “the best defence is a good defence,”¹²⁴ and to ensure its survival, states must rely on their military capabilities in self-preservation in international affairs. The means using any military means to ensure its survival regardless of the moral and ethical ramifications as long as its best safeguards core national interests. The use of drones, despite the moral and ethical questions they raise in targeted states, underscores this. This further entrenches the notion that military power is a key tool for states and the implementation of their foreign policy, which demonstrably has been reflected in the choice of drones in US CT strategy. As Morgenthau avers, “all nations actively engaged in the struggle for power must actually aim not to balance – that is, equality – of power, but at the superiority of power in their own behalf.”¹²⁵ Hence, to ensure survival, states must depend on their resources – military, economic, and strategic – in relation to other states and in dealing with threats to their own security and hegemonic stability. This means applying force in a way that best achieves the goal of self-help and projects hard power, as US drone warfare has evidently shown in targeted states.

2.2.2 The Security Dilemma

A concept related to defensive realism is the security dilemma. A security dilemma explains a situation in which actions taken by a state to ensure its own security engender reactions from other states that undermine it.¹²⁶ This is because, in a world of realism, states take measures to ensure their security in the context of anarchy and are inclined to respond to the actions of other states with additional measures of their own, especially if these measures make other states feel

¹²³ Mir, A. (2018). What explains counterterrorism effectiveness? Evidence from the US drone war in Pakistan. *International security*, 43(2), 45-83.

¹²⁴ Ibid (Gray, C.S, 2013).

¹²⁵ Morgenthau, H. J. (2004). *Political theory and international affairs: Hans J. Morgenthau on Aristotle's The Politics*. Greenwood Publishing Group.

¹²⁶ Jervis, R. (1978). Cooperation under the security dilemma. *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations*, 167-214.

less secure. Balance of power theorists term this ‘balancing behaviour,’ and it is perfectly reasonable and expected behaviour for states in a world of realism.¹²⁷

Shiping Tang¹²⁸ provides an up-to-date version of the security dilemma theory. He explains the security dilemma theory as a fulcrum of defensive realism. His analysis of the concept from this prism has resulted in a more modified version of the core aspects of its proposition. Of which, when further expatiated, provides a useful lens for explaining the implication of drone proliferation for US grand strategy at the national and global level. Tang conceptualized eight main elements of the security dilemma:

- (i) That anarchy is the main source of the security dilemma.
- (ii) That states are uncertain about each other’s present and future intentions.
- (iii) The view is that a genuine security dilemma exists between two states with defense proclivities.
- (iv) States resort to the accumulation of power as a defensive mechanism. These, however, contain some offensive capabilities.
- (v) The dynamics of security dilemmas are self-reinforcing and often lead to unintended security spiral characterized by arms racing and a worsening of relations.
- (vi) That measures to increasing security by states often lead to self-defeating outcomes: more power but less security.
- (vii) The vicious cycle engendered by security dilemma leads to tragic results manifest in unintended and avoidable wars.
- (viii) Psychological and material factors regulate the severity of security dilemma.¹²⁹

Applied to drones, the security dilemma implies that the continued reliance and deployment of drone weaponry as US CT strategy in targeted states potentially engenders dangerous, self-defeating impacts detrimental for the US in the long term. This is due to three main factors based on Tang’s analysis. First, the possibility that the continued use of drones by the US and its attendant unchecked proliferation triggers a security spiral, as regional and rivals competitors such as China, Iran, and Russia, will seek to acquire and develop drones as a countermeasure to ward off US offensive tendencies. Two, the consideration that states are perpetually unsure of other state actors’ intentions in a world of realism. Thus, while drones

¹²⁷ Booth, K., & Wheeler, N. (2007). *The security dilemma: Fear, cooperation, and trust in world politics*. Springer Nature.

¹²⁸ Tang, S. (2010). The security dilemma: A conceptual analysis. In *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time* (pp. 33-71). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

¹²⁹ Ibid (Tang, S., 2010).

may have been used mainly as military tools for accomplishing US CT goals and support its broader statecraft, rivals may perceive this as an intention to expand and therefore seek to increase their military powers as a result. Third, the expansion of US drone warfare heightens uncertainties in the international sphere that are capable of provoking unnecessary tensions in the global security landscape and potentially spark an *arms race* – as China and Russia may believe the US would likely use drones to target their military forces and strategic interests and therefore would perceptibly develop drone capabilities to match US technological advantage. These factors are examined in different parts of the thesis to underscore the nexus between drone use and the security dilemma of drone proliferation for US grand strategy.

2.2.3 Liberalism

The ideological premise of liberalism differs from the power-centric and state-centric notions of realism. Rather than share pessimism about the structure of the international realm and its consequence for moderating the behaviour of states, liberalism espouses the view that cooperation, interdependence, and multilateralism are possible among states. Proponents of liberalism express the belief that with proper institutions and diplomacy, state actors can work together to maximize prosperity and minimize conflict.¹³⁰

Liberalism provides an analytical lens for understanding world politics by offering a specific way to view and understand the world. Precisely, it is entrenched in the view that democratic promotion, international trade, free-market economies, international institutions, and diplomacy are pivotal for facilitating global cooperation and peace. There are, however, different perspectives to theorizing liberalism (see table 3 below). This distinction can be made into two: defensive liberalism and offensive liberalism, and they both share a consensus on the influence of democracy in moderating the behaviour of states and international security at large. Defensive liberalism advocates the use of multilateralism (interdependence) for advancing peace and ensuring state security, specifically, the promotion of democracy by peaceful means.¹³¹ Offensive liberalism, on the other hand, advocates democracy promotion by the barrel of the gun (force). It supports unilateralism, military assertiveness, and massive use of force in facilitating forced democratization.¹³²

Table 3: Goals of Liberalism on the use of force and approach to power and security

Objectives	Liberalism
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¹³⁰ Doyle, M. W. (1986). Liberalism and world politics. *The American political science review*, 1151-1169.

¹³¹ Walker, T. C., & Rousseau, D. L. (2016). Liberalism: a theoretical and empirical assessment. In *Routledge Handbook of Security Studies* (pp. 36-45). Routledge.

¹³² Ibid (Miller, B., 2010)

	Offensive Liberalism	Defensive Liberalism
Use of force	Maximalist/Unilateral	Minimalist/Multilateral
Approach to power and security	Focus on ideology promotion, regime change, democratic promotion, and facilitation of international cooperation using force.	Focus on soft power, international institutions, and diplomacy for the promotion of world peace and democratic ideals.

Source: Author’s adaptation

Parsing drone use and US grand strategy from the theoretical premise of liberalism highlights some useful commonalities. First, it shows the connection between the use of force in facilitating the goals of democratic promotion and international cooperation. This might help explain the George W. Bush administration’s strategic objectives in Pakistan, which rested on three pillars: One, ensuring the bulk of US assistance after 9/11 was in the form of foreign military financing aimed at combating, containing, and mitigating terrorism. Two, ensuring that US CT initiatives in Pakistan’s NWFR and FATA included the goals of supporting Pakistan’s transition to civilian rule and preventing further historical ties with al-Qaeda and the Taliban.¹³³ (this is analysed later in the thesis). The third pillar was ensuring that US assistance emphasized the disruption of Islamic Jihad, akin to what Christine Fair and Peter Chalk in their book *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of US Internal Security Assistance* as “hard security apparatus.”¹³⁴ The impact of which led to Pakistan playing a crucial role in the US *Operation Enduring Freedom* – by providing transit, logistical, and basing support for NATO and coalition forces.¹³⁵

Second, the tenets of offensive liberalism in the post 9/11 grand strategy of the Bush administration were demonstrated in his administration’s regime change in Iraq. While the Obama administration’s grand strategy espoused tenets of defensive liberalism, it, however, retained vestiges of offensive liberalism demonstrated by the intensification of drone strikes in targeted states in the first three years of his administration. This implied that despite the offensive nature of a military instrument, it could be employed to achieve the goals of liberalism. However, this is usually dependent on the goals of political leadership and the prevailing dynamics in global affairs, which determines its application as either a defensive or offensive liberal instrument.

¹³³ Mir, A., & Moore, D. (2019). Drones, surveillance, and violence: Theory and evidence from a US drone program. *International Studies Quarterly*, 63(4), 846-862.

¹³⁴ Fair, C. C., & Chalk, P. (2006). *Fortifying Pakistan: the role of US internal security assistance*. US Institute of Peace Press.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

In the next section, the theoretical underpinnings of realism and liberalism for the offense and defense argument in the US grand strategy are examined.

2.2.4 US Grand Strategy: *Betwixt Offense vs. Defense*

From the preceding analysis, it is evident that realism and liberalism are always present in the US grand strategy. However, what is necessary to consider is what factors account for changes in US grand strategy from an offense to a defense posture. Barry Posen's analysis of military doctrines provides a useful way to examine this. According to him, the degree to which a state's military doctrine or, more broadly, its grand strategy can be termed offensive, defensive, or deterrent is dependent on the state's threat perception, behaviour, and level of interstate competition.¹³⁶ Military doctrine is thus a reflection of competition between states or its absence thereof. As a result, 'offensive' doctrines increase the probability of an arms race, power rivalry, and strategic competition among world powers, as seen in the Cold War period between the US and the Soviet Union and more recently between the US and China in the South China Sea. On the contrary, defensive doctrines tend to promote more benign effects focused on "keeping the peace."¹³⁷

Bernard Miller proposes a model that explains the changes in US grand strategy from the prism of its offensive and defensive liberal and realist interpretations. According to his model, two systemic factors account for variations or shifts in US grand strategy and act as the "selector of ideas about which approach to security is likely to emerge as the winner and dominate US security policy in a certain period."¹³⁸ One is the degree of threat in the external environment. This is premised on the perceptual dimension of threat that considers: (i) state willingness to use force, (ii) the unpredictability of rival's intentions, and (iii) the actual use of force as reasons states may opt for offensive doctrines. Thus, in a high threat environment, states are more inclined to demonstrate aggressive behaviour and power-projection capabilities than in an international security environment laden with external security threats. In contrast, a benign environment, or a relative absence of threats, gives rise to defensive approaches that favors interstate cooperation and diplomatic engagement. This, however, can change in a situation of hegemonic affront by engendering the quest for dominant ideology promotion. In sum, in a

¹³⁶ Posen, B. (1986). *The sources of military doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the world wars*. Cornell University Press

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Miller, B. (2010). Explaining changes in US grand strategy: 9/11, the rise of offensive liberalism, and the war in Iraq. *Security Studies*, 19(1), 26-65

high threat environment, offensive realist and liberalist approaches are bound to thrive, and a benign environment favors both defensive realist and liberal approaches.¹³⁹

The second factor is the distribution of power in the international system. According to Miller, the distribution of capabilities in the international realm is a selector between realism and liberal approaches to US grand strategy.¹⁴⁰ In a situation of unipolarity (single hegemon), the costs of pursuing defensive ideological security approaches that place a premium on domestic values and preferences are much lower than in situations of great power parity. This is because of the freedom the hegemon enjoys in the absence of great power rivalry. This implies that conditions of hegemony have a moderating influence on the adoption of a particular grand strategy. It also follows that, in a situation of great power competition, offensive realist approaches dominate and override liberal or defensive ones. This occurs as competition causes states to focus on balancing capabilities or projecting power to prevent any challenge to their hegemony. Under this situation, appeal for costly humanitarian interventions and aggressive expansionism is considered necessary for preserving state interests.

There is, however, a caveat: while these two systemic factors are critical to influencing US grand strategic choices, there are two intervening variables that may influence these variations. One is the perception of decision-makers, and the second is the individual level of analysis. A third point can be made on the organisational, systemic factors – which explains how previous crises can condition future government decisions and introduce pathologies to its strategy.¹⁴¹ Thus, the belief system of a particular US administration, including its foreign policy objectives and worldview, can alter the choice of grand strategy.¹⁴² Likewise, the individual level of analysis (for example, a specific US president and his worldview/preferences) of threats and opportunities in the external environment can determine the choices made between offensive and defensive strategies and how they should be adopted or pursued. In the subsequent chapters, these points are weighed upon and elaborated.

2.2.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter examined the key concepts and theories that inform the research agenda. A deep dive into the meaning of grand strategy and other conceptual underpinnings implicated in the term were explored, particularly the critical question of if the US had a grand strategy. In

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Vanhoonacker, S., & Wangen, P. (2015). Graham T. Allison, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. In *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administration*. OUP Oxford.

¹⁴² Ibid.

spotlighting the different theories that can provide the analytical compass for the study, it was assessed that liberalism and realism provide a critical and useful theoretical basis for understanding the role of drones in the US grand strategy. While there is no single encompassing theory in International Relations that best explains a research phenomenon, the analysis provided a useful lens for understanding why state actors may desire to acquire and develop drone technology and the likely security spiral that are more likely to arise. This served as the basis for the analysis of the defense and offense liberal and realist interpretations of the changes to US grand strategy in this chapter.

The next chapter explores the typologies of US grand strategy and its intersection with drone use in successive administrations. It also assesses the literature on drone use and civilian deaths, proliferation, the blowback, and anti-Americanism and its intersection on US grand strategy.

CHAPTER THREE

Typologies of US Grand Strategy and Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on drones and their intersection with US grand strategy. It examined how the dominant typologies of US grand strategy offer an analytical frame for explaining US drone warfare, particularly from the lens of successive US administrations post 9/11. The literature review in this chapter identifies the gaps in the analysis of US drone warfare and its impact on US grand strategy, particularly from the standpoint of civilian casualty, the security dilemma of drone proliferation, and the blowback effect arising from anti-Americanism in targeted states. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first takes a deep dive into the typologies of US grand strategy and its intersection with the use of drones. The second part critically analyses literature on the aftermath of drone use in targeted states.

3.2 Typologies of US Grand Strategy

In this section, the typologies of US grand strategy are examined. First, the main elements of each grand strategy are identified. This is followed by an examination of their core objectives and goals and, lastly, how they intersect with drones. There are several typologies of US grand strategy, each providing underlying assumptions on how the US can maintain its unique power position in the post-Cold War. All these grand strategies offer an analytic lens for analysing US drone warfare and are central to this thesis in explaining their use in the successive grand strategies of US administrations post 9/11.

3.2.1 Primacy and Drones

Primacy strongly advocates the use of American military power in achieving its objectives. It is rooted in the unipolar perspective that emphasizes the preservation of America's hegemony and power pre-eminence.¹⁴³ Its proponents argue that sustaining "American military supremacy is the only way to ensure its security, promote its interests, and shape the international security environment without recourse to war."¹⁴⁴ As Robert Jervis notes, "this means being so powerful than any other state according to the crude measures of power, but also having the ability to establish or at least to strongly influence the rules of the game by which international politics is played."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Sloan, I. (2003). Beyond Primacy: American grand strategy in the post-September 11 era. *International Journal*, 58(2), 303-319.

¹⁴⁴ Huntington, S. P. (1993). Why international primacy matters. *International security*, 17(4), 68-83.

¹⁴⁵ Jervis, R. (1993). International primacy: is the game worth the candle? *International Security*, 17(4), 52-67.

Primacy is rooted in realist theory, more precisely, offensive realism – which explains aggressive behaviour and territorial expansion of states as enactments of self-help at the international level – to which the goal is to ensure greater national and international security. It also rests on hegemonic stability theory – which holds that the international realm is more likely to remain stable under a hegemonic unipolar world power.¹⁴⁶ The legitimacy of the hegemon under this theory, to a large extent, depends on the degree of its willingness to forcefully guard the international order against illiberal threats.¹⁴⁷

There are several objectives linked to primacy. First, it is concerned with preventing the rise of a rival great power and places a premium on maintaining America's preeminent power position around the globe. Second, it prioritizes democratic promotion in the international order to further consolidate its hegemonic status. Third, it advocates for the use of force via unilateral actions when national interests are at stake. Fourth, it supports preventive military action as a deterrent against illiberal threats. Lastly and relatedly, it champions the use of military power in achieving American security objectives, and it is arguably overconfident that its unilateral capabilities can achieve the ends it seeks. Both Robert Art¹⁴⁸ and David Baldwin¹⁴⁹ agree that the fungibility of American military power furthers its security objectives based on two central points: one, its versatility as an instrument of statecraft, and two, its importance for the successful conduct of American foreign policy.¹⁵⁰

In the post 9/11 security environment, primacy supports the assertive and determined use of American power for rolling back the threat of international Jihadist terrorism. This has been reflected in the George W. Bush preventative war framework and the regime change agenda of his grand strategy, which espoused power projection and hard power tactic for global liberal democratic promotion. As chapter six shows, vestiges of primacy are also evident in President Trump's 'America First' strategy – which advocates a hard-line, zero-sum approach to global affairs predicated on unilateralism and neo-isolationism in preserving America's power and interests.¹⁵¹ (this is further explored in-depth in chapter 6).

¹⁴⁶ Webb, M. C., & Krasner, S. D. (1989). Hegemonic stability theory: An empirical assessment. *Review of International Studies*, 15(2), 183-198.

¹⁴⁷ Cohen, E., Edelman, E., & Brian, H. (2015). Rebuilding American Foreign Policy. *Choosing to Lead: American Foreign Policy for a Disordered World*.

¹⁴⁸ Art, R. J. (1999). Force and fungibility reconsidered. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419908429390>

¹⁴⁹ Baldwin, D. A. (1997). The concept of security. *Review of international studies*, 23(1), 5-26.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid (Art, 1999; Baldwin, 1997)

¹⁵¹ Ibid (Brands, H., 2017).

A major drawback of primacy lies in its projection of an ‘Americanized’ view of eliminating security threats by military means, which creates an overblown threat perception, creating what Cathy Downes refers to as ‘unintentional militarism’ – due to the overreliance on military methods and mindsets in the pursuit of US national security objectives.¹⁵² As Downes argues, this explains why America’s exceptionalism and military capabilities have not translated to outright victories in contemporary wars. The study by Amy Belasco on the cost of US counterterrorism spending illustrates this. Presently, the US is still conducting counterterrorism in 80 countries and active drone and bombing operations in seven. This includes US troops in 14 countries and 40 military bases for prosecuting its WOT.¹⁵³ All of which costs the US more than \$6 trillion in military expenditures.¹⁵⁴

How do drones fit in within the grand strategy of primacy? From the prism of the foregoing discussion and based on empirical evidence of US drone use since 9/11, several points can be made on the nexus between drones and the grand strategy of primacy. First, drones express the “fungibility of American power”¹⁵⁵ in targeted states in dismantling and disrupting terrorist organizations. It is also expressed in their use as an instrument for supporting US counterterrorism missions globally in providing air support, intelligence, and reconnaissance operations, supplementing US alliances, conducting surveillance, and projecting US military power, particularly in hard-to-reach areas of active hostilities. Second, they function as offensive war instruments of statecraft. As Hazelton notes, “in a world of primacy, drones are essential tools for furthering US unilateralism, hegemony, and assertiveness.”¹⁵⁶ This is against the backdrop that the US has, for many years since 9/11, maintained an expansive and ever-growing range of drone capabilities. Currently, the US has over 200 types of drones, and these include the Predator, Reaper, Global Hawk, Army’s Hunter, and Shadow, as well as several others (see table 4 below).

¹⁵² Downes, C. (2010). Unintentional militarism: over-reliance on military methods and mindsets in US national security and its consequences. *Defense & security analysis*, 26(4), 371-385.

¹⁵³ Belasco, A. (2005, October). The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan and Enhanced Base Security Since 9/11. Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service; Belasco, A. (2009). *Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other global war on terror operations since 9/11*. Diane Publishing.

¹⁵⁴ Belasco, A., Eaglen, M., Hartig, L., Jonas, T., McCord, M., & Mueller, J. (2018). Counterterrorism Spending: Protecting America While Promoting Efficiencies and Accountability. *Washington, DC*, <https://www.stimson.org/content/counterterrorism-spending-protecting-america-while-promoting-efficiencies-and-accountability>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid (Art, R., 1999)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid (Hazelton J., 2017).

As Hazelton posits, this has allowed the US to use drones for accomplishing the ‘politicized functions on the use of force’¹⁵⁷ in targeted states. These functions are identified as compellence, deterrence, defence, and swaggering. As a compellence tactic, drones are used as instruments of force to stop enemy targets from acting. Deterrence is the use of drones as a preventative tactic to prevent an enemy from attacking in the first place or as a tactic during a conflict to prevent retaliation in response to an attack. Swaggering is the use of drones for brute force projection intended to intimidate or coerce adversaries.

Table 4: The United States’ Drone Capabilities.

Name	Capability Mission
RQ-4A Global Hawk/BAMS-D Block 10	Mainly for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), and Maritime protection
RQ-4B Global Hawk Block 20/30	ISR
RQ-4B Global Hawk Block 40	ISR/Combat Missions, Command and Control
MQ- 9 Reaper	ISR/Precision strike and swaggering.
MQ-IA/B Predator	ISR/Precision strike, swaggering.
MQ-8B Fire Scout VTUAV	ISR/ Precision strike/anti-submarine warfare
MQ-5 Hunter	ISR/ Precision strike/Combat missions
RQ-7 Shadow	ISR/ Precision strike /Combat missions
STUAS	ISR/Explosive Ordnance Disposal Precision strike /swaggering
ScanEagle	ISR/Target acquisition/swaggering
RQ-11 Raven	ISR/Target acquisition/swaggering
Wasp	ISR/ Precision strike
SUAS AECV Puma	ISR/ Precision strike
gMAV/T-Hawk	ISR/ Precision strike /Explosive Ordnance Disposal

Source: Morris Zachary.¹⁵⁸

3.2.2 Restraint and Drones

The grand strategy typology of restraint is framed as an incremental process to ensure power vacuums do not emerge as the US retrenches. It also advocates a sharp rollback of US power and scaling back on its commitment to global affairs.¹⁵⁹ Restraint proponents claim it is futile for the US to commit enormous economic, political, and military resources towards maintaining its hegemonic status post-Cold War in the absence of a superpower threat – such as the Soviet Union. It, however, does not abandon the goal of defending US hegemonic might or its preeminent power position. Rather, it expresses the view that balance of power and nationalism are cornerstones for understanding the interaction of states in the international

¹⁵⁷ Ibid (Hazelton J., 2017)

¹⁵⁸ Morris, Z.C (2018). US Drones. *Military Review*. 112

¹⁵⁹ Posen, B. R. (2013). Pull back: The case of a less activist foreign policy. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 116.

realm.¹⁶⁰ There are two versions of restraint. One is offshore balancing and the other, retrenchment.

3.2.2.1 *Offshore Balancing*

Offshore balancers share the view that the reduction of US global military commitments and an increase in burden-sharing with allies and partners will best preserve America's global power.¹⁶¹ As Mearsheimer posits,

“A strategy of offshore balancing would still try to ensure that no one major power dominates Europe, Northeast Asia, or the Persian Gulf. But it would make others assume the main burden and rely on local powers to balance one another while stationing US military forces over the horizon, either offshore or within the United States.”¹⁶²

Posen adds that “America has been living beyond its financial means, and its security strategy has become increasingly costly because it is overstretched under the pressure of existing security commitments worldwide.”¹⁶³ The best way forward is for the US to shift the burden of military intervention to local forces, its allies, partners, and regional powers to prevent the dangerous effect of declinism in America's preponderance which will give rise to another hegemonic power.¹⁶⁴ This finds bearing with Paul Kennedy's theory of imperial overstretch in explaining the rise and fall of great powers. The theory holds that “great powers inevitably work their way into decline and eventual demise by seeking to maximize their power; at some point, the costs of maintaining their power possessions outgrow their benefits. Consequently, the respective great powers become imperially overstretched.”¹⁶⁵

The effect of imperial overstretch potentially engenders hard balancing by other states – which occurs when other states increase their relative power against a powerful and hegemonic state through domestic military build-ups and external alignments.¹⁶⁶ Or what Fareed Zakaria termed as “the fall of the West and the rise of the Rest” – which explains the rise of new and revisionist

¹⁶⁰ Ibid (Brands, H., 2017)

¹⁶¹ Brands, H., Feaver, P., Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M. (2016). Should America Retrench: The Battle over Offshore Balancing. *Foreign Aff.*, 95, 164.

¹⁶² Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M. (2016). The case for offshore balancing. *Foreign Affairs*, 95(4), 70-83.

¹⁶³ Posen, B. R. (2013). Pull back: The case of a less activist foreign policy. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 116.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid (Posen, B.R., 2013).

¹⁶⁵ Kennedy, P. (2010). *The rise and fall of the great powers: economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000*. Vintage. Also see Soare, S. R. (2013). Looking Through the Hourglass of American Declinism. *Review of Military History*. Pp 5

¹⁶⁶ Nye, J. S. (2012). Declinist pundits. *Foreign Policy*, (196), 64.

great powers in the international system that challenges American power in order to maximize their own power and gains.¹⁶⁷

Offshore balancers oppose US international engagement in costly CT missions and the encumbrance of foreign wars and international humanitarian missions.¹⁶⁸ Rather, they argue that the US narrows its focus to three core interests: First, shielding the American homeland from attacks. Second, defending and preserving its territorial integrity, and third, safeguarding American sovereignty.¹⁶⁹ For countries where the US is actively at war, offshore balancing could involve the selling of drones to Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and other countries of active hostilities in order to minimize dangerous troop deployment – and diminish the cost and risk of warfare. The scaling back of US presence and global security commitments, however, has a dangerous unintended consequence for aggravating wars, fomenting regional instability, and incentivizing global terrorism. This is because, to American allies and partners, offshore balancing fosters the perception that the US is passively rescinding on its commitments to global democratic promotion. Thus, increasing their vulnerabilities and the need to devise means to safeguard and protect their national interests – even when the US provides them with the technology to ensure their security.¹⁷⁰

3.2.2.2 *Retrenchment*

Proponents of retrenchment emphasize the cutting back of American international commitments and military costs.¹⁷¹ They call for reduced defence spending, scaling back on American foreign mission deployment, and a reduction in military expenditures and security commitment obligation.¹⁷² Retrenchment does not avoid strategic commitment; rather, it strongly advocates for lowered cost and reduced commitment more than offshore balancing. This was evident in President Obama's grand strategy – that opposed heavy-footed counterinsurgency missions, rather opting for minimal soldier deployment for ground campaigns, a scaled-back force structure, and a restrained and minimalist security strategy.¹⁷³ For example, in 2010, US national security spending made up 20.1 percent of the fiscal budget. This dropped to 15.9 percent in 2015 because of phased troop withdrawal from Iraq and

¹⁶⁷ Zakaria, F. (1997). The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 76, 22.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid (Brands et al, 2016; Posen, B. R 2013; Kennedy, P., 2010)

¹⁶⁹ Ibid (Avey et al, 2018).

¹⁷⁰ Dueck, C. (2015). The Strategy of Retrenchment and its Consequences. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Brooks, S. G., Ikenberry, G. J., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2013). Do not come home, America: the case against retrenchment. *International Security*, 37(3), 7-51.

Afghanistan and across-the-board cuts in both military and non-military spending within the same period.¹⁷⁴

3.2.3 The Utility of Drones in the Grand Strategy of Restraint

The scaling back of US security and defence commitments overseas and the lower cost of warfare as advocated by restraint favours drone use. Drones are generally low-cost, remotely controlled, light approaches to warfare. The cost disparity between MQ-9 Reaper drones (mainly used for ISR and precision strikes) and F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is huge and highlights this. While a single unit of the MQ-9 Reaper drone costs US\$6.48 million with an estimated operational cost of US\$3million, in contrast, the F-35 jet costs nearly US\$91million per unit and an additional US\$5million to operate.¹⁷⁵ However, F-35s have very different capabilities and are conceptualized for very different purposes to drones. For instance, while F-35s are effective and necessary for forward troops deployed globally, in retrenchment, less of it will be required, thus shifting preference for drone systems. Another comparison between the cost of manned F-16s and combat Reaper drone (see table 5 below) also highlight the utility of drones as a replacement for manned aircraft under the restraint strategy.

Table 5: Comparison of Manned F-16 vs. Drone procurement costs.

No of Aircraft	F-16 Cost (in millions)	De-manned F-16 Cost + GCS (in millions)	Potential Savings (in millions)	UCAV Cost + GCS (in millions)	Potential Savings (in millions)
1	\$30	\$50	-\$20	\$30	+\$0
2	\$60	\$75	-\$15	\$40	+\$20
3	\$90	\$100	-\$10	\$50	+\$40
4	\$120	\$125	-\$5	\$60	+\$60
5	\$150	\$150	0	\$70	+\$80
6	\$180	\$175	+\$5	\$80	+\$100

Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense UAV Roadmap (2000-2025).¹⁷⁶

Drones are also lower cost compared to soldier deployment. In 2012, each soldier deployed to Afghanistan cost the US government approximately US\$2.1million.¹⁷⁷ This amount does not include medical costs associated with life-threatening injuries, insurance, trauma, and disabilities associated with the risk of deployment. This means every five American soldiers deployed to Afghanistan equalled the procurement and operational cost of one MQ-9 Reaper

¹⁷⁴ Ibid (Belasco et al, 2018).

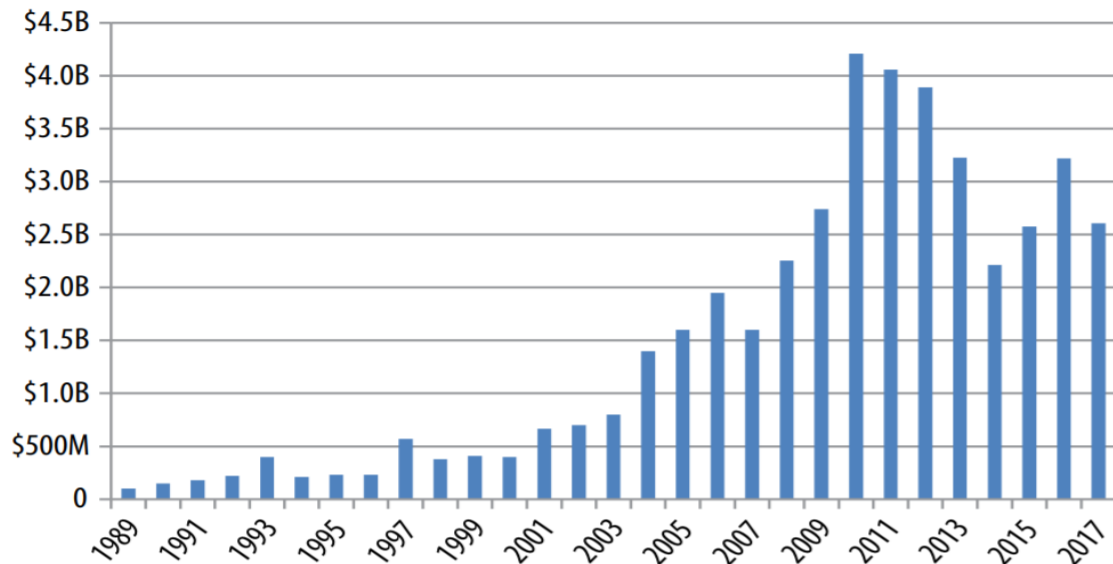
¹⁷⁵ McLean, W. (2014). Drones are cheap, soldiers are not: a cost-benefit analysis of war. *The Conversation, The Conversation US, Inc*, 25. Also see Ibid (Morris, Z., 2018).

¹⁷⁶ United States Office of the Secretary of Defense (2001). Unmanned aerial vehicles roadmap (2000-2025). <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a391358.pdf> (Accessed 21 October 2018)

¹⁷⁷ Ibid (McLean, W. 2014).

drone.¹⁷⁸ It is therefore, unsurprising why the Obama administration increased drone procurement spending despite cuts in the Department of Defence (DoD) budget as part of his restraint grand strategy.

Figure 1: United States Drones Procurement Budget 1989-2017



Source: Morris, Z.¹⁷⁹

From figure 1 above indicating US drone procurement expenditure, the increase in drone spending in the first three years of the Obama administration (2009-2011) reflected the utility of drones in advancing US hard power capabilities while toning down on military expenditures and commitments. From \$284 million in FY2000, drone spending under President Obama increased to \$3.3 billion in FY2010. This further increased to \$4.8 billion in FY2011 and \$5.1 billion in FY2012.¹⁸⁰ From this lens, the use of drones in a world of restraint echoes what Hazelton termed as “a high-cost tool of violence, actual and threatened.”¹⁸¹ Precisely, it reiterates the position that while the US may be willing to cut down on its defence budget, it is not letting up on its international strategic commitments and security obligations to the American homeland or in responding threats at the international sphere.

3.2.4 Deep Engagement, Selective Engagement, and Drones

The US has pursued a grand strategy of deep engagement since the end of WWII. Deep engagement maintains that US retrenchment from its security commitments to its partners in

¹⁷⁸ Ibid (Belasco, 2018).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid (Zachary M., 2018).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid (Belasco A., 2018).

¹⁸¹ Ibid (Hazelton, J., 2017).

Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East would have a number of security and economic benefits.¹⁸² These include preserving the stability of Eurasia, facilitating America's effort to maintain the stability of economic globalization and ensuring that its overall architecture is favourable to its core interests, and promoting institutionalized cooperation that benefits many states but is reflective of US preferences.¹⁸³ Deep engagement shares a similar emphasis with primacy on the imperative of US power preponderance in maintaining a peaceful and prosperous world. The key elements of deep engagement are predicated on economic globalization, promotion of institutional order, protecting allies, and avoiding international conflicts that threaten the US-led international world order.¹⁸⁴ Proponents of deep engagement posit it achieves three things for the US. First, the preventing the emergence of dangerous security dynamics in the world's core regions. Second is facilitating across-the-board institutional cooperation that reflects American interests and greatly benefits its allies. Third, it ensures the global economic architecture is favourable to US interests.¹⁸⁵

Selective engagement espouses the same ideals as deep engagement but with important modifications. Robert Art identifies four of these modifications: First, it seeks the maximization of American interests by ensuring its military power is used most effectively in protecting these interests. Second, it is a hybrid strategy that incorporates the best elements of other grand strategies but avoids their inherent pitfalls. Third, it stands between isolationism and unilateralism on the one hand and interventionism and offensive liberalism on the other hand. Fourth, it strikes a balance between restrictive and overly expansive definitions of American interests in the international system by allocating political attention, military support, and material resources to core interests than desirable ones.¹⁸⁶ Proponents argue that the increased security benefits from selective engagement prevent band-wagoning among states, as near-peer competitors of the US are less likely to challenge its hegemony. Two separate casual processes account for this in a realist sense. According to Reuben Steff and Nicholas Khoo, "in a defensive realist world, uncertainty over intentions activates security dilemma dynamics, leading to balancing. Hence, in an offensive realist world, conflict over real interests

¹⁸² Brooks, S. G., Ikenberry, G. J., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2013). Don't come home, America: the case against retrenchment. *International Security*, 37(3), 7-51.

¹⁸³ Brooks, S. G., Ikenberry, G. J., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2013). Lean forward: In defense of American engagement. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 130.

¹⁸⁴ Brooks, S. G., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2016). *America abroad: The United States' global role in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid (Brooks et al, 2016 pp 1-2)

¹⁸⁶ Art, R. J. (1999). Geopolitics updated: The strategy of selective engagement. *International Security*, 23(3), 79-113.

leads to balancing.”¹⁸⁷ This means less need for the US to drain resources on military spending and in fostering security commitments at the regional and international levels.¹⁸⁸

3.2.4.1 What Roles Do Drones Play in the World of Selective/Deep Engagement?

In selective engagement, the role of drones is to shape the behaviour of other states, precisely, allies and partners of the US to preserve its hegemony and maintain regional stability. This underscores drones as leveraging tools for moderating state choices. On this, Hazelton notes, “the use and withholding of drone strike to leverage other states’ choice is possible if the US is willing to hold off on potential strikes when politically necessary, even if a strike is militarily possible and even desirable.”¹⁸⁹

This implies that the US can withhold drone strikes as a compellence tactic to force its partners to act – or it conduct unilateral drone strikes to project its military power and to reassure its partners. Drones can also support security coordination for dealing with international terrorist threats like al-Qaeda; under selective engagement, this would mean deploying drones to complement and support military actions of allies and partners and also requiring states to deal with their own security.

3.2.5 Cooperative Security as a Grand Strategy and Drones

Proponents of cooperative security share the view that liberal democratic promotion in the international order is the cornerstone of US grand strategy.¹⁹⁰ This is premised on the notion that America’s economic and military hegemony can effectively maintain stability, ensure global security, and engender the creation of a favourable international order if it is based on three pillars: open societies, open governments, and an open international system.¹⁹¹ Cooperative security shares a number of beliefs about the international order and the role of the US in it. First, it believes global humanitarian interventionism and liberal internationalism are pivotal in advancing human rights, democracy, and free markets.¹⁹² Second, it construes a

¹⁸⁷ Steff, R., & Khoo, N. (2014). Hard balancing in the age of American unipolarity: The Russian response to US ballistic Missile defense during the bush administration (2001–2008). *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 37(2), 222-258.

¹⁸⁸ Norrlof, C., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2019). Is US grand strategy self-defeating? Deep engagement, military spending, and sovereign debt. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 36(3), 227-247.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid (Hazelton, J., 2017 pp 9)

¹⁹⁰ Art, R. J. (2013). *A grand strategy for America*. Cornell University Press; Ibid (Hazelton, 2017).

¹⁹¹ Ikenberry, G. J., & Slaughter, A. M. (2006). Forging a world of liberty under law. *US National Security in the 21st Century*, 17.

¹⁹² Also see Ikenberry, G. J. (2007, June). Grand strategy as liberal order building. In *prepared for conference After the Bush Doctrine: National Security Strategy for a New Administration at the University of Virginia*, (29 May 2007), available at <https://www.princeton.edu/~gjj3/Ikenberry-Grand-Strategy-as-Liberal-Order-Building-2007-word.pdf>

rules-based order founded on rules and institutions as salient for promoting collective security and cooperation among democracies – which overall is beneficial for US hegemony and interests.

Third, it maintains that benevolent leadership, rather than coercion, best preserves the international order. That is, it supports the use of US power for advancing democratic institutions, promoting free markets, pulling down barriers to global trade, and greater institution-building while acting within the boundaries of the rules-based order. Fourth, it justifies increased US defence spending on troop deployments, security commitments, and the use of military power overseas if it advances the goals of democratic promotion and institutional building.¹⁹³ It, however, emphasizes the incorporation of multilateralism in ensuring legitimacy in the use of force. Fifth, it views international terrorism, human rights violation, and the rise of illiberal powers as a threat to the global order and the American homeland and advocates for the use of force for dealing with threats. Lastly, it maintains that stability in the international order is best guaranteed when America is willing and able to use its preponderant power to overcome collective problems and provide international stability as a public good.¹⁹⁴

What then is the role of drones under this grand strategy? Considering that cooperative security construes US military dominance as underwriting the international liberal order, drones under this grand strategy serve as instruments for facilitating the international rules-based order and a hedge against potential illiberal challenges to America's hegemony. From this lens, drone strikes facilitate liberal internationalism by exerting US power in counterterrorism, democracy promotion, and humanitarian intervention, and as a useful tool for deterring anti-liberal challengers and conflicts. However, drones can be perceived as overly aggressive (as their use after 9/11 suggests) and express the illiberal use of US power in targeted states, which potentially undermines the legitimacy of liberal internationalism as practiced and promoted by the US. This highlights one of the critical arguments of this thesis, that while drones are tactically useful, their impact in targeted states engender countervailing impacts that serve to undermine US grand strategy.

¹⁹³ Ikenberry, G. J., Smith, T., Knock, T. J., & Slaughter, A. M. (2009). *The crisis of American foreign policy: Wilsonianism in the twenty-first century*. Princeton University Press.

¹⁹⁴ Nexon, D. H. (2009). The balance of power in the balance. *World Pol.*, 61, 330.

3.2.6 Drones and US Grand Strategy: The Nexus

Having considered the different typologies of US grand strategy – including its core elements and the putative role of drones in it, how then can drones support or undermine it? This is answered in two ways in this thesis. First, to determine how drones support US grand strategy, their use as a political and strategic instrument of statecraft is assessed through the lens of the different typologies of US grand strategy (see table 6 below). This assessment is done based on how successive US administrations post 9/11 used drones and the respective grand strategic ‘vision’ they have pursued and implemented. The table below provides a template that is used later in the thesis to answer the research questions.

Table 6: Typologies of US grand strategy, its core objectives and view on the use of force

	US Grand Strategy Typologies			
	Primacy	Restraint	Cooperative Security	Selective/Deep Engagement
Theoretical Anchor	Realism/hegemonic stability theory	Realism	Liberalism	Realism/liberalism
<i>Objectives</i>				
Main objective	US power preponderance and prevent the rise of another hegemon.	Scaled-back global commitment and lower cost of warfare	Liberal internationalism and promotion of rules-based order	Preventing the rise of another hegemon
Peer Competitor	Prevent	Prevent	Allow, if it promotes rules-based order	Prevent
Counterterrorism	Supports	Minimal support	Supports	Supports
Democracy Promotion	Supports	Minimal support	Supports	Supports
Institution-building	Wary	Indifferent	Supports	Supports
<i>Views on the use of force</i>				
Force structure	Expand	Reduce	Maintain	Maintain
Troop deployment	Supports	Minimal support	Supports	When necessary
Use of force	Unilateral	When balancing fails	Multilateral	When core interests are threatened

Source: Author’s re-adaptation from Avey et al.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Ibid (Avey et al, 2018, pp 17)

Second, assessing how drones undermine US grand strategy entails a critical assessment of the aftermath of drones in targeted states for CT operations. This means examining their use from the lens of different drone policies and strategies of successive US administrations after 9/11. For example, selective engagement has as its core objective the prevention of the rise of another hegemon. Thus, when drones proliferate globally, particularly among revanchist and resurgent powers, in a way that matches US drone capabilities, it creates uncertainties and vulnerabilities that potentially hampers US grand strategy. This implies investigating the inherent dilemma between the grand strategy espoused by a particular administration against the backdrop of how drone use in targeted states undermines its stated goals.

3.2.7 Tactical vs. Operational vs. Strategic Use of Drones

Drones have tactical, operational, and strategic significance. The instrumentation of drone technology highlights their tactical military uses – in providing defence, facilitating remote warfare, projecting US aerial superiority, and commanders' asymmetric advantages. Drone from a tactical standpoint, thus, refers to how its weaponry is used relative to its purpose in CT operations. Hazelton shares the view that drones are likely to remain tactically relevant in areas of active hostilities where the US has airpower predominance. However, as more state actors acquire air defense capabilities, this advantage is likely to be constrained and overshadowed.¹⁹⁶

Operational uses of drones represent the nexus between their tactical and strategic uses. It refers to the actual use of drones in targeted missions for their functionality and military significance – particularly as a countermeasure against illiberal threats. Since 9/11, this has been reflected in their role in thwarting terrorist safe-havens, preventing terrorist attacks by decapitating HVTs, and in disrupting terrorist organizations. This has been further expressed in their use as a force multiplier, particularly in the remote killing of terrorist targets by a simple push of the button. The Predator and Reaper drone systems have been the warhorse of US CT missions, and their operational uses for combat and ISR missions have reflected the duality of their functions – for “warcraft” and statecraft in targeted states.

The strategic use of drones refers to the ends it accomplishes for the US for CT and its WOT. It underscores how the use of the technology advances national interests, preserves military power, and broader security goals beyond their operational and tactical use. As Hazelton adds, drone strikes are “strategically useful primarily for their ability to reassure and provide leverage

¹⁹⁶ Ibid (Hazelton, 2017).

over partner states. They are also useful, if anti-Americanism hinders the advancement of US interests, for their ability to cause less inflammation of popular opinion than other standoff weapons.”¹⁹⁷ This thesis returns to these topics later in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7.

3.2.8 Doctrine vs. Strategy vs. Tactics

For conceptual purposes, there is a need to establish the difference between the meaning of doctrine, strategy, and tactics as used in this thesis. Doctrines refer to the set of principles and/or statements that purport an explanation of the use of force. DoD defines them as “fundamental principles that guide the action of military forces in support of national objectives.”¹⁹⁸ The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also views doctrine as “fundamental principles by which the military forces guide their actions in support of objectives.”¹⁹⁹ There is, however, a caveat, while doctrines by their nature are implicitly authoritative, there is a need to apply judgement in its implementation. This is because, as Harold Hoiback cautions, the efficacy of a doctrine as a tool for change, education, or command, depends on the military application of its devise²⁰⁰ – of which when wrongly applied can defeat the purpose it was crafted, thereby causing wars, inflaming tensions and conflicts. Furthermore, for a doctrine to be meaningful beyond the abstract conception, Hoiback argues it must be explicit and specific with useful empirical content to avoid the pitfalls of being construed as dogmatic and without value.²⁰¹

According to renowned American strategist Colin Gray, strategy is the “product of the dialogue between policy and national power in the context of the overall international security environment.”²⁰² It also refers to the approach for achieving the goals that take into cognizance factors such as technology, resources, and geopolitical realities.²⁰³ The DoD defines the concept as the “art and science of developing and using political, economic, psychology, and military force as necessary during peace and war, to maximize support for policies and increase the probabilities of victory and lessen the chances of defeat.”²⁰⁴ Whereas, tactics, as defined by

¹⁹⁷ Ibid (Hazelton, 2017).

¹⁹⁸ Department of Defense (2020) Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms.
<https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>

¹⁹⁹ NATO cited in Høiback, H. (2011). What is doctrine? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34(6), 879-900.

²⁰⁰ Høiback, H. (2011). What is doctrine? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34(6), 879-900.

²⁰¹ Høiback, H. (2016). The anatomy of doctrine and ways to keep it fit. *Journal of strategic studies*, 39(2), 185-197.

²⁰² Gray, C. S. (1999). *Modern strategy* (Vol. 42). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid (DoD, 2020).

DoD's military terminologies, "refers to the specific ways military strategies are accomplished."²⁰⁵

What then is the difference between doctrine, strategy, and tactics? While doctrines are generally applied to tactics and strategy and clarify the links between their objectives and actions – simply put, it provides the basic principles on *how* the force operates. Strategy, on the other hand, *describes how* military objectives will be accomplished and to what ends. In contrast, tactics refer to the planned actions needed to *implement* a stated strategy. For instance, while *Operations Desert Storm* was a strategy of President Bush's administration in Iraq in 2003, it was predicated on an offensive liberal doctrine that espoused the goals of forced democratization and unilateralism. The tactics for the strategy were evident in the actual military engagement with the Iraqis.

3.3 Literature Review

This section assesses academic literature on drones. The aim is to situate the core focus of this thesis – the impact of drone use on US grand strategy – in relation to the existing literature by highlighting the key issues and gaps. This is done using a thematic approach to help situate the dissertation within the context of analysis for in-depth analytical exploration. The first relates to the moral and ethical dilemma of drones. The second theme centers on the impact of drone strikes and civilian casualty. The third theme assesses the blowback effect of anti-Americanism. Finally, the last theme relates to the security dilemma of drone proliferation for the US grand strategy.

3.3.1 Moral and Ethical Dilemma of US Drone Use

The unprecedented reconnaissance, surveillance, and lethal capabilities of drones since 9/11 have increased its reliance and continued use as a CT instrument. Besides the asymmetric tactical advantage drones provide in dealing and responding to threats posed by terrorist groups and non-conventional targets, they provide strategic advantages to the US by facilitating remote warfare.²⁰⁶ This is essentially warfare that places a premium on minimal troop deployment and a preference for remotely controlled war. From an ethical lens, drones engender what former Secretary of Defence Robert Gates termed the "desensitization and dehumanization of warfare

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Kahn, P. W. (2002). The paradox of riskless warfare. *Philosophy & Public Policy Quarterly*, 22(3), 2–8. doi:10.13021/pppq.v22i3.380

that makes death painless and colourless.”²⁰⁷ This is because drones reduce the cost and risk of the use of force and engender a new form of warfare facilitated by the push of a button from a remote location far removed from the battlefield. Welsh explains this by asserting drones “...erase the pain given and taken, reduce the grunt and the struggle to the push of a button ... and the game, the war, is no more than a fast-twitch exercise – a battle fought without personal cost. It is a cause without effect, a victory only for technology and opposable thumbs.”²⁰⁸

This closely approximates what Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli conceptualized as “surrogate warfare” to explain the transference of the burden of war from humans to technological surrogates.²⁰⁹ While this gives the US a wiggle room to avoid the human penalties resulting from its WOT in targeted states, it has not prevented the international backlash that has been ascribed to its continued drone programme and the perception that drones violate just war principles – which requires that the use of force must be justified under certain conditions (*Jus ad Bellum*) and be limited in certain ways (*Jus in Bello*).²¹⁰ Paul Kahn terms this the “paradox of riskless warfare,” – which explains how the pursuit of asymmetry in war undermines reciprocity and the moral justification for killing the opponent’s combatants.²¹¹ The paradox implied here is that the very feature of drones that makes it attractive to policymakers and military generals as a CT tool (for eliminating HVTs) also generates antipathy against their use due to blowback from civilian casualty and the visceral opposition it triggers in targeted states.

However, the decision of whether drones are ethically permissible, as Jennifer Welsh notes, is dependent on “the precise differentiation between the use of force in wartime and the use of force outside the framework of armed conflict.”²¹² Ethical questions regarding the use of drones revolve around six key elements of the just war concept: last resort (which requires that all peaceful options must be explored towards achieving a just cause before resorting to the use of force), imminence (that use of force must be used in response to a looming attack), war must be sanctioned by lawful authority, proportionality (use of force must be proportional to the

²⁰⁷ Robert Gates cited in Morris, Z. (2018). US Drones: Smaller, Less Capable Drones for the near Future. *Military Review*, 98(3), 38.

²⁰⁸ Welsh, J. M. (2015). The Morality of “Drone Warfare”. In *Drones and the Future of Armed Conflict*. University of Chicago Press.

²⁰⁹ Krieg, A., & Rickli, J. M. (2018). Surrogate warfare: the art of war in the 21st century? *Defence studies*, 18(2), 113-130.

²¹⁰ Williams, R. E., & Caldwell, D. (2006). Jus Post Bellum: Just war theory and the principles of just peace. *International studies perspectives*, 7(4), 309-320.

²¹¹ Ibid

²¹² Ibid. (Welsh, J. M., 2015)

stated goals of the war), protection of non-combatants, and the principle of necessity (that use of force must be predicated on the right intentions). As Kahn asserts, “drone warfare is not predicated on the notion of self-defence, since it removes the threat by opponents, and more so, the targeted side has no means to retaliate against lethal drone strikes.”²¹³ Thus, making the asymmetric advantage conferred by drones in combat zones morally unjustifiable since it removes the ability of targeted individuals for self-defence. These ethical concerns are reflected in US drone operations in targeted states and fall short of most of these just war concepts (this is weighed upon in the latter part of the thesis). While these studies have explored the ethical dimensions of US drone warfare, particularly in violating the rights of non-combatants in targeted states, there has been limited analysis on the impact on US grand strategy – which is one of the areas this thesis explores.

From a moral lens, drones make it easy for the US to conduct surgical strikes without the fallout of international laws or humanitarian laws. The moral dilemma stems from the civilian death following drone strikes and the collateral damage in targeted states, which currently have not been sanctioned as war crimes for unlawful killings of non-combatants. The moral problem is further compounded when the issue of culpability regarding who is to be punished for unintended killings of non-combatants. Is it the drone operator that pushes the trigger, or the decision-makers involved in targeted killing, or the drone itself that should be blamed for human rights violations and contravention of the Geneva Convention? The Convention requires that the use of force abide by four cardinal principles: distinction, proportionality, military necessity, and humanity. The overarching objectives of these principles are to ensure that weapon used in war serves the following purposes: (i) effectively discriminate between combatants and civilians, (ii) meet the requirements of military weapons, and (iii) do not cause needless suffering or are excessive relative to the context of its application.²¹⁴ While answering these questions is outside the purview of this thesis, they reflect some of the underlying moral questions that drone use raise in US CT operations, and the impacts for US grand strategy have been underappreciated in literature.

The US, however, takes a different position on the questions regarding the morals and ethics of its drone warfare. First, US policymakers argue that the moral justification for drones for CT apart from the AUMF has been the self-defence proviso of the United Nations Charter

²¹³ Ibid

²¹⁴ Ibid

(Article 51), which provides the *carte blanche* for states to engage in acts of war when reasonably provoked to self-defence. The proviso states, “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”²¹⁵

In defence of drones, Harold Koh, former Legal Adviser of the Department of State under President Obama, stated, “It is considered the view of the Obama administration – and it has certainly been my experience during my time as Legal Adviser – that US targeting practices, including lethal operations conducted with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, comply with all the applicable law, including the laws of war.”²¹⁶

Successive US administration post 9/11, from Bush to Trump, has been vocal on the propriety of drone use and their justification in the WOT under the ambit of applicable international laws as reflected in several *NSS* documents, public speeches, and statements. Their position is based on the recognition that the US is engaged in preventative and preemptive warfare to disrupt transnational terrorist groups and their networks and protecting its homeland following the 9/11 attacks. Hence the use of drones in targeting enemy combatants does not require the due process of international laws of war conventions.²¹⁷

This, however, does not supplant the manifold evidence establishing drone use in targeted states as contravening international laws of war and contributing to a precarious moral and ethical dilemma for US WOT. Buchanan and Keohane, for instance, assert that US CT is rightly an act of war and should not be misconstrued as self-defence or armed conflict, hence, amenable to applicable international laws moderating inter-state warfare.²¹⁸ From this prism and based on studies that have assessed drone use from the moral and justice requirements of the 1899 Hague Convention, it is apparent that the full discretionary powers drone gives the

²¹⁵ United Nations Article 51, Chapter VII-Articles relating to Threat to the Peace, Breaches to the Peace and Act of Aggression. <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml>

²¹⁶ Koh, H. H. (2017). The legal adviser’s duty to explain. In *The Role of Legal Advisers in International Law* (pp. 290-312). Brill Nijhoff.

²¹⁷ Fischer, M. P. (2006). Applicability of the Geneva Conventions to Armed Conflict in the War on Terror. *Fordham Int’l LJ*, 30, 509. See also: Center, H. L. S., Abizaid, J. P., Brooks, R., & Stohl, R. (2014). *Recommendations and report of the Task Force on US Drone Policy*. Stimson.

²¹⁸ Buchanan, A., & Keohane, R. O. (2004). The preventive use of force: a cosmopolitan institutional proposal. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 18(1), 1-22.

US in engaging in remote warfare wherever and whenever it deems fit, establishes a new form of warfare – that is outside the moral and ethical scope of the Geneva Convention.²¹⁹

Furthermore, the CIA drone strike operations have been predicated on a clandestine and highly classified targeted mission for eliminating HVTs and groups considered a threat to the US or linked to 9/11. However, the secretive nature of this war has been criticized as immoral and unethical.²²⁰ Apart from concerns about casualty figures, target lists, and the secretive target locations, drone strikes perpetuate a unilateralist manifestation of US CT, which abhors moral consideration in accomplishing military objectives. Several studies have highlighted this. Surprisingly, there is scarcely any study that explores the nexus between the moral and ethical implications of drone use for US grand strategy. This does not, however, refer to the legal aspects of drone use, as this has been overstretched and belaboured in academic literature. Rather, the moral and ethical aftermath of drone strikes as a CT tool and as an instrument of statecraft in the grand strategies of successive US administration, post 9/11. This thesis builds further on this in subsequent chapters. One of the arguments of this thesis is that the moral and ethical impact of drone use engenders negative consequences for US grand strategy in targeted states. Specifically in setting a negative precedent for US near-peer competitors, the impact on US soft power, and in compromising America's US global reputation as the powerhouse of democracy and liberal institutions.

3.3.2 Drones and Blowback

The tactical utility of drones in CT operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan is well reported in academic literature. Though anecdotal evidence lends credence to this, a burgeoning concern of drone use in targeted states has been its blowback effect – especially for US CT, and more broadly, its grand strategy. Studies report that the aftermath of drone strikes serves as a catalyst for the growth, lethality, and influence of transnational terrorism. Scholars assert that drones engender new strategic risks for the US due to widespread anger, opposition to drones in targeted states, and the view that it inflames terrorist violence and spurs terrorist recruitment.²²¹

²¹⁹ Hajjar, L. (2019). The Counterterrorism War Paradigm versus International Humanitarian Law: The Legal Contradictions and Global Consequences of the US "War on Terror". *Law & Social Inquiry*, 44(4), 922-956.

²²⁰ Strawser, B., Hajjar, L., Levine, S., Naqvi, F., & Witt, J. (2014). *Opposing perspectives on the drone debate*. Springer; Hajjar, L. (2014). Is Targeted Killing War? In *Opposing Perspectives on the Drone Debate* (pp. 21-29). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

²²¹ Ibid (Boyle, M.J., 2016). See also: Quigley, J. B. (2014). Drone Strike Blowback. *Ohio State Public Law Working Paper*, (252).

Blowback effects of drones in targeted states have been conceptualized at three levels: the local, national, and transnational.²²² Local blowback espouses the view that the unintended death of a family member killed in a target zone following drone strikes spurs the rise of anti-Americanism and visceral opposition to drones.²²³ As Kilcullen and Exum put it, “each drone miss that kills civilians, or even each hit that kills militants anger locals near the blast zone and inflames national sentiments against the US in ways that aid militant recruitment and retaliation.”²²⁴ This is premised on the argument that in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Pashtun’s code of familial revenge is the unspoken governing norm that inflames opposition to continued drone strikes. More applicably, the Pashtunwali code, which is an amalgam of two words, ‘*Pashtun*’ and ‘*Badal*,’ which means *hospitality* and *revenge*, respectively, serve as the basis for militant retaliation and terrorist violence in targeted states in opposition to drones.²²⁵ Other than the concern that it disconnects local populations from the hearts and minds of CT efforts, every unintended death of a relative, family or kin, arouses a desire for revenge against the US and also has a propaganda effect in terrorist mobilization and recruitment.²²⁶

Blowback at the national level is anchored on the perception that drones erode sovereignty norms and violates territorial integrity. It is local opposition in targeted states to the proliferation of military bases, ‘unwarranted’ drone strikes, and the alliances with their domestic government that facilitate them. The aftermath results in anti-drone protests, and insurgencies which terrorist groups can leverage to mobilize and finance opposition to drones.²²⁷ This approximates Frank Sauer and Niklas Schornig's conceptualization of drones as “silver bullets of democratic warfare.” In their view, drones thwart democracies and provoke more wars in the long run.²²⁸ As Cronin adds, “drone blowback is a manifestation of the embitterment of the people and reflection of an aroused desire for revenge.”²²⁹ Peter Bregen

²²² Shah, A. (2018). Do US drone strike cause blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and beyond. *International Security*, 42(04), 47-84.

²²³ Ibid (Kilcullen and Exum, 2009; Hudson et al, 2011)

²²⁴ Johnston, P. B., & Sarbahi, A. K. (2016). The impact of US drone strikes on terrorism in Pakistan. *International Studies Quarterly*, 60(2), 203-219.

²²⁵ Ibid (Shah, A., 2018); Aslam, W. (2013). Drones and the issue of continuity in America’s Pakistan policy under Obama. In *Obama's Foreign Policy* (pp. 149-171). Routledge.

²²⁶ Khattak, R. W. S., Mohammad, F., & Lee, R. (2009). The Pashtun code of honour. *Research Journal of Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar-Pakistan*. http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/Issue_65/01_The%20Pashtun_Code_of_Honour.html.

²²⁷ Sauer, F., & Schörnig, N. (2012). Killer drones: The ‘silver bullet’ of democratic warfare? *Security Dialogue*, 43(4), 363-380.

²²⁸ Ibid

²²⁹ Cronin, A. K. (2013). Why drones fail: when tactics drive strategy. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 44.

and Katherine Tiedemann construe reprisal insurgent attacks following targeted drone strikes as a reflection of a deep-seated resentment for many years of aerial drone strikes, indiscriminate civilian deaths, and collateral damages of their aftermath.²³⁰ At the transnational level, blowback is evident in the widespread resentment triggered by drones in targeted states, particularly among the rank and file of terrorist groups – as the spread of terrorist groups from South Asia to the Middle East and East Africa suggests.

There are, however, contrary studies that refute the blowback hypothesis. These studies cite a lack of credible evidence to determine the validity of blowback and the possibility that internal factors such as state repression, weak governance mechanism, suppression of human rights, and the proselytization of extreme radical ideologies as the potential factors for blowback (these arguments are weighed and assessed in the latter part of the thesis).²³¹ The blowback analysis of drones for the US grand strategy is a critical aspect of this study and is built upon in chapter 8 of this thesis.

3.3.3 Civilian Casualty and Drones

Drones are precision munitions, which suggest that compared to other weapons such as helicopter gunships, cruise missiles, F-35 fighter jets, they are more accurate and create less collateral damage. This is because drones can follow their intended target for days and weeks, gathering intelligence and conducting surveillance before killing their intended targets. Targeted killing here is defined as “the deliberate killing of an identified individual, specified in advance as the target, approved by an authorized part of a government bureaucracy without independent judicial process.”²³² This implies that drones can avert unnecessary civilian casualty in battlefield settings, particularly considering the authorization process that precedes the order for drone strikes in combat zones.^{233, 234}

However, while drones are presumed effective in discriminating between civilian and military targets compared to other manned systems, drone use post 9/11 suggests the contrary, as shown by the glaring figures of civilian deaths left following drone attacks. This questions the

²³⁰ Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2011). Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the US Drone Programs in Pakistan. *Foreign Aff.*, 90, 12.

²³¹ Ibid (Shah A., 2018)

²³² Blum, G., & Heymann, P. (2010). Law and policy of targeted killing. *Harv. Nat'l Sec. J.*, 1, 145.

²³³ Ibid (Boyle M., 2016); Strawser, B., Hajjar, L., Levine, S., Naqvi, F., & Witt, J. (2014). *Opposing perspectives on the drone debate*. Springer.

²³⁴ Vogel, R. J. (2013). Droning on: Controversy surrounding drone warfare is not really about drones. *the brown journal of world affairs*, 19(2), 111-121.

expected ‘precision’ of drones for discriminating against their targets in US CT missions. Evidence from US drone strikes in targeted states buttresses this. Reports from TBIJ, LWJ, and NAF estimate that from the Bush to the Trump administrations, more than 2,500 civilians have been killed in drone strikes in targeted states. Jeremy Scahill argues that “US preference for assassination rather than capture, and undue over-reliance on signals intelligence in its high-value targeting campaign accounts for the incalculable civilian toll.”²³⁵

Scholars share the view that the civilian death toll exacerbates rather than diminishes the threats the US seeks to confront in its ongoing WOT.²³⁶ Besides the blowback effect that arises from civilian deaths, concerns for human rights violations, and the view that it causes anti-American sentiments and opposition, their use further creates inimical consequences – such as inflaming insurgent actions against the domestic government in targeted states – that portend long-term strategic considerations for the US CT operations.

It is against this backdrop that US controversial drone operations have been criticized. The criticism stems from the view that drones perpetuate unethical warfare that ignores the proportionality and distinction criteria required for the use of weapons in targeted killings. These principles are based on the Geneva Convention, and proportionality requires that policymakers and military commanders ensure that the use of weapons in areas of active hostilities minimizes civilian deaths.²³⁷ As Rogers and McGoldrick note, the permissibility of targeted killings under laws of war requires a consideration that intended targets are legitimately classified as combatants and that targeted locations are designated battlefields. In addition, that targeting killing operations be conducted in ways that minimize unintended civilian casualties.²³⁸

The rising civilian death toll under Trump’s drone warfare relative to the Obama era easily buttresses this point. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in the first nine months of Trump’s administration, 150 civilian deaths were

²³⁵ Scahill, J. (2017). *The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program*. Simon and Schuster.

²³⁶ Ibid (Gusterson, H., 2016)

²³⁷ Lewis, M. W., & Crawford, E. (2012). Drones and distinction: How IHL encouraged the rise of drones. *Geo. J. Int'l L.*, 44, 1127.

²³⁸ Rogers, A. P., & McGoldrick, D. (2011). III. Assassination and Targeted Killing—The Killing of Osama Bin Laden. *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 60(3), 778-788.

reported from drone strikes.²³⁹ This figure has exceeded 1350 since then.²⁴⁰ Likewise, Amnesty International reports that drones have killed at least 14 civilians in Somalia since 2017, and as of January 2020, US drones used in fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria have resulted in more than 1,257 civilians deaths.²⁴¹ These civilian casualty figures are higher compared to President Obama's drone warfare. For example, in the overall course of the first and second term of the Obama administration (2008-2016), only 5 percent non-combatant deaths were recorded in Somalia, 12.9 percent in Yemen, and 18.6 percent in Pakistan.²⁴² Despite these numbers, President Obama facilitated a general decrease of non-combatant deaths in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan over his second term, decreasing non-combatant deaths from 12.54 percent at its highest in 2013 to 2.75 percent non-combatant deaths at its lowest in 2015.²⁴³ While President Trump saw a decrease of non-combatant deaths in Yemen and Pakistan, a larger percentage of civilians have died from drone strikes in Somalia in 2017 than the average figures during Obama's second term (these issues are further examined in the latter part of the thesis).

The classification of drone strikes into personality and signature strikes, as studies argue, also contribute to the increasing number of civilian deaths.²⁴⁴ Personality strikes refer to strikes that target individuals based on confirmation that the intended target identity and location match with intelligence.²⁴⁵ In contrast, signature strikes are based on a pattern of life and suspicious behaviour (the likelihood of engaging in terrorist activities) of the intended target. The authorization of these strikes usually does not require a confirmation of the identity of the target before the kill order is given. The CIA has conducted several covert signature targeted strikes in Pakistan and in North Africa, and strong arguments have been made that these contribute to the increasing number of civilian deaths.²⁴⁶

²³⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) 24 February 2019 *Civilian Deaths From Afghan Conflict In 2018 At Highest Recorded Level – UN Report* <https://unama.unmissions.org/civilian-deaths-afghan-conflict-2018-highest-recorded-level-%E2%80%93-un-report#:~:text=KABUL%20%E2%80%93%20More%20civilians%20were%20killed,3%2C804%20civilian%20deaths%20in%202018>

²⁴⁰ Ibid (TBIJ, 2020).

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² Malone, R. (2018). Trump's first year: Analysing the Trump administration's use of drone strikes as a counterterrorism strategy in 2017. *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 6(2), 6-18.

²⁴³ Ibid

²⁴⁴ Ibid (Strawser, 2015; Boyle, 2016).

²⁴⁵ Shaw, I. G. (2013). Predator empire: The geopolitics of US drone warfare. *Geopolitics*, 18(3), 536-559.

²⁴⁶ Fair, C. C., Kaltenthaler, K., & Miller, W. J. (2014). Pakistani opposition to American drone strikes. *Political Science Quarterly*, 129(1), 1-33.

A related concept is ‘double tap’ strikes – which essentially is a second drone strike following an unintentional first miss. This second strike, however, does not often consider bystanders, first responders, or collateral damage until the intended target is completely immobilized.²⁴⁷ The above was evident in the CIA drone strikes targeting Baitullah Mehsud in Makin city in 2009 for his involvement in the assassination of former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. The use of double strikes led to the death of 60-83 innocent civilians who were observing a funeral event.²⁴⁸

These unintended deaths portend a negative antecedence for US CT operations with long-term implications for its grand strategy. While there have been several useful studies examining the impact of civilian deaths on US global image and its CT, there is a dearth of literature exploring how civilian deaths serve to undermine US grand strategy.

3.3.4 Drone Proliferation

Since the first successful drone strike against al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan, successive US administrations have continued to rely on and deploy drones for targeted killing missions and covert operations. This has inadvertently incentivized an unbridled arms race among revisionist and revanchist powers such as China and Russia to counter the technological edge the US has enjoyed over its monopoly of drones. As David Kilcullen notes, “...US technology deployment in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq has demonstrated to rival competitors how it fights modern wars.”²⁴⁹ Apart from near-peer competitors of the US such as Russia and China, drone proliferation at its current level increases the risk that non-state actors and enemy states can deploy drones in carrying out coordinated aerial attacks that are likely to cause dangerous ramifications for the US at the national and global security level. This is akin to what Michael Gross described as ‘the epochal transformation in international security due to the detachment of brutality from humanity in future warfare.’²⁵⁰

At the global level, drones risk re-ordering the balance of power and strategic competition by introducing new dynamics in existing security arrangements. This raises the possibility that enemy or rogue states may develop armed drones for retaliatory or terrorist attacks and state or

²⁴⁷ Williams, B. G. (2013). New light on CIA “double tap” drone strikes on Taliban “first responders” in Pakistan’s tribal areas. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 7(3), 79-83.

²⁴⁸ Kirton, J. (2015). ‘The Only Game in Town’—But is it a Legal One? American Drone Strikes and International Law.

²⁴⁹ Kilcullen, D., (2010). *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford University Press.

²⁵⁰ Gross, M.L., (2018). Moral Dilemmas of Asymmetric Conflict. *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Theory*, p.233.

non-state actors deploying armed drones outside declared theatres of war. At the national security level, drone diffusion potentially alters strategic competition and the race to develop its technology among states. With advanced weaponization of artificial intelligence (AI) underway, the transformative potentials of drones as a critical component of national security also presages an emerging security dilemma likely to heighten uncertainties and introduce new changes to the accretion of military power.²⁵¹ The implication of all this for the US grand strategy is scarcely mentioned in the literature; this is examined in-depth in chapter 9 of this thesis.

3.3.5 Chapter Summary

The preceding analysis on the typologies of US grand strategy and review of the literature on drones shows, there have been limited studies exploring the impact of drones within and outside targeted states for US grand strategy, which makes this thesis an important contribution to literature. A review of literature on the key themes relating to the intersection of drones for the US grand strategy has been undertaken, and the gaps for highlighted. The chapter established three key points. First, it determined the nexus between drones and the different typologies of US grand strategy post 9/11. It demonstrated that parsing drone from the gamut of successive US administrations provides a useful lens for assessing how it undermines or supports US grand strategy. Third, is that the literature on civilian deaths, proliferation, the blowback of drones, and its impact on US grand strategy is an underappreciated area that requires further investigation.

The next chapter explores the historical development of drones and their role in the US grand strategy from WWI to the Clinton administration. The overarching goal is to determine whether the evolutionary development of drone contribute to the furtherance of US strategic objectives.

²⁵¹ Ibid (Johnson, 2020)

CHAPTER FOUR

Drones and US Grand Strategy: A Historical Analysis

“...Because war must always be thought of as an instrument of policy, military innovation must be guided by a coherent strategy or at least a sense of what is politically desirable and feasible.”²⁵²

4.0 Introduction

This chapter assesses the historical role of drones in furthering US grand strategy by chronicling their evolutionary development and application by successive US administrations from World War I to the Kosovo War. The chapter argues that the lethal weaponization and the deployment of drones as a tactical and strategic tool of statecraft post 9/11 is inexorably rooted in the evolutionary antecedents of its weaponry – particularly in the Cold War era. During this period, there were important signposts as to how and why airpower and its proliferation could undermine US strategic objectives. As a tactical weapon, drones provided support for US ground troops while concurrently supplying valuable signals and image reconnaissance for guided missile release and influencing combat missions. As a strategic weapon, drones were key tools for force multiplication, precision targeting, and remote aerial bombardment operations. To critically assess this, the chapter is divided into five parts. The first part assesses the early development of drones during the World Wars and its intersection with US grand strategy during this period. In the second part, drone development during the Cold War and through the Korean and Vietnam Wars is explored within the gamut of successive US grand strategies during this period. The third part appraises the advancement of drone weaponry in the post-Cold War period, the rise of Network Centric Warfare, and their intersection with US grand strategy. The fourth part analyses the emergence and use of combat drones in the Persian Gulf War, Bosnian War, and Kosovo War and the impact on US grand strategy. The final part summarizes the key arguments discussed in the chapter.

4.1 The Evolutionary Phases of Drone Development (1909-1917)

The idea behind the drone technology dates to the mid-19th century when Austrian forces besieged Venice and floated nearly 200 paper hot air balloons carrying explosives set to detonate with 30-minute fuses.²⁵³ This innovation, though unsuccessful in destroying its targets in Venice, demonstrated the possibility of developing remotely controlled unmanned aerial systems with a guided precision munition. Elmer Sperry’s pioneering work with the gyroscope,

²⁵² Rosen, S. P. (1994). *Winning the next war: Innovation and the modern military*. Cornell University Press.

²⁵³ Zaloga, S. J. (2011). *Unmanned aerial vehicles: robotic air warfare 1917–2007*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

which began in 1909, proved significant for the early development of UAVs. His experimental works with radio control and inertia guidance resulted in the gyroscope – which was a key invention for achieving aerial stability in manned aircraft. This proved useful for further ground-breaking works in inertial navigation and missile guidance system.

The inception of WWI proved significant for the application of drone instrumentation at its incipient stages. In 1915, Germany’s declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare that led to the sinking of several American merchant ships, including its ocean liner – the *Housatonic*, served as the casus belli for US involvement in WWI. After initially electing to be neutral, President Woodrow Wilson, with the unanimous backing of the US Congress, declared war on Germany. The entrance of America into the war was significant as it helped the Allied forces secure victory in the battlefields of Western Europe. During WWI, precisely in 1917, the gyroscope was applied to the Curtiss Flying Boat (also known as flying bombs), and this led to the development of the first guided missile flight known as the Curtiss-Sperry Aerial Torpedo. The aircraft was built to carry a payload of nearly 200 pounds and was remotely guided to release missile torpedoes that caused massive damage to enemy defences.²⁵⁴ Their deployment proved pivotal in breaking the stalemate of trench warfare and carrying out targeted attacks on German U-boats in the sea.

Setbacks due to engine and catapult launch failure led to the demise of this progenitor UAV system. However, the measured success it achieved in WWI against the Germans caused the US Army to fund more research and experimental works on UAV development. This culminated in the design of the Kettering Bug.²⁵⁵ This innovation was an unmanned aircraft fitted with a pneumatic, electric dolly-and-track system for flight stability and guided-missile release.²⁵⁶ Though it was never deployed on the battlefield, it represented further progression in America’s effort in advancing UAV technology.

Following the end of WWI, President Wilson’s administration announced its vision for achieving a stable, peaceful, and liberal world order in Europe and the rest of the world. This was articulated in this Fourteen Point speech which became the core pillar of America’s grand strategy throughout the 20th century or what would be dubbed the “American Century.”²⁵⁷ His

²⁵⁴ Cook, K. L. (2007, March). The silent force multiplier: The history and role of UAVs in warfare. In *2007 IEEE Aerospace Conference* (pp. 1-7). IEEE.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, (Cook, 2007).

²⁵⁶ Keane, J. F., & Carr, S. S. (2013). A brief history of early unmanned aircraft. *Johns Hopkins APL Technical Digest*, 32(3), 558-571.

²⁵⁷ Ambrosius, L. (2002). *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and his legacy in American foreign relations*. Springer.

speech proposed open covenants of peace, reduction of armaments, support for the emergence of nation-states, a more favourable balance of power in the international system, and a rules-based order that welcomed post-war Germany and post-revolutionary Russia.²⁵⁸ It also advocated for greater enforcement of global peace by the League of Nations and freedom of navigation in territorial waters.²⁵⁹

Under President Wilson, UAV development was at its early stages, and the concept of airpower had not gained much traction in US military operations. As of 1912, US Congress approved only \$125,000 for research and development of aircraft, half of which were split between airplanes (including UAVs) and balloons. Even when the US declared war in 1917, the US military aviation unit was still retained as part of the Army, and only around 200 Army trainer non-combat worthy aircraft were in its fleet.²⁶⁰ This caused the US to rely on France for the supply of 5,000 aircraft used during WWI.²⁶¹ Thus, there were no connections between UAVs and Wilson's grand strategy at this stage as their use was rudimentary, limited, and their military potential still undeveloped. However, changes that occurred in the Interwar period would greatly influence the trajectory of drone use.

4.2 UAVs in the Interwar Period (1918-1938)

The Interwar period describes the period after WWI and the beginning of the Second World War. Contrary to the notion, it was a time of relative world peace; it was also one characterized by rising tensions as states were guided by realist-style worst-case assumptions and prescriptions. This period also marked an era of German expansionism and revolution in its military affairs buoyed by a resurgent Prusso-German strategic culture under Adolf Hitler. Key among Hitler's goals was to jettison the prohibitions of the Treaty of Versailles – which stripped Germany of its colonial powers and severely prohibited its military capabilities and possible rearmament.

This period was also characterized by unprecedented development in the aviation industry and the ascendancy of airpower in military operations. The 1922 Washington Naval Treaty or the Five Power Treaty signed by world powers that won WWI was very silent on the development of aerial systems though it put stringent restrictions prohibiting naval construction. In the

²⁵⁸ Wilson, W. (1918). Fourteen points. *Woodrow Wilson: Essential Writings and Speeches of the Scholar-President*, edited by Mario R. DiNunzio, 403-6.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Blom, J. D. (2010). *Unmanned Aerial Systems: a historical perspective* (Vol. 45). Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

absence of any constraints, airpower development further gained traction as a symbol of power and military advantage in war. Debates bordering on the tactical and strategic application of airpower in war also emerged in this period. Advocates of tactical use of airpower acceded to the saliency of the traditional use of “boots on the ground” in winning any war and share the view that airpower should be solely used for providing aerial support for troops in the form of reconnaissance, military supply, communications, and air support.²⁶² Supporters of strategic use of airpower, however, argued that decisive war victories could be achieved with heavy aerial bombing operations without the need to commit troops.²⁶³

These arguments would have a profound influence in shaping UAV development and use in the US in the coming years. However, bureaucratic opposition within the US War Department and Congress stymied the furtherance of air doctrine in the 1920s. Rather than invest in air development and the independence of the Air Force from the Army, President Calvin Coolidge’s administration in its first term reduced the military budget by \$750 million.²⁶⁴ This affected any significant development of UAVs at this stage; however, some experimental works on television technology were pivotal in the Navy’s instrumentation of UAVs with aircraft trailing and evading capabilities. These were later tested on two US naval aircraft carriers – USS *Ranger* and USS *Utah* – with some success.²⁶⁵ The Navy was also able to develop radio-controlled pilotless target aircraft, which laid precedence for the emergence of assault drones with guided-missile capabilities that possessed radar guidance systems and alternative control platforms.

Apart from the US, other countries were also carrying out research and developmental works in the application of UAVs to warfare. This not only demonstrated the burgeoning role of airpower but an acknowledged *arms race* – competitive adversarial acquisition of military capabilities among states – to acquire UAV capabilities among imperial world powers. Germany, for instance, developed the Ju-87 Stuka dive bomber and the unmanned V-1 aircraft – a cruise missile that flew less than 1,000 feet off the ground and flying at 400mph.²⁶⁶ This would prove very useful in the *Blitzkrieg* – the intense bombing campaign carried out by the German Nazi army against the United Kingdom in the early years of WWII. Likewise, Britain

²⁶² Williamson, D. A. (2010). *Strategy and the Use of Airpower on the Eastern Front: Lessons for the Airpower Strategist*. Air Univ Maxwell Afb Al Maxwell Afb United States.

²⁶³ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Kindervater, K. H. (2016). The emergence of lethal surveillance: Watching and killing in the history of drone technology. *Security Dialogue*, 47(3), 223-238.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

also made advances with UAVs with the development of the Airspeed Queen Wasp, Queen Bee, Fairy IIF Floatplane, and Miles Queen Martinet.²⁶⁷ These pilotless drones were used in several targeting operations in WWII though their many technical shortcomings, such as limited manoeuvrability and engine size, hampered its subsequent development and operations. The predominance of airpower in the military, the acknowledged race for UAV development, and the progress made in furthering its technology laid precedents for the increased role of drones as a weapon of war policy, as a force multiplier, and a show of military capabilities.

4.3 UAVs, WWII, and US Grand Strategy (1939-1945)

World War II marked an era for the decisive use of airpower, particularly for strategic bombing operations carried out by Germany, the US, Japan, Britain, and the Soviets. Germany's air offensive operations using lightning air strikes to deal a decisive blow to British acquired targets demonstrated this. This not only conferred the Germans with positional advantage but with the ability to carry out coordinated maneuver and support their troops at their points of weaknesses during the war. For the Soviets, airpower played a key role in aerial bombardment operations of its Air Force (VVF) in the Eastern Front and in supporting ground operations of the Red Army infantry. Strategic bombing was also a dominant strategy used by Britain during the war in planning defence and in conducting aerial offensives, as the Battle of Berlin in 1943 and the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 demonstrated. The US was not an exception, as strategic bombing played a pivotal role in supporting amphibious operations in the Pacific, particularly in protecting US naval ships from German U-boat attacks. It was also deployed in the bombing of contested battlefields of strategic interests across Europe and in countering German V-1 flying bomb assault attacks. The ascendancy of airpower in WWII using manned aircraft was also strongly complemented with UAV deployment operations.

UAVs played a notable role in WWII as the generation of drones in this period were equipped with photoreconnaissance capabilities, battlefield damage assessment (BDA), and the ability to intercept messages. There were two types of drones produced during this period. The first was proto drones – which were camera-guided autonomous missiles that can be fired at high velocity from a great distance. The second was unmanned assault drones which used television technology for intelligence gathering and surveillance operations.²⁶⁸ Allied and Axis powers incorporated UAVs as a tool for weapon delivery, gathering valuable intelligence, relaying

²⁶⁷ Whitmore, B. A. (2016). *Evolution of unmanned aerial warfare: a historical look at remote airpower-a case study in innovation*. US Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth United States.

²⁶⁸ Ibid (Kindavater, 2016)

communication, and for anti-gunnery operations with onboard munitions. V-1 flying bomb unmanned aircraft were used by Germany in the aerial bombardment of Britain. The US deployed retrofitted UAVs carrying high explosives for destroying German bunkers.²⁶⁹

The bombing of Pearl Harbor following a Japanese attack on 7 December 1941 served as the catalyst for America's entrance into the war and the basis for the implementation of the three-tier grand strategy of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. The goals of his strategy included: establishing a greater alliance with Great Britain in cohering and implementing a common strategy, crushing Axis powers which it perceived posed the greatest threat to America's security, interest, and values, and third, mobilizing US economic and technological resources to support Allied Forces during the war.²⁷⁰ A quintessential aspect of Roosevelt's grand strategy was its unequivocal invocation of the Monroe Doctrine – which is a classic American expression of unilateralism developed when Britain sacked Washington in the war of 1812.²⁷¹ The core aspects of the policy included: (i) US non-interventionism in the internal affairs of European countries, (ii) America's recognition of existing colonies and dependencies in the Western hemisphere, (iii) preventing colonization in the Western hemisphere, (iv) foiling any attempt by European powers to acquire or control territories in the Western hemisphere.

These policies not only asserted US dominance of the Western hemisphere but were reflective of the US declaration of the right to act as an international police force over it.²⁷² The basis of the Monroe Doctrine is pre-emption that provides a rationale to take unilateral military actions when its interests or its citizens are threatened.²⁷³ Thus, the Pearl Harbor attack caused a redesign of the US grand strategy under Roosevelt's administration as it more readily re-introduced the doctrine of pre-emption in the US unilateral decision to use force against enemy states. In his first major budgetary response to the Pearl Harbour, which he described as a war budget. Roosevelt declared: "This is a war budget. The details of a war program are, of course, in constant flux. Its magnitude and composition depend on events at the battlefronts of the world, on naval engagements at sea, and on new developments in mechanized warfare. Moreover, war plans are military secrets."²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ Ibid (Whitmore, 2016).

²⁷⁰ Gaddis, J. L. (2005). Grand strategy in the second term. *Foreign Affairs*, 2-15.

²⁷¹ Perret, G. (2004). *Lincoln's War: The Untold Story of America's Greatest President as Commander in Chief*. Random House Incorporated.

²⁷² Whitney, G. (2004). The Bush Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary.

https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1103&context=ask_gleaves

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ U.S. Budget, FY1943, *ibid.*, page vi.

According to data from the Congressional Research Service, “the national defense appropriation surged from \$6.4 billion for Fiscal Year (FY) 1941 to \$25.7 billion for FY1942. This increased to \$66.7 billion for FY1943 and peaked at \$83 billion for FY1945 before dropping in the postwar years.”²⁷⁵ The impact of this budget also had a significant impact on the research and development of drone instrumentation, particularly for the development of the radio-controlled RP-4, which was later redeveloped into the Radioplane OQ-2 – a total of nearly fifteen thousand of these drones were manufactured for the US Army during WWII.²⁷⁶

The effectiveness of strategic bombing in WWII and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki further established the importance of air power in military campaigns. Relatedly, the utility of drones in aerial reconnaissance missions proved tremendous in aiding further works on drones in post-WWII. Though WWII generation of drones encountered logistical, operations problems in communication relays, David Blom argues, “the experience of WWII not only solidified the mind of the US Army on the effectiveness of tactical reconnaissance, but it also demonstrated the utility of organic aviation for intelligence gathering and surveillance operations.”²⁷⁷ It was therefore not surprising that the *National Security Act* of 1947 made the Air Force an independent unit of service similar to the Army and Navy, but also an Air Material Command was formed for the purposes of developing new aircraft. Ultimately, the ‘redesign’ of US grand strategy under President Roosevelt’s administration, the burgeoning role of strategic bombing in WWII, and the rise of proto drones and assault-type drones would lay the groundwork for the further advancement of the technology in coming years, particularly during the Cold War.

4.4 UAVs and US Grand Strategy in the Early Cold War (1947-1950)

The end of WWII brought about changes in the structure of the global distribution of power – from multipolarity to bipolarity. The new bipolar order distributed world power between two ideological blocs – the United States and the Soviets.²⁷⁸ The US promoted liberal democratic ideas, whereas the Soviets pursued Communism as its political and economic ideology. The ensuing tension between these two dominant powers led to a worldwide struggle for ideological

²⁷⁵ Keith Robert (2001) Initial Budget Response to the 1941 Attack on Pearl Harbor. Congressional Report Service. <file:///C:/Users/64210/Downloads/46.pdf>

²⁷⁶ Newcome, L. R. (2004). *Unmanned aviation: a brief history of unmanned aerial vehicles*. American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

²⁷⁷ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

²⁷⁸ Wagner, R. (1993). What was Bipolarity? *International Organization*, 47(1), 77-106. Retrieved October 26, 2020, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706883>

supremacy, which culminated in the Cold War. The long telegram sent to the US Department of State by George Kennan, the American state diplomatic representative serving in Moscow, detailing his views on the Soviet Union, provided a pivotal underpinning for the development of America's Cold War policy of Containment.²⁷⁹ As Kennan argued,

“The Soviets were incapable of long-term cooperation with the West. Driven by traditional Russian insecurity, Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the need to legitimize ruthless repression at home, they viewed the outside world as implacably hostile and were determined to seek security only in the deadly but patient struggle for the destruction of rival power.”²⁸⁰

Containment policy focused on preventing a major war with the Soviets but suppressing their territorial expansion and preventing the spread of Communist ideas. This meant for the US, maintaining a strong nuclear weapon advantage and protecting its strategic interests in Europe and the rest of the world from Communist threat. As Joseph Nye puts it, “US sought to strategically uphold its sphere of influence and regional proxies based on pragmatic political and economic considerations to sought to strategically contain Soviet influence”²⁸¹ The implementation of Containment, however, did not take place all at once; it was honed over time by series of events which affected its core goals and overarching priorities that would shape the grand strategy of Harry Truman's presidency.

4.5 US Grand Strategy under Harry Truman and the Militarization of Containment

The grand strategy of Truman's administration is heralded as the “golden age of American grand strategy” as it laid down key policies for containing Soviet expansionism and stabilizing international order beyond the purview of the Cold War.²⁸² This required the US to maintain an auspicious geopolitical balance and devise a strategy for resurgence states destroyed by WWII, especially in Western Europe and Northeast Asia. Truman's policies translated into the formulation of the Marshall Plan – often referred to as the economic and ideological side of Containment, the formation of NATO, increase in US military buildup, and the revival of Japan

²⁷⁹ Walt, S. M. (1989). The case for finite containment: Analyzing US grand strategy. *International Security*, 14(1), 5-49.

²⁸⁰ Gaddis, J. L. (2005). Grand strategy in the second term. *Foreign Affairs*, 2-15.

²⁸¹ Nye Jr, J. S. (1996). Conflicts after the cold war. *Washington Quarterly*, 19(1), 4-24.

²⁸² Gaddis, J. L. (2005). Grand strategy in the second term. *Foreign Affairs*, 2-15.

and Western Germany.²⁸³ These policies placed the US as the world policeman of the liberal world order with powerful economic and military might.

The Chinese revolution in 1949, the Soviet explosion of an atomic bomb in late 1949, and the start of the Korean War in 1950 served as the catalyst for the militarization of the Containment strategy. Hitherto, the Containment strategy was devoid of America's intention to wage a direct war with the Soviets; these three historical events, however, changed this notion. The National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68), a declassified top-secret 58-page report authored by Ambassador Paul Nitze of the US Department of Policy Planning Office, provided the clearest articulation of the Containment strategy. The wordings of his report explicitly stated that the US would "vigorously pursue a policy of containing Soviet expansion and embark on a rapid military expansion of conventional forces and the nuclear arsenal, including the development of the new hydrogen bomb."²⁸⁴ The document perceived the hostile design of the Soviet Union as the most credible threat facing the US and therefore recommended a massive military build-up. At the heart of the document, it called for "a rapid build-up of the political, economic and military strength of the free world than provided by current policies, with the purpose of reaching, if possible, a tolerable state of order among nations without war and of preparing to defend ourselves if the free world is attacked."²⁸⁵

The NSC-68 established the framework for US security policy throughout the Cold War and broader aspects of its recommendations included:

- i. Sustaining ongoing diplomatic efforts at negotiating with the Soviets and preparation to defend when attacked.
- ii. The defence and protection of US values and interests. This contributed to the Cold War arms race during this period.
- iii. Armament to deter Soviet aggression and enhance US technological superiority through accelerated exploration of its scientific potential.

²⁸³ Mahnken, T. (2015). US grand strategy, 1939–1945. In J. Ferris & E. Mawdsley (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War* (The Cambridge History of the Second World War, pp. 189-212). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CHO9781139855969.010

²⁸⁴ Drew, S. N., & Nitze, P. H. (1994). *NSC-68 forging the strategy of containment*. DIANE Publishing.

²⁸⁵ Paul Nitze, cited in Record of the State Defence Policy Group Meeting, 10 March 1950. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1950*, vol. 1 (Washington DC: GPO, 1977), 195

- iv. It considered the creation of political and economic conditions in the free world as a potent deterrence to the Soviets from pursuing a military solution.²⁸⁶

The NSC-68 framers were, however, skeptical that US isolationism would lead to Soviet domination in Eurasia, making it challenging for the US to ward off the spread of Communism. Likewise, it was averse to carrying out preventative attacks on the Soviets for fear that such actions would embolden Soviet's military aggression in Western Europe and further attacks on the US. Yet, the militarization of NSC-68 was instrumental in shaping Cold War strategic planning and in preventing the rise of Communist revolutionary antics that sought to overthrow US regional proxies. It also increased the fight against Communist decolonization movements in Indochina.

4.6 Drone use during the Early Cold War

Compared to previous wars, several factors contributed to the furtherance of drones during this period. The aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki increased the need to scale the effects of war and to prevent another atomic bomb event. Second, the Cold War led to an organic build-up in conventional rearmament and military capabilities between the US and the Soviets. The end game was to outdo the other power in military superiority and reach. Drone development in this era further reflected this ongoing competition.²⁸⁷

At the beginning of the Cold War, airpower and guided missile systems still had predominance in military operations; however, the early Cold War led to greater use of drones for anti-gunnery operations and ISR missions between the US and the Soviets. This also shaped the type and capabilities of drones that were developed during this period, mainly for tactical surveillance and intelligence gathering. As the Cold War progressed, the US raced to develop several types of UAVs in a bid to counter Soviet aerial technological advances. In the US, the Army experimented with small tactical drones while the Navy deployed DSN-3 drones for photographic reconnaissance and naval combat engagement.²⁸⁸ Another of these drones was the Quail – a jet-powered drone that was designed purposefully to confuse Soviet integrated air defense system by saturating its air defense as a decoy to improve the targeting accuracy of the US bomber aircraft. Over time, Quails were easily detected by Soviet radar and were defenseless against its surface-to-air missiles. The need to gather valuable intelligence about

²⁸⁶ Ibid

²⁸⁷ Ibid (Cook, 2007)

²⁸⁸ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

the Soviets' military defence formation, nuclear programme, and atomic weapons development led to the development of the Firebee drone – a U-2 high altitude reconnaissance drone specifically developed for spying on Soviet nuclear weapons programmes.²⁸⁹ In response, the Soviets developed the SA-2 radar-guided surface-to-air (SAM) missiles to counter these drones. The interactive process between the two world powers underscored the inherent security dilemma of the drone development that transpired during the Cold War – whereby US efforts to increase its UAV defensive/offensive capabilities triggered reciprocal effects with the Soviets. Though the Firebee suffered operational, budgetary, and logistical shortcomings, it was pivotal in ISR operations.

In effect, the Cold War set the tone for the deepening of the role of drones in US military operations and their tactical utility on the battlefield. Their role in furthering US grand strategy was, however, overshadowed by the predominance of nuclear weapons in the Cold War. Besides, the early Cold War period marked the launch of the DoD's first offset strategy. The strategy sought to offset the potential advantages of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in conventional forces. The goal was to leverage America's nuclear advantage against the Soviet's expected advantage in conventional forces in Europe, thus strengthening deterrence.²⁹⁰ However, the start of the Korean War in 1950 led to profound changes in the utility of drones as an instrument of war and statecraft.

4.7 Drones, US Grand Strategy in the Vietnam War and Korean War of the 1950s

The Korean and Vietnam Wars were consequential for drones and US grand strategy. The wars were largely fought as proxies in the larger Cold War between the US and the Soviets. In Korea, Communist North Korea invaded the South Korean peninsula in a bid to unite the country under the rule of Communism. North Korea was backed by the Soviets and the People's Republic of China, while South Korea was supported by the US and the UN. Likewise, in Vietnam, the Communist North was supported by the Soviets, China, and other Communist allies, while the South was backed by the US and several Western (anti-Communist) allies.

²⁸⁹ Ibid (Blom, 2010)

²⁹⁰ US Department of Defense (2016), Remarks by Deputy Secretary Work on Third Offset Strategy. <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Speeches/Speech/Article/753482/remarks-by-deputy-secretary-work-on-third-offset-strategy>. (Accessed 10 September 2020)

4.7.1 Richard Nixon's Vietnamization Policy

When Richard Nixon came into power, Containment was still the predominant US grand strategy. However, the Vietnam War, the rise of Soviet and China's influence in US regional proxies, and the post-WWII resurgence of Japan and Germany necessitated a new approach for US engagement in the Cold War. Together with his then-National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, Nixon sought to develop a new structure of peace for dealing with the challenges of the Vietnam war and implementing a foreign policy that promoted core American national interests rather than liberal ideology. In his words, "world leadership requires something that is in many ways alien to the American cast of minds. It requires placing limits on idealism, compromising with reality, at times, matching duplicity with duplicity and even brutality with brutality."²⁹¹

This formed the cornerstone of his three-pronged grand strategy. The first component recognized that a tripolar configuration of power (tripolarity) between the US, Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China was manifest in the international sphere. The second aspect is the admission that the tripolar power structure plays a deterministic role in the development of the international system. Third, curtailing Soviet expansionism while avoiding direct military skirmishes. The grand design for achieving these strategic objectives was premised on:

- i. Accepting Soviet parity in nuclear weapons,
- ii. Devising a carrot-and-stick approach (relying on negotiation and diplomacy but showing a willingness to attack) when dealing with the Soviets,
- iii. Instituting rules-based order in issue areas
- iv. Maintaining American foreign policy commitments with or without congressional and public support.
- v. Implementing a 'Vietnamization' policy which involved shifting combat roles to South Vietnam troops and the phased withdrawal of US troops
- vi. Improving the defence capabilities of South Vietnam in the face of US imminent withdraw from the war.

²⁹¹ Nixon cited in Mahnken, T. (2015). US grand strategy, 1939–1945. In J. Ferris & E. Mawdsley (Eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War* (The Cambridge History of the Second World War, pp. 189-212). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CHO9781139855969.010

4.7.2 *The Efficacy and Utility of Drones in the Korean and Vietnam Wars*

The Korean War, which started in the 1950s, was pivotal for the furtherance of drone warfare as it led to the development of assault-ready reconnaissance UAVs. These drones were deployed by the US to spy on North Korea and for reconnaissance and surveillance missions. However, it was not until the Vietnam War that reconnaissance UAVs were first deployed in a combative role shortly after US involvement in the war in 1964. Prior to this, and within the same year, the Tonkin Gulf incident – which involved the destruction of US naval destroyers off the coast of Vietnam – served as the *casus belli* for America’s involvement in the Vietnam war and also demonstrated the need for the US to incorporate UAVs into its wartime service for combative and reconnaissance purposes. This prompted the development and launch of AQM-34 drones and DC-130 drones, which were photoreconnaissance drones with combat capabilities.

Among other drones used during the Vietnam War, the Lightning Bug (Ryan 147B) drone – an ultra-fast UAV fitted with a jet-propelled engine, deployed for targeting operations and reconnaissance, stood out. These modified target reconnaissance drones flew at both high and low altitudes and used their photographic and radar capabilities in gathering electronic signals intelligence that spied on North Vietnamese enemy forces and provided battlefield data in real-time. It was further used for bomb damage assessment, revealing North Vietnamese anti-aircraft installations, and used by the CIA in devising electronic countermeasures.²⁹² The photographic intelligence of the Lightning Bug was instrumental in disproving Communists’ accusations of US complicity in the killing of civilians following the bombing of Hanoi and Hai Phong cities.²⁹³

Outside Vietnam, these drones also conducted spy missions over Communist China and were used to provoke China’s Air Defenses.²⁹⁴ Though the Chinese People Liberation Army (CPLA) Air Force shot down eight of these drones, it did not deter the US from further use in gathering valuable signals intelligence (SIGINT) during the Cold War. The efficacy of the Lightning Bug led to the use in performing 3,300 reconnaissance operations during the Vietnam War.²⁹⁵ Apart from situational awareness and gathering useful SIGINT, these drones were used for reconnaissance missions and in plotting enemy vulnerabilities, for example, in tracking Soviet

²⁹² David, B. J. (2010). *Unmanned Aerial Systems: A Historical Perspective. Occasional Paper, 37.*

²⁹³ *Ibid*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid* (Blom, 2010).

surface-to-air missiles and in providing acquisition data on North Vietnamese troops. It was also used for the optimal tracking of the enemy position in airfields and shipping harbors and in mapping out the defensive orders of enemy troops. The Firebee was particularly useful in intercepting air-to-air missiles loaded on Mikoyan-i-Gurevich-21 (MiG-21) Soviet aircraft.²⁹⁶ It was also equipped with an onboard electronic gear system that picked up radar signals and tapped into North Korean, Chinese, and Russian communication channels.

A program that demonstrated the utility and survivability of drones during the Vietnam War was *Operation Chicken*.²⁹⁷ During this program, US drones were used for intercepting enemy aircraft, detecting missiles, and enabling manned aircraft maneuverability in the face of threats. The war also demonstrated the use of drones as a tool of psychological warfare – which is the use of planned tactical propaganda and other non-combative techniques during wars or periods of unrest to attempt to intimidate or influence the thinking of enemy targets. The utilization of UAVs for this purpose occurred with the dissemination of propaganda leaflets from the skies into territories containing Nixon’s messages urging Communist North Vietnam to change from their foolish ways.²⁹⁸ Despite many Lightning Bugs being gunned down by enemy missiles, their efficacy as combat and reconnaissance UAVs in battlefield settings encouraged the US Air Force to modify its engines to carry heavier payloads.

The successful application of the Lightning Bug in the Vietnam War demonstrated the tactical utility of drones as an instrument of statecraft – as the workhorse of the war. This was evident in the marginal role it played in furthering the Vietnamization strategy of the Nixon administration – particularly in providing valuable electronic intelligence to boost the defence capabilities of South Vietnamese forces – though it lost the war (the reasons for this are outside the scope of this thesis). It also demonstrated the utility of drones as a force multiplier with more advanced ISR capabilities compared to manned aircraft. Against the backdrop of the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ – or prolonged warfare or stalemate – the efficacy of drones during the Vietnam War informed arguments that the US military could reduce American casualties during warfare with drones replacing soldier deployments in hard-to-reach areas and war fronts.²⁹⁹ As such, it was not surprising that their success buoyed further US research and

²⁹⁶ Whitmore, B. A. (2016). *Evolution of unmanned aerial warfare: a historical look at remote airpower-a case study in innovation*. US Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth United States.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid (Kindavater, 2016)

²⁹⁹ Blom, J. D. (2010). *Unmanned Aerial Systems: a historical perspective* (Vol. 45). Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press.

development into the making of more combat-effective UAVs modified from the Lightning Bugs. This birthed the Ryan 154, also known as the Compass Arrow.³⁰⁰ It was the first UAV to be equipped with a prototype stealth technology as it was built to fly at an altitude of 78,000 feet with minimal heat and radar detection signatures.

The goal for the design of the Compass Arrow was to further the advancement of long-range UAVs with photo-reconnaissance capabilities – this meant drones that flew faster, farther, more precise, and less prone to enemy missiles while simultaneously providing real-time high-resolution battlefield images and intelligence.³⁰¹ However, unlike the Lightning Bug, which was a remarkable success, the Compass Arrow failed to live up to its bidding, as its launch was besieged with several political, technical, and financial setbacks.³⁰² The main setback was the lack of operational utility of the Compass Arrow as the Vietnam War was coming to its end. Second, the Kissinger-Nixon Sino-American rapprochement initiative with China in 1971 also considered Compass Arrow not necessary in supplying intelligence about Soviet Forces. Its deployment was also considered too costly and excessive for the Six Days War between Arabs and Israel (Yom Kippur war). Besides this, the development of the Ryan 154 was budgeted at \$35 million, but the final cost exceeded \$200 million.³⁰³ As a result of the lack of mission to purpose these drones, the US military-industrial establishment considered it excessive and consequently ordered its decommissioning.

It is worth noting Israel's efforts in UAV development, particularly during the 1973 Yom Kippur war. This is because the generation of drones developed by Israel following this war led to further advancement in drone technology in the post-Cold War years. Concerns of Soviet encroachment in the Suez Canal engendered the development of Teledyne-Ryan Aeronautical (TRA) – which was mainly a combat drone that functioned like the Lightning Bug but was used mainly for countering air-to-surface missiles.³⁰⁴ Israel also developed the BGM-34A for reconnaissance mission for Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in detecting Egyptian missile sites in war and again in 1982 for detecting Syrian missile sites at the Bekaa Valley.³⁰⁵ The situational

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Mahnken, T. G. (2008). *Technology and the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975. Technology and the American Way of War Since 1945*. Colombian University Press.

³⁰² Miller, J. (2013). Strategic Significance of Drone Operation for Warfare. *E-International Relations Students*, (18 August), < <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/08/19/strategic-significance-of-drone-operations-for-warfare>.

³⁰³ Ibid

³⁰⁴ Keane, J. F., & Carr, S. S. (2013). A brief history of early unmanned aircraft. *Johns Hopkins APL Technical Digest*, 32(3), 558-571.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

awareness and battlefield success of these drones caused them to be widely accepted in the US defence community. This caused the US to procure the Israeli drone, called Pioneer – which was a combat-ready photoreconnaissance drone used for gathering image intelligence (IMINT) for tactical command operations on land and at sea.³⁰⁶ The Pioneer, like every other UAV, had its own share of shortcomings in battlefield settings and underwent redevelopment with a \$50 million research to repurpose their use to a level described as “minimum essential capability.”³⁰⁷ The combat utility of the Pioneer would come nearly a decade later during the Persian Gulf War (this is discussed in subsequent sections).

4.8 Drones, Détente, and the Second Cold War

Under President Nixon, the US gradually relaxed tensions with the Soviet Union. This period, which lasted between 1963-1975, is known as détente. The hallmark of this period was the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the two major powers to limit ballistic missile launchers and the SALT II to reduce nuclear weapons stockpile. The détente and denouement of the Vietnam war limited further use of reconnaissance UAVs. Several factors in the mid-70s led to the slowing down of drone development. First, drastic military budget cuts limited drone research and development. Two, drones were not suitable to carry heavier payloads and were increasingly defenceless against Soviet aircraft missiles. Third, new developments in avionics, sensor technology, laser-based artillery projectile systems meant changes needed to be made to existing UAV models. Lastly, the efficacy of new high-speed missile systems and long-range bombers in military systems led to the prioritization of funding over drones.³⁰⁸ Hence, apart from the BGM models, which were introduced after the Vietnam war, further research and expenditures on UAVs were put on hold.³⁰⁹

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, however, changed the US disposition to the Soviet Union and effectively ended détente. President Jimmy Carter's administration considered this invasion “the most serious threat to peace since WWII”³¹⁰ and, as a response, halted existing economic relations with the Soviets. Though drone development did not increase during this period, the events surrounding it would serve as the catalyst for the further advancement of its weaponry and utility in facilitating US grand strategic objectives.

³⁰⁶ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

³⁰⁷ Zaloga, S. J. (2011). *Unmanned aerial vehicles: robotic air warfare 1917–2007*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

³⁰⁸ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Carter, J. (1980). Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan. *The American Presidency Project*.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 further intensified the rising tension between the Soviets and the US. This period has been referred to as the “Second Cold War”³¹¹ due to the increase in military stockpiles and renewed superpower hostilities that engendered fear of a nuclear showdown between the two world powers. This was also the period when the DoD's second offset strategy was framed with the goal of developing stealth technology, precision-guided munitions, smart weapons, and laser-guided weapons to counter Warsaw's Pact numerically conventional forces.³¹²

President Reagan denounced Soviet invasion and affirmed his determination to roll back Communism instead of tolerating it – with the goal causing its eventual end. In a speech delivered at the British parliament, Reagan vowed to leave Communism “on the ash-heap of history, as it has left other tyrannies, which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people.”³¹³ His vigorous stance effectively revived a Cold War arms race and increase in US military defense spending – which soared from \$326 billion in 1980 to \$456 billion in 1985.³¹⁴ The ensuing rivalry led to the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) – an anti-ballistic missile programme initiated under Reagan to shield the US from nuclear missiles using space technology.³¹⁵ The development of the SDI alone cost \$100 billion.³¹⁶ However, despite significant military spending and missile technology being critical assets in US strategic intelligence systems under Reagan, drones did not take priority in his administration spending as the US focused on defending against Soviet nuclear weapons rather than deploying airpower or UAVs for combat missions. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, opened a new opportunity in the research and development of post-Cold War drones and their military application.

4.8.1 Drones, George H.W. Bush Administration, and the Persian Gulf War

The end of the Cold War signaled the end of bipolarity and the rise of a unipolar power, with the US emerging as an unrivaled global power with immense discretion to do what it wanted and pursue ideological objectives. As Ikenberry and his colleagues put it, “as a unipolar power, US overall share of capabilities placed it unambiguously in a class by itself compared to other

³¹¹ Subrahmanyam, K. (1983). The Second Cold War. *Strategic Analysis*, 7(2-3), 73-97.

³¹² Ibid (Department of Defense, 2016)

³¹³ Reagan, R. (1982). Speech before the British Parliament. *London, June, 8*.

³¹⁴ Ostrom, C. W., & Marra, R. F. (1986). US defense spending and the Soviet estimate. *American Political Science Review*, 80(3), 819-842.

³¹⁵ Drell, S. D., Farley, P. J., & Holloway, D. (1985). The Reagan Strategic Defense Initiative: a technical, political, and arms control assessment.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

states.... thus, offering powerful structural incentives for the US to be revisionist in the absence of a countervailing power....”³¹⁷

Under the George H.W. Bush administration, the US embraced a new grand strategy. In a speech at the Aspen Institute in Colorado on 2 August 1990, Bush announced a new national strategy for the planning and organization of US military power. As he famously declared, “the rule of law and not the rule of the jungle shall govern the affairs of nations”³¹⁸ This strategy was called the ‘New World Order’ or the ‘Aspen Strategy.’ Its’ overarching goal was to transcend the superpower competition that characterized the Cold War in favour of promoting global democratic enlargement in the post-Cold War – by preventing the rise of Third World powers with nuclear capabilities and ensuring a favourable international balance of power.³¹⁹

The Persian Gulf War – triggered by Iraq’s occupation and invasion of neighbouring Kuwait in 1990 – served as the basis for the application of the NWO. As President G.H.W. Bush asserts, “the Gulf War was more than one small country; it is a big idea; a new world order with new ways of working with other nations...peaceful settlement of disputes, solidarity against aggression, reduced and controlled arsenals and the just treatment of all peoples.”³²⁰

According to Miller and Yetiv, the NWO was essentially a rethink of the way the US fights its wars – that is, one that reduced soldier casualty, prevented congressional and domestic opposition to war and multiplied US power.³²¹ In theory, it appeared practicable and purportedly advanced the US role in the post-Cold War era; however, in principle, it was criticized as being “vague, inchoate, unworkable and nascent.”³²² However, with the inception of the Gulf War, which served to operationalize the NWO, this view changed. The war created an opportunity for the US to take a strong position in world politics in asserting its power and

³¹⁷ Ikenberry, G. J., Mastanduno, M., & Wohlforth, W. C. (Eds.). (2011). *International relations theory and the consequences of unipolarity*. Cambridge University Press.

³¹⁸ Quigley, J. (1992). The New World Order and the Rule of Law. *Syracuse J. Int'l L. & Com.*, 18, 75.

³¹⁹ Tunander, O. (1991). Bush's Brave New World A New World Order—A New Military Strategy. *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, 22(4), 355-368.

³²⁰ Miller, E. A., & Yetiv, S. A. (2001). The new world order in theory and practice: the Bush administration's worldview in transition. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 31(1), 56-68.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Freedman, L., & Karsh, E. (1993). *The Gulf conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and war in the new world order*. Princeton University Press.

influence and to prove to the rest of the world that even in changed circumstances, the US remained a force.³²³

4.9 Drones, Network Centric Warfare, and the Persian Gulf War

The Persian Gulf War was important for drone use. This is because it was during this time that the concept of “pilotless aircraft” or “remote piloted aircrafts” gained prominence in the US military establishment and marked a shift in the way the US military viewed and utilized drone technology. The late 1980s was characterized by several technological advancements that influenced the generation of drones that were produced in the Gulf War. This included development in an electronic system, micro-computing, global positioning system, and further improvements in guided missile systems. This was also a time when the US military underwent a revolution in military affairs and consequently led to the emergence of Network Centric Warfare (NCW) – the application of computer-based technologies in changing military operations. This was strongly reflected in DoD’s goal of “altering the way US forces conduct its military operations by introducing advanced weapon systems with greater precision and with innovative operational concepts.”³²⁴

The idea behind NCW, as Christopher Bellamy notes, is to “develop a system that would enable US Armed Forces to carry out decentralized, surgical and irregular warfare using satellite communications systems and devices for building interoperability.”³²⁵ The evolutionary impact of the NCW led to the restructuring of the US Command and Control system into the C4 ISR, which stands for Command, Control, Computer, Communication, Information, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance.³²⁶ The main objective was to facilitate the remotely operated missions with surgical precision. These changes significantly affected the functions and capabilities of successor drones in the post-Cold War era. Apart from having force enhancement capabilities, these drones had enhanced command, control, and communications (CCC) units, image processors, advanced high-resolution sensor imaging, in-built remote systems, reduced size, and weight and computerized platforms compared to predecessor drones.³²⁷ The long-range capabilities, naval gunfire support, battlefield management platform, interoperability, precision

³²³ Freedman, L. (1991). The Gulf war and the new world order. *Survival*, 33(3), 195-209.

³²⁴ Ibid (Department of Defense, 2016).

³²⁵ Bellamy, C. (2002). 'Tools of Ill-Omen': The Shifted Conflict Paradigm and Reduced Role of Conventional Military Power. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 15(1), 149-157.

³²⁶ Ibid (Kindervater, 2016)

³²⁷ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

targeting system, and remote missile guidance further increased their tactical usefulness in high-threat space. These technological modifications made drones produced in the 1990s quickly proliferate in the US military.³²⁸

By 1990, the US armed forces had heavily invested in the Pioneer drone, and when the Gulf crisis broke out, it emerged as one of the most useful military assets. The Pioneer drone played a pivotal tactical role in supplying valuable image reconnaissance, intelligence and real-time situational data, and BDA that helped targeting operations of manned US air offensives. High-level commanders were able to effectively utilize the new satellite imagery and precise engagement capabilities of this drone to deal a decisive blow on Iraq's defense. A notable incident was when the USS *Missouri* deployed the Pioneer to Faylaka island off the coast of Kuwait to destroy the enemy defense.³²⁹ Their use in attacking the Kuwait airport with missiles when it was occupied by Iraqi forces was notable. In another instance, it was used to deactivate enemy artillery, thwarting Iraqi troop advancement in the north end of the Kuwait airfield and to destroy Iraqi forces' base of operation in Kuwait and in monitoring the coastline for enemy activity. Further, it helped in detecting Iraqi patrol boats, anti-ship missiles, and anti-aircraft artillery. The Pioneer flew more than 300 combat reconnaissance missions during Persian Gulf operations, and its operational success in *Operation Desert Storm* – a US-led massive air offensive against Iraq – helped to consolidate their wide acceptance.³³⁰ This led to its further development, which contributed immensely to successor drones such as the Global Hawk, Predator, and the Dark Star.³³¹ Due to the efficacy of the Pioneer during the Persian Gulf War, drones began to be assigned combat roles conventionally executed by manned aircraft. This was key in facilitating aspects of the NWO grand strategy, which interalia aimed at reducing US soldier death and altering the way the US fought its war. The war ended with only 291 US soldier casualties of the 750,000 US and allied troops stationed deployed for the operation.³³² Advanced firepower and US technological advances were attributed to the success of the war operation.³³³

³²⁸ Ibid (Kindervater, 2016)

³²⁹ Cook, K. L. (2007, March). The silent force multiplier: The history and role of UAVs in warfare. In *2007 IEEE Aerospace Conference* (pp. 1-7). IEEE.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Clark, R. M. (1999). *Uninhabited combat aerial vehicles: airpower by the people, for the people, but not with the people*. Air Univ Maxwell AFB AL School of Advanced Airpower Studies.

³³² Otterman S., (2005) IRAQ: U.S. Deployments at the War's Height. Council for Foreign Relations.

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/iraq-us-deployments-wars-height>

³³³ Ibid.

4.10 Drones, Clinton's Grand Strategy, and the Bosnian War

The crisis in Somalia, the Balkanization of the former Yugoslav Republics, the rise of new economic and political entities such as the European Union, World Trade Organization (WTO), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) were some of the changes in the post-Cold international system that informed the grand strategy of the Bill Clinton's administration. This advertently presented a credible opportunity for President Clinton to pursue a *NSS* that focused on promoting American ideas in the liberal capitalist world order. This was the cornerstone of his grand strategy, which focused on national security, neoliberal globalization, and democratic promotion. This was expressed in his 1995 *National Security Strategy*, which championed the goals of free trade, open and equal access to foreign markets, and enhancement of US national security—in effect consolidating, deepening, and globalizing the neoliberal project of Reagan's era.

Initially, President Clinton did not prioritise the use of American military power to address foreign policy issues. As Andrew Bacevich notes, Clinton was “keen on avoiding any American casualties; military power was not to be unleashed but doled out in precisely measured increments.”³³⁴ However, while his administration was committed to promoting economic liberalization, the Bosnian war and subsequent attacks on American buildings by al-Qaeda caused a U-turn in Clinton's use of America power and, in effect, prompted the offensive proclivities of his grand strategy – a task he would eventually delegate to the CIA.

The outbreak of the Bosnian war of 1992, between Orthodox Serbs and Bosnia's Muslim (Bosniaks) and Croats in the former Yugoslav Republic, saw the use of the Predator drone. These drones fitted with payload sensors with electro-optical infrared technology were equipped with line-of-sight capabilities and built-in ultra-high-frequency satellite communication system and guided missile system. They were the first military drone to be used in complex, joint tactical operations in an active combat theatre as part of the US Air Force Combat Command's 11th Reconnaissance in the Bosnian war.³³⁵ This was predominantly due to their combat readiness and ISR capabilities for supporting ground troops and their friendly forces.³³⁶

³³⁴ Bacevich, A. J. (2000). The Use of Force in the Clinton Era: Continuity or Discontinuity. *Chi. J. Int'l. L.*, 1, 375.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

The emergence of the Predator is, however, not surprising as several factors accounted for their development.

- i. The aftermath of the Vietnam War sapped domestic support for prolonged wars and American soldier casualties. This led to US Joint Chiefs of Staff asking the then Director of Intelligence, Michael Cramer, to develop ISR capabilities that protected the lives of non-combatants in combat zones.³³⁷
- ii. New post-Cold War security threats that did not conform to traditional military weapons
- iii. The need to leverage the success of the Pioneer drone in the Persian Gulf War.
- iv. The Predator's ISR capabilities and its integrated arms platform was a key component for facilitating the working of the C4 ISR system.

The Predator was pivotal in surveillance and intelligence gathering, and supporting ground troops during the war. Its live video and re-tasking capabilities increased battlefield awareness for commanders. It flew over 20,000 hours and made several combat deployments, including providing targeting and real-time intelligence.³³⁸ The ISR capabilities of the Predator provided valuable intelligence to NATO and US military commanders that facilitated active bombing operations and contributed to the denouement of the war with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995.³³⁹

The successful deployment of the Predator inspired further development and redesign of drones by the CIA and US Air Force that incorporated the C4 ISR system. These modifications included an expanded data-dissemination structure and air-traffic control systems.³⁴⁰ During *Operation Allied Force* – NATO's military operation against the former Yugoslav Republic during the Kosovo War – further use of drones for military-type engagement demonstrated the ascendancy of their weaponry in US military affairs, particularly with the introduction of the Pioneer, Predator, and the Hunter. While the first two systems had been deployed in previous wars, the IAI RQ-5 Hunter drone with C-band line-of-sight link and sensors made them provide IMINT in real-time.³⁴¹ After the Kosovo conflict, drones became more tactical than strategic for US military missions, as manifested in further deployment for surveillance missions

³³⁷ Ibid (Kindavater, 2016).

³³⁸ Ibid (Bacevich, 2000)

³³⁹ Ibid (Blom, 2010).

³⁴⁰ Ibid Blom, 2010)

³⁴¹ Ibid (Cook, 2007).

globally. This increase of drones in military operations under Clinton's administration further consolidated their role as instruments of war and statecraft in a post-Cold War era. This fitted with the DoD's third offset strategy – which aimed to revitalize US conventional deterrence capabilities and to outmanoeuvre near-peer competitors closing the gap on American military-technological advantage post-Cold War.

4.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the historical development of drones and US grand strategy from its early development in WWI to the Kosovo war in the 1990s was outlined and critically assessed. During WWI though the technology behind drones was still in its incipient stages, its success in the war influenced their further development in the Inter-War period and their use in WWII. The utility of drones as assault weapons and in reconnaissance missions in WWII laid the precedent for the evolution of the modern-day use of drones in warfare. The analysis showed that drones had limited utility in facilitating the US grand strategy before the Cold War. This, however, changed in the heat of the Cold War, especially in the Korean and Vietnam Wars and in the post-Cold War period when the application and tactical relevance of its weaponry became useful for military operations and for facilitating the offensive aspects of US grand strategy. Despite the predominance of nuclear weapons and air power in the grand scheme of strategic considerations in the Cold War period, this examination highlighted the instrumentality of drones as part of the quiver of tools in US weaponry. This was demonstrated in their efficacy for dealing with threats and in protecting American values and interests in the face of hegemonic threats, and in dealing with rogue states. The impact of their role during and after the Cold War laid the precedents for the deepening of their use and lethal weaponization after 9/11 as a tactical and strategic instrument for warfare and statecraft. In the next chapter, the role of drones in the Bush administration is examined in order to ascertain if their deployment in targeted states in the aftermath of 9/11 supports or undermines US grand strategy.

CHAPTER FIVE

Bush Administration, Drone Warfare and US Grand Strategy

5.0 Introduction

The Cold War provided various lessons for the use of drones, and there was evidence that during the early post-Cold War period, they were becoming more instrumental strategically. However, things were to change as the Bush administration, particularly following the terrorist attacks of 2001, which not only changed his perception of threat of the international environment and the grand strategy of his administration but also led to the lethal weaponization of drones for CT missions in targeted states.

Did the use of drones during the Bush administration support or undermined US grand strategy? In answering this question, it is necessary to consider the foreign policy outlook of the Bush administration, the ways in which drones were used during this period, and the way they intersected with the US grand strategy. The key argument in this chapter is that drone use during the Bush administration was closely related to a shift in US grand strategy from the defensive realist stance of successive US presidents in the post–Cold War period to a national security realist posture in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The chapter further argues that preventive and pre-emptive drone strikes served to undermine Bush’s grand strategy, particularly in targeted states such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen by causing unintended civilian deaths, a broader escalation of anti-American sentiment, a rise in retaliatory strikes by radical insurgents, and through their propaganda value as a recruitment tool for extremists. Furthermore, though the global proliferation of drones was not significant during his administration, as the US maintained a monopoly over the use of lethal drones, the deployment of armed drones under Bush laid the precedent for its proliferation as it demonstrated their military utility for US counterterrorism missions.³⁴²

In building these arguments, the chapter is divided into four sections. In the first part, the foreign policy of the Bush administration prior to and after the 9/11 terrorist attacks is analysed. The second part examines the emergence of a post-9/11 grand strategy, including the role of neo-conservatism in that process. In the third part, the evolution of Bush drone warfare from

³⁴² Okpaleke, F., & Burton, J. (2020). 9 US grand strategy and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles during the George W. Bush administration. *Emerging Technologies and International Security: Machines, the State, and War*, 153

2000 to 2008 is assessed. The fourth section examines the role of and rationale for drone use during the Bush administration. In the last section, we examine whether the use of drones undermined the US grand strategy during this period.

5.1 George W. Bush's Foreign Policy Before and After 9/11

Since the US emerged as the sole superpower following the end of the Cold War, successive US presidents have sought to formulate and pursue different grand strategies in the absence of a peer competitor.³⁴³ This applies to George H.W. Bush's 'New World Order,' Bill Clinton's 'Engagement and Enlargement' strategy, George W. Bush's 'Primacy,' and more recently to Barack Obama's pursuit of 'Restraint' and Donald Trump's 'America First.'

Prior to 9/11, the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration pursued a defensive realist strategy. As part of this, it showed little appetite for global democratic interventions. Many analysts³⁴⁴ have argued that the foreign policy of Bush during this period was devoid of elements of offensive liberalism or, more precisely, of plans to forcefully project military into rogue states or those providing safe havens for terrorists. This was expressed by Bush's ambivalence before 9/11 to effecting regime change or to order offensive military action against the Baathist government in Iraq. Likewise, his initial foreign policy orientation, or what has been described by Robert Jervis³⁴⁵ as the 'First Bush Doctrine' – was predicated on strengthening US military power and managing great power competition with Russia and China. This stance was corroborated by Bush's objection to the deployment of US military power in open-ended democratic intervention missions, as stated during his 1999 presidential campaign.³⁴⁶ In sum, prior to 9/11, the foreign policy of Bush can be summarised as one overly focused on changing the Clinton-era 'enlargement and engagement' strategy to a more defensive realist approach predicated on limited democratic interventions and little inclination for offensive liberal proclivities.³⁴⁷

³⁴³ Jervis, R (2005) 'Why the Bush Doctrine cannot be sustained', *Political Science Quarterly*, 120(3), pp. 351–377.

³⁴⁴ Art, RJ and Cronin, PM, eds (2003) *The United States and coercive diplomacy*. US Institute of Peace Press; Hirsh, M (2003) 'Bush and the world', *Foreign Affairs*, 81, p. 18.

³⁴⁵ Jervis, R (2003) 'Understanding the Bush Doctrine', *Political Science Quarterly*, 118(3), pp. 365–388.

³⁴⁶ Chollet, D, Chollet, DH and Goldgeier, J (2009) *America between the wars: from 11/9 to 9/11; the misunderstood years between the fall of the Berlin wall and the start of the war on terror*. Public Affairs.

³⁴⁷ Miller, B (2010) 'Explaining changes in US grand strategy: 9/11, the rise of offensive liberalism, and the war in Iraq', *Security Studies*, 19(1), pp. 26–65.

The September 9/11 attack ushered in a new direction for US grand strategy by challenging the Bush administration's seeming complacency to threats in the international environment. The terrorist attack engendered new security concerns and a heightened fear that radical terrorist groups would acquire Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) to carry out coordinated attacks on US soil and interests.³⁴⁸ This is mainly because the 9/11 attacks heightened the perception of a possible alliance between rogue states and radical militant groups in perpetuating further terror attacks against the US.³⁴⁹

As a consequence, the 9/11 attacks led to a shift in priorities and a new foreign policy direction for the Bush administration as encapsulated in the 'Second Bush Doctrine.'³⁵⁰ The new doctrine was articulated in the 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and outlined four aspects of US strategy in the post-9/11 security environment. First, at the heart of the Bush doctrine was the idea of anticipatory self-defense – the requirement for the US to act unilaterally, with immediacy, and offensively in dealing with global terrorist threats.³⁵¹ This included preventive and preemptive wars against imminent threats from rogue states and terrorist groups seeking to develop WMDs.³⁵² Second, the strategy strongly advocated for sustaining US military primacy, arguing that a preponderance of US power could ensure peace and that the most serious threat to US primacy would be an “across-the-board” political, economic, and military challenger.³⁵³ The fundamental objective of the US was premised on a will to forcefully guard the international order against illiberal threats and the rise of a foreign power.³⁵⁴ Fourth, it declared its goal for forcible democracy promotion, particularly in the Muslim world (Miller, 2010). The new approach encapsulated in the second Bush doctrine thus formed the main foreign policy focus of the administration and shifted the administration towards an offensive liberal approach to grand strategy.

5.2 Grand Strategy after 9/11 and the Role of Neo-conservatism

Following 9/11, the Bush administration believed that its existing foreign policy strategy was not suitable for addressing the threat of transnational terrorism and that a new direction was

³⁴⁸ Ibid (Jervis, 2003)

³⁴⁹ Schmidt, BC and Williams, MC (2008) 'The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq war: neoconservatives versus realists', *Security Studies*, 17(2), pp. 191–220.

³⁵⁰ Ibid (Miller, 2010)

³⁵¹ Gaddis, JL (2005) 'Grand strategy in the second term', *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 2–15.

³⁵² Ibid (Jervis, 2003)

³⁵³ Art, RJ (2013) *A grand strategy for America*. Cornell University Press.

³⁵⁴ Chollet, D, Chollet, DH and Goldgeier, J (2009) *America between the wars: from 11/9 to 9/11; the misunderstood years between the fall of the Berlin wall and the start of the war on terror*. Public Affairs.

needed. More precisely, the 9/11 terrorist attacks demonstrated the flaws in defensive and offensive realist approaches that seemed ill-suited for dealing with non-state threats like suicide bombings, rogue states, or transnational terrorism.³⁵⁵ In his assessment of the different versions of US grand strategies, Bernard Miller argues that they were “incapable of offering any effective response for dealing with non-state threats.”³⁵⁶ Implicit in defensive realism is the advocacy for the use of deterrence as a tactic to achieve its goals. While this may be useful against traditional state actors and against nuclear-armed states, deterrence was seen as an ineffective strategy to combat “irrational” terrorist or rogue states that were, or could be, willing to support transnational terrorist networks, use suicide bombs or WMD with little regard for their own lives.³⁵⁷

Furthermore, while preventive attacks could be allowed through an offensive realist strategy and could potentially deal with the threats posed by rogue states and terrorist groups, it does not preclude the possibility of hostile regimes rebuilding infrastructure and conducting clandestine activities in hard-to-reach areas.³⁵⁸ In the same vein, defensive liberalism, based on advocacy for multilateral diplomacy to advance non-proliferation, seemed to be a weak approach to adopt in dealing with regimes that were likely to hide their WMD programs or rogue states that could clandestinely support and finance transnational terrorism.³⁵⁹

It was not possible to forge a grand strategy for dealing with the threat of al-Qaeda and rogue states via a rational, linear process. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, there appeared to be a symmetry between neo-conservative thinking and the immediate needs of the administration. Thus, the crucial issue for the Bush administration after 9/11 was formulating the most appropriate approach to deal with the rising threat of Islamic terrorism, and this served as the catalyst for the center play of neo-conservative ideas for US foreign policy in the Bush administration.

Neo-conservatism had been a prominent part of the US domestic debate on foreign policy since the end of the Cold War and had a broader intellectual history stretching back at least to the

³⁵⁵ Leffler, MP (2011) ‘9/11 in retrospect: George W. Bush's grand strategy, reconsidered’, *Foreign Affairs*, 33(11) pp. 33–44.

³⁵⁶ Miller, B (2010) ‘Explaining changes in US grand strategy: 9/11, the rise of offensive liberalism, and the war in Iraq’, *Security Studies*, 19(1), pp. 26–65.

³⁵⁷ Kaufman, R (2007) *In defense of the Bush Doctrine*. University Press of Kentucky.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid* (Leffler, 2011).

³⁵⁹ Gurtov, M (2006) *Superpower on crusade: the Bush Doctrine in US foreign policy* (vol. 35). Lynne Rienner Publishers.

1960s. With the demise of the Soviet Union, neo-conservatives advocated that enforced democracy promotion based on an offensive liberal strategy should be the cornerstone of a new ideological American foreign policy.³⁶⁰

Neoconservatives had been influential players at the inception of Bush's unilateralist administration and gained more influence after 9/11. Neo-conservatives such as Paul Wolfowitz appeared to be the only ones ready with a detailed program that offered a credible response for dealing with the post-9/11 threats based on their long-standing offensive liberal agenda with regard to Iraq and the Middle East. Analyses by Robert Jervis³⁶¹ and Robert Kaufman³⁶² have shown the program included an explanation of the sources of terrorism (that states in the Middle East were aiding and abetting terrorism by inflaming American resentment and incentivizing the spread of radical Islamic ideologies), a program for forcible regime change in Iraq, and an action plan for dismantling terrorist operations and the rogue regimes that allegedly harboured them. Finally, Wolfowitz, an ardent neoconservative under Bush, proposed replacing rogue regimes with liberal democracies, arguing that "the more democratic the world becomes, the more likely it is to be both peaceful and friendly to America."³⁶³

As a consequence, due to the availability and the seeming plausibility of the neo-conservative approach, together with the political and strategic shock of 9/11, key officials in the Bush administration, such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, who hitherto had not been seen as neo-conservatives, also adopted this approach. Offensive liberalism thus became a key aspect of the Bush administration's post 9/11 foreign policy and informed the President's usage of the term, 'Axis of Evil,' during the January 2002 State of the Union address and the articulation of Second Bush Doctrine of September 2002. As Miller puts it, "the offensive liberal strategy advocated by neo-conservatives, focused not only on changing the capabilities of rogue regimes, namely destroying their WMD and preventing them from acquiring more but also on changing their ideological character by transforming the nature of their political system – namely, enforced democratization."³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ Halper, S and Clarke, J (2004) *America alone: the neo-conservatives and the global order*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁶¹ Ibid (Jervis, 2003).

³⁶² Ibid (Kaufman, 2007)

³⁶³ Paul Wolfowitz cited in Kaufman, R (2007) *In defense of the Bush Doctrine*. University Press of Kentucky.

³⁶⁴ Ibid (Miller, 2010)

The offensive liberal strategy was perceived not only as necessary for US security but also as feasible since it was expected that “the oppressed Middle Eastern peoples would welcome democracy if they could be helped to get rid of their oppressors.”³⁶⁵ The expectation of the neo-conservatives was that a successful regime change in Iraq would have ripple effects across other states in the region and thus trigger democratization in the whole of the Middle East. Ultimately, while US power preponderance made this strategy possible, the high level of perceived threat post-9/11 provided the catalyst for its adoption, with neo-conservative ideology providing its intellectual underpinnings. The next section explores the phases of drone warfare under the Bush administration.

5.3 The Evolution of Lethal Drone Warfare 2001-2008

Since the first lethal drone strike in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in October 2001, the Bush administration’s use of drone warfare evolved and expanded in terms of the range of operations and targets. This evolution is divided into three phases (see table 7 below) and the casualty figures (see table 8 below). The first phase (2002-2004) served as the testing period for the use of drones for the elimination of HVTs in targeted states. The second phase (2005-2007) was characterised by slight increases in strikes on HVTs. The third phase (2007-2008) consisted of the escalation of drone strikes in targeted states.

Table 6: Phases of Bush Drone Warfare

Drone Strikes by Phase	Number of strikes	HVTs Killed	Total Deaths
(2002-2004)	2	2	11
(2005-2007)	6	2	53
(2007-2008)	48	5	333

Source: Adapted from Hudson, Owens, and Flames.³⁶⁶

Table 7: Drone strikes and Casualty Figures in the Bush-era

Drone strikes and Casualty Figures in the Bush-era	
	Figures
Total drone strikes	51
Total reported killed:	410-595
Civilians reported killed:	167-332
Children reported killed:	102-129
Total reported injured:	175-277

Source: TBIJ.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ Dorrien, G (2004) ‘Benevolent global hegemony: William Kristol and the politics of American empire’, *Logos*, 3(2-8).

³⁶⁶ Hudson, L, Owens, CS and Flannes, M (2011) ‘Drone warfare: blowback from the new American way of war’, *Middle East Policy*, 18(3), pp. 122–132.

³⁶⁷ Ibid (TBIJ, 2020).

The first phase of Bush’s drone warfare began in mid-November 2001 when a drone strike killed Mohammed Atef, an al-Qaeda military commander. This was followed by another CIA drone strike in the Maarib province of north-eastern Yemen. The strike killed six al-Qaeda militants, including Salim Sanin al-Harethi, and it was the first drone strike to kill an American citizen, Kamal Derwish.³⁶⁸ The next attack started in 2004 and killed Nek Mohammed, an influential member of the Taliban and a former Mujahedeen. The total number of HVTs killed in this period based on published data from TBIJ is estimated to be five or six.³⁶⁹

The second phase occurred mainly in Pakistan. Drones strike increased slightly during this period and targeted al-Qaeda and Taliban HVTs in the remote FATA region of Pakistan. Though there are conflicting reports that most of the targets killed during this phase were mainly low-value targets (LVTs) and not top members of the al-Qaeda core³⁷⁰, the elimination of Hamza Rabia, the number three in the chain of command in al-Qaeda, did occur during this phase. In the third phase, the use of drones for leadership decapitation became a key component of strategy, as more HVTs were eliminated following the intensification of lethal drone strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia (see table 9 below).

Table 9: Drone strikes against HVTs in the third phase of the Bush administration’s drone warfare.

Drone HVT	Terrorist Role/Affiliation	Date of Death
Qaed Salim Sinan al-Harethi	Al-Qaeda leader in Yemen	November 3, 2002
Nek Mohammed Wazir	Senior Taliban Leader in Pakistan	circa 2004
Abu Laith al Libi	Senior militant/Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan	January 31, 2008
Abu Khabab al-Masri	Al-Qaeda Weapons Chief	28 July 2008
Khalid Habib	Al-Qaeda Leader in Northwest Pakistan	October 16, 2008
Usama al Kini	Senior militant/Al-Qaeda in Pakistan	January 2, 2009

Author’s adaptation from TBIJ and NAF.

The rationale for the use of drones for leadership targeting is expressed in the 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (NSCT). The document highlighted the intersection between leadership decapitation and the collapse of terrorist organizations.

³⁶⁸ Ibid

³⁶⁹ Ibid (TBIJ, 2013).

³⁷⁰ Boyle, MJ (2013) ‘The costs and consequences of drone warfare’, *International Affairs*, 89(1), pp. 1–29.

“The terrorist leadership provides the overall direction and strategy that links all these factors and thereby breathes life into a terror campaign. The leadership becomes the catalyst for terrorist action. The loss of leadership can cause many organizations to collapse. Some groups, however, are more resilient and can promote new leadership should the original fall or fail. Still, others have adopted a more decentralized organization with largely autonomous cells, making our challenge even greater.”³⁷¹

Thus, the focus of drone strikes for the Bush administration was the elimination of leaders affiliated with global al-Qaeda and its affiliates. As a counterterrorism tool, it demonstrated that the US could leverage the precision and lethal weapon capabilities of drone technology for leadership decapitation when targets were identified and intelligence matched the kill order.³⁷² The success of drones in eliminating HVTs like Salim Sinan al-Harethi – who was targeted for his involvement in the October 2000 *USS Cole* bombing and the October 2002 Limburg attack – and Nek Mohammed, a senior Taliban leader in Pakistan, gave the Bush administration the impression that if limited drone strikes were successful at leadership decapitation and terrorist disruption, more strikes would be even better. The logic behind this argument is that drone strikes create a climate of fear among terrorist targets by fracturing their organization and eventually leading to their collapse.³⁷³ In writings discovered after his death, Osama bin Laden lamented the impact of drone strikes and recommended that Al-Qaeda leaders flee Waziristan to safer terrain to avoid them.³⁷⁴

The US process behind making the decision to launch a decapitation strike through targeted killings is worth noting here. According to Gallarotti,³⁷⁵ this involves (i) deciding if the target is a significant threat to US interests, (ii) cognizance of state sovereignty issues, (iii) high confidence in the target’s identity, and (iv) that innocent civilians will not be harmed and, finally, (v) engaging in an additional review process if the individual is a US citizen.

³⁷¹ National Counterterrorism Strategy of the United States, 2003

³⁷² Ibid (Boyle, 2013)

³⁷³ Rae, JD (2014) *Analyzing the drone debates: targeted killing, remote warfare, and military technology*. Springer.

³⁷⁴ Minhas, Z and Qadir, A (2014) ‘The US war on terror and the drone attacks in FATA, Pakistan’, *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*. 50(4), pp 17-20

³⁷⁵ Gallarotti, GM (2010) *The power curse: influence and illusion in world politics*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

5.4 Explaining Drone use During the Bush Administration

The domestic rationale for lethal drones was predicated on the AUMF. The AUMF not only expanded the executive powers of US presidents to use force for matters of national security but also served as the basis for the rationalization of lethal drone strikes for Bush's preemptive and preventive attacks in targeted states. The Bush administration further maintained that Article 51 of the UN Charter gave the US the authority to act in self-defense against high-level targets who were planning attacks, both in and out of declared theatres of war.³⁷⁶

Since their first lethal use, the precision, accuracy, and disruptive effects of drones on terrorist groups have helped to avoid the costs of conventional war – civilian and soldier deaths and collateral damage.³⁷⁷ This is premised on the idea that drones are more capable than human beings in gathering and processing information precisely, rapidly, and flexibly.³⁷⁸ Similar arguments assert that drones provide the US with greater incentive and capacity to defend itself from external aggression through the projection of force.³⁷⁹

At an operational level, one of the many US responses in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks was the increase in the build-up of military and intelligence capabilities and the establishment of new military bases in Asia, including a new military command in Africa.³⁸⁰ This occasioned a rise in defence expenditures and emphasised the imperative of counterinsurgency initiatives for dealing with the new security threats in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Under Bush, drones initially served ISR functions, with limited lethality in the battlefield, but by the end of the administration and as a result of the change in his administration's grand strategy, they had become weaponized tools for CT and COIN operations that more directly and forcefully served the offensive aspects of the Bush doctrine.

Relatedly, As Aqil Shah recounts, America's experience in Afghanistan and Iraq showed that a quick and decisive victory over the Taliban and Iraqi forces did not result in the complete destruction of the militant groups.³⁸¹ In Iraq, armed groups mounted sustained attacks on US

³⁷⁶ Shaw, I and Akhter, M (2014) 'The dronification of state violence', *Critical Asian Studies*, 46(2), pp. 211–234.

³⁷⁷ Ibid (Rae, 2014)

³⁷⁸ Byman, D (2013) 'Why drones work: the case for Washington's weapon of choice', *Foreign Affairs*, 92, p. 32.

³⁷⁹ Hazelton, JL (2012) 'Drones: what are they good for?', *Parameters*, 42(4/1), p. 29.

³⁸⁰ Ibid (Hudson, Owens and Flames, 2011).

³⁸¹ Shah, A (2016) 'Drone blowback in Pakistan is a myth. here's why', *Washington Post*, 17.

forces resulting in high military casualties.³⁸² In Afghanistan, US troops weakened but did not completely dismantle or eliminate the Taliban. The Afghan War caused al-Qaeda's senior leadership to take safe haven in Pakistan's FATA following the fall of the Taliban.³⁸³ This made it difficult for the US to bring to bear the extraordinary advantage in conventional military power it had in Afghanistan and Iraq³⁸⁴ and compounded the pressure (discussed in the next paragraph) on the US to make quick and decisive progress in Afghanistan, which required dismantling al-Qaeda's safe haven in Pakistan.³⁸⁵

The expectation that American military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq would be withdrawn as soon as stable and effective government institutions were created proved erroneous – meaning the US faced a choice between supporting a long term presence in both countries or decreasing its military footprint and risking a protracted war and the overthrow of its local allies.³⁸⁶ Also, al-Qaeda's clandestine transnational network became increasingly complex for the US to track, disrupt and dismantle, especially as it established links with other armed groups and terrorist affiliations as far away as Southeast Asia, Northern and Eastern Africa, and the Middle East.³⁸⁷

The onset of intense violence, the rising cost of war, mounting American soldier deaths, increasing uncertainty over the US democracy promotion mission in Iraq, and the perception that the administration lacked an exit strategy and a defined path to victory served to undermine President Bush's foreign policy and public support for it.³⁸⁸ Initially, the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan received the support of a majority of Republicans and Democrats in Congress and from the majority of the American public. Pew Research conducted when the Iraq War began in March 2003 showed more than seven in ten Americans (73%) supported the use of force, including 93% of Republicans, 66% of Independents, and 59% of Democrats.³⁸⁹ Towards the end of the George W. Bush administration, support for military action in Iraq had plummeted,

³⁸² According to the US Department of Defense, the US has lost 4,487 service personnel in Iraq since the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom on 19 March, 2003. By 31 August, 2010, when the last US combat troops left, 4421 have been killed.

³⁸³ Ibid (Shah, 2016)

³⁸⁴ Walsh, JI, 2018. 'The rise of targeted killing', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41(1–2), pp. 143–159.

³⁸⁵ Khan, W. Z. (2014). *US Drone Policy and Anti-American Sentiments in Pakistan (2001-2012)*. EduPedia Publications.

³⁸⁶ Ibid (Walsh, 2018).

³⁸⁷ Yousaf, F (2017) 'CIA drone strikes in Pakistan: history, perception and future', *CRSS*. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3160433> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3160433>

³⁸⁸ Miller, S. E (2006) 'The Iraq experiment and US national security', *Survival*, 48(4), pp. 17–50.

³⁸⁹ Pew Research Center (2013) *A majority of Americans still support the use of drones despite questions*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/05/23/a-majority-of-americans-still-support-use-of-drones-despite-questions/>, accessed 6 February, 2020.

with only 17% of Democrats and 73% of Republicans supporting the war.³⁹⁰ Thus, the use of drones under Bush, particularly in the latter stages of the administration, offered a way to continue the conflicts in the Middle East without sapping public support.

The Bush administration's experience in Iraq following the invasion of 2003 thus made the use of drone strikes a more attractive strategy.³⁹¹ As their use in the latter part of the administration showed, drones became a manifestation of primacy and hard power empowerment for an offensive liberal grand strategy. Used in this way, drones fulfilled an important objective of aggressively countering terrorism as "an assertive and determined strategy to rollback threats that challenge US national security."³⁹² In sum, the use of drones after 9/11 under Bush reflected not only America's technological and military power but also reiterated the commitment of the US to act alone in defeating al-Qaeda and its affiliates. This pivotal role was expressed in its utility as a tool for the propagation of a form of 'American First' multi-unilateralism – which advocates the use of brute force when US interest is threatened without compromising the benefit and necessity of multilateral cooperation.³⁹³

5.5 The Dilemma of Drone Warfare for the Bush administration's Grand Strategy

Since the 9/11 attacks, drones have played an important yet controversial role in US counterterrorism strategy. Despite the acknowledged utility of drones for targeted killings, reducing troop deployment, and casualty figures, the intensification of their use in targeted states had several negative effects. Ultimately, they worked at cross-purposes with the more liberal elements of the Bush administration's grand strategy and undermined efforts to promote democracy in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen. This was due to the countervailing democratic reactions engendered in the aftermath of drone strikes in these targeted states, such as local protests against their use, unintended civilian death, anti-American sentiments, and militant recruitment and violence. From this lens, rather than consolidating democratic promotion, drone use triggered the conditions that undermined it.

³⁹⁰ Pew Research Center (2011) *Bi-partisan support for US. drone strikes*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/drone-strikes/>, accessed 10 February, 2020.

³⁹¹ Gurtov, M (2006) *Superpower on crusade: the Bush Doctrine in US foreign policy* (vol. 35). Lynne Rienner Publishers.

³⁹² Nau, HR (2012) 'Realism', in *Routledge handbook of American foreign policy*. Routledge, pp. 77–90.

³⁹³ *Ibid* (Boyle, 2013).

A number of scholars have taken up this line of reasoning. The use of drones against HVTs from 2002-2007, as Kilcullen and Exum,³⁹⁴ avers caused indignation to their use in targeted states. They argue that drones engendered three effects that undermined their use (these assertions are supported by data outlined in the next paragraph). First, they created a siege mentality in targeted states, triggering a blowback effect for unintended civilian deaths and collateral damage caused. Second, drone strikes sparked opposition from the population in target areas and increased anti-American sentiments due to the moral and territorial issues associated with their use. Third, drones externalize the burden of war. This approximates with Krieg and Rickli's³⁹⁵ explanation that drones are an instrument of 'surrogate warfare' – which places the burden of war on human and technological surrogates, particularly in instances where the US judges no vital American interest to be at stake. This is analogous to what Shaw and Akhter³⁹⁶ call the "dronification of state violence," which highlights the shifting pattern of US state violence towards the inclusion of weaponized drones.

More specifically, attempts to expand the offensive liberal strategy of the Bush doctrine beyond Iraq to Pakistan and Afghanistan appeared self-defeating and disempowering for the US. The reliance on drones as a tactic for targeted killing operations of terrorists increased the cause of anti-Western militancy and engendered political opposition in targeted states that supported drone operations.³⁹⁷ Richard Boyle³⁹⁸ contends that the way the US used its power in the WOT increased American vulnerability by energizing terrorism and galvanizing support for anti-Western movements within the countries in which drone strikes occurred. Hazelton adds, "drone strikes appeared to inflame existing enmities the US had prior to 9/11 by creating a web of fear and vulnerability in targeted states."³⁹⁹ The next paragraph supports the case that drone strikes inflame anti-American sentiments in targeted states. A recent study by David Jaeger and Zahra Siddique⁴⁰⁰ outlines the negative feedback in targeted states and the perception of the US as a military threat following drone strikes during the Bush era. The study reported the vengeance effects of drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan based on an analysis of terrorist

³⁹⁴ Kilcullen, D and Exum, AM (2009) 'Death from above, outrage down below', *New York Times*, 16, pp. 529–35

³⁹⁵ Krieg, A and Rickli, JM (2018) 'Surrogate warfare: the art of war in the 21st century?', *Defence Studies*, 18(2), pp. 113–130.

³⁹⁶ Ibid (Shah and Ahkter, 2014).

³⁹⁷ Ibid (Gallaroti, 2015).

³⁹⁸ Ibid (Boyle, 2016)

³⁹⁹ Ibid (Hazelton, 2012)

⁴⁰⁰ Jaeger, DA and Siddique, Z (2018) 'Are drone strikes effective in Afghanistan and Pakistan? On the dynamics of violence between the United States and the Taliban', *CESifo Economic Studies*, 64(4), pp. 667–697.

data attacks on the Taliban from January 2005-September 2011. The study showed that drone strikes induced further violence through vengeance by the Taliban.⁴⁰¹

A 2010 poll based on a sample of 1,000 residents in all seven FATA agencies showed that 76% of respondents opposed drone strikes; only 16 percent thought that such strikes accurately target insurgents, and 48 percent believed that the strikes largely kill civilians.⁴⁰² Moreover, 60 percent believed that suicide attacks against the US were “sometimes” or “always” justified. Bergen and Tiedemann, who conducted the survey, had used these figures to claim that suicide attackers are popular across FATA and that the main motivation for anti-American militancy “stems from anger at CIA-directed drone strikes at militants living in the area.”⁴⁰³

Kilcullen implies that the aftermath of drones in targeted states elevates the level of anti-American sentiment, which is counterproductive for US objectives to win the hearts and minds of the population in targeted states.⁴⁰⁴ This is against the backdrop of the siege mentality drone fosters in targeted states akin to what transpired in Somalia in 2005 and 2006, where targeted attacks against Union of Islamic Courts forces caused the Islamist's popularity to soar and consequently emboldened the use of extremist tactics. This eventually resulted in the military intervention in Ethiopia, a surge in the regional insurgency, and a rise in offshore pirate activities.⁴⁰⁵ Thus, while insurgency is usually unpopular, domestic outrage emanating from faceless drone attacks that kill innocent civilians makes the former less ominous. From this lens, instead of drones to advance the strategic objectives of the US, it creates negative outcomes that serve to undermine it.

As Ashan Iqbal of the Muslim League Party (MLP) notes, the Islamist parties have used the pretext of the aftermath of drone strikes to mobilise thousands of followers throughout Pakistan in large protests in Punjab, North West Frontier Province, and Sindh.⁴⁰⁶ To this end, the excessive reliance on hard power (and drones) in dealing with terrorism under the Bush-era rather than improve the US image as a promoter of democracy, or address terrorism through legal mechanisms, served to undermine it.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid

⁴⁰² Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2011). Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the US Drone Programs in Pakistan. *Foreign Aff.*, 90, 12.

⁴⁰³ Ibid

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid

⁴⁰⁵ Kilcullen, D., & Exum, A. M. (2009). Death from above, outrage down below. *New York Times*, 16, 529-35.

⁴⁰⁶ Iqbal Ashan cited in Williams, BG (2010) 'The CIA's covert predator drone war in Pakistan, 2004–2010: the history of an assassination campaign', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33(10), pp. 871–892.

Drone strikes have been argued to spur militant recruitment and retaliation in targeted states.⁴⁰⁷ It is, however, hard to prove direct causation between drone strikes and militant retaliation – that the increase in suicide bombings was related to the emergence of insurgencies in targeted states that would probably have occurred even had drone strikes not been happening. For instance, insurgent action against the Pakistani government has been ongoing prior to drone strikes, particularly in FATA and NWFR. This was established conducted by Luqman and colleagues, based on a comparative analysis of the mean deviation of suicide attacks following drone strikes interval between the Bush and Obama. The report determined that at least one suicide attack occurred 3-days after each drone attack – compared to one in 20 days under Obama.⁴⁰⁸ They attributed their findings to drone attacks killing more children and women under Bush, which caused more reprisal actions compared to Obama, who had “cleaner” or surgical strikes.

However, drones clearly fuelled the conditions under which these insurgencies grew. Boyle⁴⁰⁹, for example, argues that there is a substantive relationship between the increasing number of drone strikes and the mounting number of retaliation attacks. As data published by the TBIJ shows, for every high-profile, purposeful attack by the US, many more low-profile attacks take place.⁴¹⁰ This position is supported by a report published by the CIA (2009) on HVTs:

“The potential negative effect of high-level target operations includes increasing the level of insurgent support, strengthening an armed group's bonds with the population, radicalizing an insurgent group's remaining leaders, creating a vacuum into which more radical groups can enter, and escalating or de-escalating a conflict in ways that favour the insurgents.”⁴¹¹

Drone attacks generate what Kilcullen describes as the “accidental-guerrilla” phenomenon – which explains that drones incentivize the militarization of the locals and increases the

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid (Boyle, 2013).

⁴⁰⁸ Saaed L., Spagat M, Overton I., (2019) Drone strikes and suicide attacks in Pakistan: an analysis <https://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Drone-strikes-and-Suicide-bombings-in-Pakistan-examined-1.pdf>

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid

⁴¹⁰ Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2014) *US drone wars: 2014 in numbers*. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2015-01-07/us-drone-war-2014-in-numbers/>, accessed 11 February, 2020.

⁴¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency (2009) *Making high-value targeting operations an effective counterinsurgency tool*. https://wikileaks.org/cia-hvt-counterinsurgency/WikiLeaks_Secret_CIA_review:of_HVT_Operations.pdf/, accessed 10 February, 2020)

propensity of reprisal attacks.⁴¹² Acknowledging the accidental guerrilla phenomenon, Shah writes, “the new combatants unable to retaliate against the US within FATA, crossed over the border into Afghanistan, where US troops, NATO forces, and Afghan security forces are concentrated and present easily identifiable targets by joining the ranks of groups like the Pakistani Taliban, whose attacks within Pakistan destabilize the US-Pakistani alliance.”⁴¹³

These “new combatants” contribute to the growth of terrorist cells, which hinder US counterinsurgency operations. This implies that the use of drones as a decapitation strategy served as a propaganda tool for the creation of accidental guerrillas in targeted states – a consequence of which engendered a paradox of Bush CT operations. Articulating this, Jessica Wolfendale stated that “counterterrorism policies that are intended to enhance security often have a counterproductive and paradoxical effect.”⁴¹⁴ This corresponds to a modified version of security dilemma analysis which explains situations where the actions were taken by a state to increase its own security cause reactions from other states, leading to a decrease rather than an increase in the state’s security.⁴¹⁵

Data published by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) supports this (see figure 2 below). As the trend in the graph below shows, retaliatory attacks in Pakistan increased with the intensification of US counterterrorism operations. The graph below (see 2002-2008) corresponds with evidence from research on terrorist radicalization and recruitment between 2004 and 2008, which reported a steady rise in attacks by suicide bombers in Afghanistan and Pakistan – the two main centers for the Bush-era drone strikes.⁴¹⁶ Though a recent study by Shah based on interviews and surveys of “well-informed” respondents in FATA, Pakistan, discredits the credibility of militant recruitment following drone strikes, his study still confirms drone strikes as contributing to the precarious security situation in Pakistan.

The use of drones as a CT instrument of statecraft under Bush came at a high price for US soft power. Drones emphasised US hard power, which complicated its strategic mission in Afghanistan, as well as affected its fragile relationship with Pakistan.⁴¹⁷ The negative feedback

⁴¹² Kilcullen, D (2009) *The accidental Guerrilla: fighting small wars in the midst of a big one*. Oxford University Press.

⁴¹³ Shah, A (2018) ‘Do US drone strikes cause blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and beyond’, *International Security*, 42(4), pp. 47–84.

⁴¹⁴ Wolfendale, J (2016) ‘The narrative of terrorism as an existential threat’, in *Routledge handbook of critical terrorism studies*. Routledge, pp. 130–139.

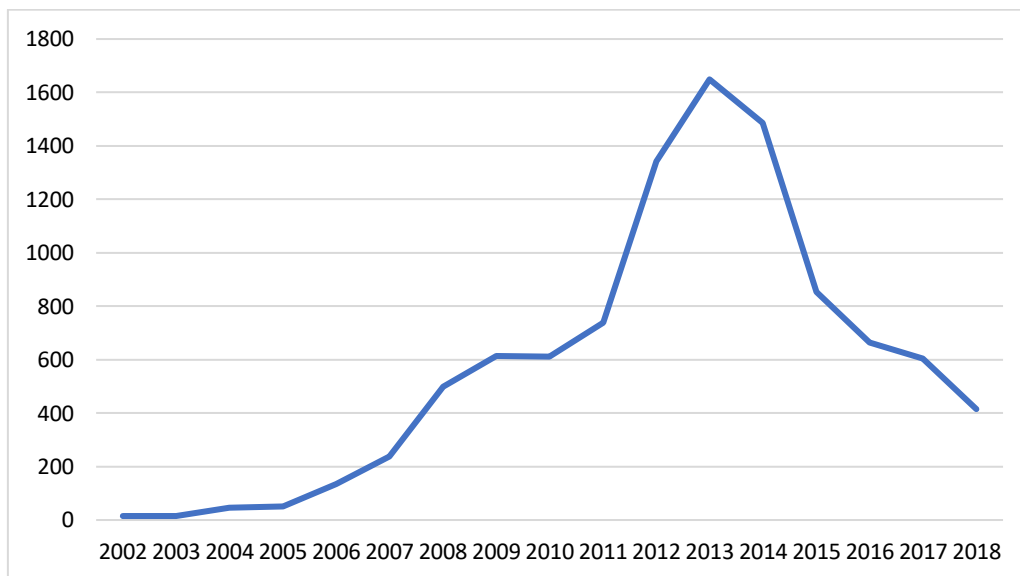
⁴¹⁵ Tang, S (2009) ‘The security dilemma: a conceptual analysis’, *Security Studies*, 18(3), pp. 587–623.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid (Leffler, 2011)

⁴¹⁷ Minhas, Z and Qadir, A (2014) ‘The US war on terror and the drone attacks in FATA, Pakistan’, *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*. 50(4), pp 17-20

of the new drone policy, particularly in targeted states, undermined the domestic and international soft power of the administration’s foreign policy.⁴¹⁸ According to Byman,⁴¹⁹ drones caused “enormous pressure for governing structures in these countries while at the same time worsening social volatility in the target area with an unpredictable outcome.” This was the case in Pakistan, where the intensification of drone strikes culminated in a series of protests against the Pakistani government for aiding the US in killing its citizens.⁴²⁰

Figure 2: Trends in terrorist retaliatory attacks in Pakistan following US counterinsurgency operations.



Source: GTD, University of Maryland, 2019.⁴²¹

Likewise, the US COIN mission in Afghanistan also became a victim of two forms of blowback. The first blowback arose from the feeling of asymmetric vulnerability from non-combatants on the ground in the target area. The feeling resulted in the desire to fight back and inflamed national sentiment against the use of drones. The second blowback is that drones potentially engender stiff resistance to local authorities in targeted states which are shown to be powerless (or even complicit) to stop drone strikes over their territories.⁴²² The point here is that the Bush administration’s drone attacks served to further destabilise an already fragile nation by deepening divides between the citizenry that abhors the attacks and the government institutions that tolerate or facilitate them.⁴²³

⁴¹⁸ Miller, SE (2006) ‘The Iraq experiment and US national security’, *Survival*, 48(4), pp. 17–50.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid (Byman, 2013).

⁴²⁰ Ibid (Boyle, 2013)

⁴²¹ Global Terrorism Database (2019). <https://www.start.umd.edu/research-projects/global-terrorism-database-gtd>

⁴²² Sadat, LN (2012) ‘America’s drone wars’, *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 45, p. 215.

⁴²³ Ibid (Hudson, Owens, and Flames, 2011).

5.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the role of drones in the grand strategy of the Bush administration has been critically assessed. One of the key arguments is that drones served as a tool for facilitating US offensive liberal strategies under Bush. The utility of drones for targeted killings, leadership decapitation, and as an instrument of statecraft in targeted states were also highlighted. The overarching argument in this chapter is that drone strikes in targeted states undermined rather than supported US grand strategy, especially towards the end of the Bush administration. Furthermore, the use of drones by Bush for CT set a precedent that made them attractive to other states and non-state actors, and while substantial armed drone proliferation did not take place until the Obama administration, their use under Bush established a legacy for the advancement and development of armed drones. As such, the US would lose its US monopoly on drone technology (this is further investigated later in the thesis).

In the next chapter, the Obama administration's use of drone warfare and its impact on US grand strategy is examined. Is there a continuation of the US offensive liberal agenda under Obama? Did his foreign policy show continuity with Bush doctrine? How and to what extent were drones used to facilitate US strategy? Were they successful? What undermined it? These questions are a core interest in the next chapter. The chapter also provides an assessment of Obama drone policy in particular, and more specifically for drones and US grand strategy.

CHAPTER SIX

Obama's Drone Wars and US Grand Strategy

“Obama’s drone programme, in fact, amounts to the largest unmanned aerial offensive ever conducted in military history: never have so few killed so many by remote control.”⁴²⁴

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the role of drones in the Obama administration’s grand strategy is critically assessed. The overarching argument is that the tactical reliance and intensification of drone use for targeted killings during Obama’s era served as a double-edged strategy for facilitating the administration’s hybrid grand strategy that sought, on the one hand, to promote America’s exceptionalism, multilateral engagement, and restraint in world affairs, and on the other, its military assertiveness. Despite the political and strategic utility of drones under Obama as a counterterrorism tool, this chapter argues that the aftermath of signature drone strikes in targeted states undermined Obama’s grand strategy by engendering a *dronification* and security paradox. The basis of the security paradox is that while drones had some beneficial security outcomes for the US – in saving the cost and risk of warfare – they also created negative outcomes in targeted states. This is evident in the increase of anti-American antipathy, retaliatory attacks, anti-drone protests due to civilian deaths and territorial violations, and suicide attacks following drone strikes. The *dronification* paradox argues that while drones have been effective CT instruments, the over-reliance of their use under Obama set a negative precedent for US CT to rival and regional powers. This manifested in the proliferation of drones among non-state actors, including revanchist and resurgent powers, and the continuation of terrorism despite leadership decapitation using drones.

In building these arguments, this chapter is divided into five parts. The first part deciphers and unpacks the making of the Obama doctrine. The second part assesses the grand strategy of the Obama administration. The third part unbundles the elements, character, and phases of Obama’s drone warfare campaign. In the fourth part, the utility of drones in supporting Obama’s grand strategy is explored. The final part critically examines how drones have served to undermine Obama’s grand strategy.

⁴²⁴ Hastings, M. (2012). *The Operators: The Wild and Terrifying Inside Story of America's War in Afghanistan*. Penguin.

6.1 The Making of the Obama Doctrine

The precarious state of America's global leadership following the end of the Bush administration served as the catalyst for the emergence of Obama's foreign policy that sought to re-establish America's exemplarism (leading by example) in global affairs. This is against the backdrop of the number of strategic challenges that greeted Obama's presidency from its onset – a resurgent China, a domestic financial crisis, an assertive Russia in Europe, mounting war costs, an inherited global WOT, and the dent of America's global image due to his 2003 Iraq failed invasion. In reference to Bush, Obama in his 2008 presidential debate with Republic nominee, John McCain faulted his predecessor's strategy in Iraq for not considering “how much the war was going to cost, whether US intelligence was sound, what the exit strategy might be, how it would affect US relationships around the world, but also failed to finish the job in Afghanistan and put al-Qaeda to rest”⁴²⁵

The aftermath of the Iraq invasion, as Brands notes, “weakened US power rather than strengthen it, as it put America in a position of strategic and military overstretch and increased its military spending.”⁴²⁶ On this basis, Obama's presidency at its initial stages set its sight on reversing what they saw as the flawed foreign policy of the Bush-era, re-establishing a new course for America's leadership in world affairs, and re-orienting Washington's priorities. More precisely, he sought to reformulate the US offensive liberal strategy that relied on the use of force by including non-military aspects of America's power – that placed a premium on multilateral engagement and cooperation, peaceful democracy promotion, and strategic partnerships for economic prosperity.⁴²⁷ Due to Obama's preoccupation in undoing his predecessor's errors and adjusting the relative settings of Washington's consensus on the use of America's global power, the early years of his presidency have drawn divergent analyses regarding the overarching goals it espoused for America's engagement in world affairs.

6.1.1 Did Obama have a Doctrine?

There are different speculations in the literature on what constituted the pillars of Obama doctrine in the early years of his administration. Michael Clarks and Anthony Ricketts, in their article, argue that the early years of Obama's foreign policy were “largely incoherent,

⁴²⁵ New York Times (2012), Transcript of The First Presidential Debate.

<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2008/president/debates/transcripts/first-presidential-debate.html>

⁴²⁶ Hal Brands, (2014) Breaking Down Obama's Grand Strategy | The National Interest <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/breaking-down-obamas-grand-strategy-10719>

⁴²⁷ Löfflman, G. (2019). The Obama Doctrine and Military Intervention. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 24(1).

ideologically pragmatic” as it veered from America’s post-Cold War traditional foreign policy goal of democracy promotion.⁴²⁸ Likewise, Michael Hirsh, in his article, in *The Atlantic*, boldly declared, “Obama had no doctrine” due to his little interest in foreign policy, minimal appreciation of America’s powers, and excessive confidence in international norms.⁴²⁹ In a similar assessment, Timothy Lynch characterized Obama’s policies at their incipient stages as “a set of reactions, adapting itself to reality rather than reshaping it, as it provided no clear road map for America to navigate the murky waters of international affairs.”⁴³⁰ Adam Quinn, an expert in America’s foreign policy and politics, describes this period as a story;

“...Characterized as the unfolding of two plots, intertwined yet distinct. One focuses on the presidency and consists of efforts to locate his approach within the intellectual historical context of US policymaking and evaluate its wisdom. The other concerns the status of the US within the international order and consists of debate over the sustainability of US primacy.”⁴³¹

The lack of renowned foreign policy advisers like Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski at the beginning of Obama’s tenure may partly account for the “chaotic and scattered”⁴³² characterization of his foreign policy. As David Unger argues, this is because Obama “imagined he could transform the content of American foreign policy without transforming its operating structures.”⁴³³

6.2 Deciphering Obama’s First Doctrine

Contra to the view that the clearest articulation of Obama’s foreign policy was lacking at the incipient stages of his presidency, four strategic priorities are identifiable from his presidential campaigns that formed the cornerstone of his foreign policy – which were indicative that Obama had a grand strategy. They include: (i) facilitating America’s disengagement from Iraq, (ii) refocusing the attention of US counterterrorism spotlight on Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak) with the broader escalation of drone operations, (iii) re-orientating Washington’s leadership away from vindicationism – that placed a premium on power projection and expression of American power, to exemplarism – that emphasizes exemplary leadership away

⁴²⁸ Clarke, M., & Ricketts, A. (2017). Did Obama have a grand strategy? *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40(1-2),

⁴²⁹ Hirsh, M. (2011). Obama has no doctrine. *The Atlantic*, 29.

⁴³⁰ Lynch, T. J. (2014). Obama, liberalism, and US foreign policy. *Obama and the World: New Directions in US Foreign Policy*, 41-52.

⁴³¹ Quinn, A. (2011). The art of declining politely: Obama's prudent presidency and the waning of American power. *International affairs*, 87(4), 803-824.

⁴³² Kitchen, N. (2011). The Obama Doctrine—Détente or Decline? *European Political Science*, 10(1), 27-35.

⁴³³ Unger, D. (2016). The foreign policy legacy of Barack Obama. *The International Spectator*, 51(4), 1-16.

from the hubris of America's power preponderance⁴³⁴ (iv) promoting multilateral engagement and (v) Pivot to Asia. These priorities become the pillars of the first Obama doctrine and subsequently informed his 2010 *National Security Strategy*.

6.2.1 Disengaging America from Iraq

On moving beyond Iraq, Obama published an article in *Foreign Affairs*⁴³⁵ where he explained the logic behind Iraq was flawed and argued that contemporary security issues are not amenable to purely military solutions; rather, they require a whole range of instruments of US political, economic and military power to address them.⁴³⁶ He argued that America could no longer afford to pursue an ambitious grand strategy of offensive liberalism that emphasizes overseas troop deployment, forced regime change, and military activism, as it not only creates more problems than it solves but also increases the burden of US security commitments and military spending.⁴³⁷ Rather, Obama proposed a more calibrated, cautious, and austere strategy akin to what two renowned American political scientists, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, termed as “retrenchment or restraint.”⁴³⁸

Retrenchment advocates for the scaling back of security commitment and military spending cuts to training and involving local forces to respond to security threats.⁴³⁹ Retrenchment proponents argue it prevents America's declinism and will preserve its powers in global affairs.⁴⁴⁰ Besides, the call for cautious and internationalist strategy at the beginning of Obama's presidency was amplified by fears of America's decline. This was vis-à-vis the rise of resurgent rivals, particularly China in Eurasia and Russia in former Soviet territories, and by the presence of a host of strategic challenges such as ongoing nuclear weapons proliferation and humanitarian crises around the world – that the Bush administration had failed to dispel.

Obama's calibrated strategy resulted in the phased withdrawal of American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan (from 183,000 in 2009 to 15,062 in 2016)⁴⁴¹ and the training of local security forces in preserving domestic security. However, burgeoning new strategic challenges such as

⁴³⁴ Monten, J. (2005). The roots of the Bush doctrine: Power, nationalism, and democracy promotion in US strategy. *International Security*, 29(4), 112-156.

⁴³⁵ Barack Obama, (2007) ‘Renewing America Leadership’ *Foreign Affairs* <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2007-07-01/renewing-american-leadership>

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Mearsheimer, J. J., & Walt, S. M. (2016). The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy. *Foreign Aff.*, 95, 70.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Glaser, J., & Thrall, A. T. (2017). Obama's Foreign Policy Legacy and the Myth of Retrenchment.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid (Congressional Research Service, 2018)

China's newfound assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific, the rise of the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) threat, and the Arab Spring tested the limits of Obama's commitment to retrenchment. As this chapter argues during the latter part of the Obama administration's term, this caused a paradigm shift in Obama's inclination towards international affairs and his disposition to use America's military power.

6.2.2 *Broader Escalation of Counterterrorism*

Obama prioritized refocusing America's CT operations from Iraq to Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak). The main goals included: (i) cracking down on the Taliban command and leadership hierarchy, (ii) decapitating and the leadership of al-Qaeda HVTs and its affiliates, (iii) dismantling the terrorist links and safe havens, (iv) disrupting terrorist organization within America's homeland. These goals not only formed the hallmark of Obama's CT strategy, but they became the main reference point of his administration's drone programme in targeted states. Furthermore, Obama initially expressed continuity for the Bush-era WOT, however with a new CT nomenclature that declared war on "far-reaching network of violence and terror"⁴⁴² that attacks the US, its allies, and partners. This was buttressed further in his 2010 *NSS* document, which affirmed his declaration to wage a global campaign, "...against al-Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates to protect the America homeland, secure the world's most dangerous weapons and material, deny al-Qaeda safe haven, and build positive partnerships with Muslim communities around the world."⁴⁴³ The CT efforts of Obama at the incipient stages of his presidency subsequently informed the 2011 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT)* which had as its primary objective the goal of dismantling terrorist networks that posed direct and significant threats to the US.⁴⁴⁴

6.2.3 *Promoting Washington's Exemplarism*

Obama advocated a foreign policy that espoused America's exemplarism that insulates the world from the hubris of America's power in the unipolar world. Contra to his predecessors, he categorically opposed the "emblematic muscular internationalism"⁴⁴⁵ stance of former US presidents, rather championed the merits of America's global leadership that avoids the ideals

⁴⁴² White House (May 2010) National Security Strategy
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ White House (June 2011) National Strategy for Counterterrorism
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf

⁴⁴⁵ Brands, H. (2016). Barack Obama and the dilemmas of American grand strategy. *The Washington Quarterly*, 39(4), 101-125.

of moral absolutism, exceptionalism, and misguided faith in brute power for dealing with world problems. Obama, speaking at the G-20 meeting in Strasbourg on 4 April 2009, called for greater strategic collaboration among world powers in global affairs and dismissed the notion of an America endowed with exceptional responsibilities in world affairs.⁴⁴⁶ Similarly, while addressing the UN on 23 September 2009, he promoted the allure of US soft power that showcased its diplomatic strength, persuasion, and values rather than the coercive instruments of its economic and military might.⁴⁴⁷ Daniel Drezner described this as counterpunching – to underscore Obama’s willingness to leverage America’s soft power to project its influence and ideals across the globe, particularly when challenged by other countries.⁴⁴⁸ This, however, did not mean Obama was dismissive of using America’s power in unilateral humanitarian missions or when its national interest was threatened.

6.2.4 *Pivot to Asia*

Obama’s ‘Pivot to Asia’ strategy was an economic, diplomatic, and security approach developed for the Asia-Pacific that places Washington in the cockpit of global security competition in the region. Some scholars argue that Pivot to Asia (later relabelled the rebalancing) was a long-term change of US strategy to Asia initiated under the Obama presidency but has been carried on by successive administrations – particularly, Trump.⁴⁴⁹ For instance, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – a free trade agreement between the US and twelve Pacific-rim countries intended to liberalise trade and foreign investment (now renamed without the US, as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)), was an economic component of the Pivot to Asia strategy that took years to negotiate but created what Rubrick Beigon termed a “crisis of common sense.”⁴⁵⁰ This is because it inadvertently fostered a trade governance crisis, and its approach was devoid of clear answers to the broader strategic goals of the administration in Asia.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁶ Obama, Barack. 2009. The President’s News Conference in Strasbourg. April 4. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=85959>

⁴⁴⁷ White House (2009) Remarks by the President to the United Nations General Assembly. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-united-nations-general-assembly>

⁴⁴⁸ Drezner, D. W. (2011). Does Obama have a grand strategy? Why we need doctrines in uncertain times. *Foreign Affairs*, 57-68.

⁴⁴⁹ Manyin, M. E., Daggett, S., Dolven, B., Lawrence, S. V., Martin, M. F., O'Rourke, R., & Vaughn, B. (2012). Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama administration's rebalancing toward Asia. Library Of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service.

⁴⁵⁰ Biegon, R. (2020). US Hegemony and the Trans-Pacific Partnership: Consensus, Crisis, and Common Sense. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 13(1), 69-101.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

Extending his analysis, John Ford argues, the strategy was based on a number of flawed assumptions, which led to its demise and can be regarded as one of Obama's biggest foreign policy failures. The assumptions were: (i) that hitherto US foreign policy had neglected the Asia-Pacific, (ii) that assigning more military, economic, and diplomatic resources to the region was the best response to its growing global economic influence, (iii) that it would afford the US the opportunity to pull back its security commitments from the Middle East.⁴⁵² Militarily, the strategy created a need for the US to reorient its force structure away from Europe and the Middle East to Asia. Drones, in part, created a way for the US to do this by freeing up key military assets that would have been deployed in the region – this was also evident in US drone sales. For instance, the US under Obama sold MQ-9 Reaper drones to Taiwan, which the DoD argues was intended to “improve the security of Taiwan and assist in maintaining its political stability, military balance, economic progress in the region.”⁴⁵³ This, however, infuriated Beijing and caused it to increase its military drills in the South China Sea (SCS) in response to US intervention in the region.

Thus, rather than improve Washington's influence in the region, the Pivot to Asia approach inflamed tensions in the Asia-Pacific and caused the Middle East and Europe to fall into deeper chaos due to neglect. According to Ford,

“America's neglect of Europe was followed by Russian adventurism in Ukraine, an increased threat to the Baltic states, and the erosion of democracy in Poland and Hungary. After America pulled back from the Middle East, the Syrian Civil War displaced 11 million people and caused a refugee crisis, the Islamic State moved into Iraq, and America's relationships with its Gulf allies frayed as Iranian influence expanded throughout the region.”⁴⁵⁴

Furthermore, it provoked an aggressive military response from Beijing in an effort to contain America's growing influence.⁴⁵⁵ China's defense response was also evident in its deployment of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) in an effort to keep US fighter jets and naval ships from the shores of China. This also included improving its drone technology and sophisticated radar

⁴⁵² Ford, J. (2017). The Pivot to Asia Was Obama's Biggest Mistake. *The Diplomat*, 21.

⁴⁵³ Glaser, B. S. (2014). US-China Relations: Managing differences remains an urgent challenge. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2014(1), 76-82.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid (Ford, 2017: pp 4).

⁴⁵⁵ Brands, H. (2014). Breaking Down Obama's Grand Strategy. *The National Interest*, 23.

capabilities, prominent among them being the CH-4 drones.⁴⁵⁶ (the broader impact of these for US grand strategy is analysed later in chapter 9).

6.2.5 Multilateral Engagement

Obama sought to build bridges that fostered global partnerships, conciliated actual and potential rivals rather than his predecessor's "coalition of the willing." This was evident in his speech delivered at Cairo University in Egypt on 4 June 2009, which announced "a new beginning for the Muslim world" and a willingness to broker a nuclear deal with Iran and establish free trade agreements with Eurasia.⁴⁵⁷ It also called for international support in fighting transnational terrorism.⁴⁵⁸ The default basis of Obama's multilateralism based on his commencement address at West Point on May 28, 2014, is premised on four principal objectives: (i) non-proliferation and disarmament, (ii) promotion of global peace and security, (iii) global environmental protection, (iv) globalization of the world economy.

These four strategic priorities highlighted above were re-echoed in the 2010 NSS, which had as its core goals: multilateralism and global engagement, the doctrine of strategic patience – that advocates the pursuit of national security at low cost and minimal losses, retrenchment, American exemplarism, use of force as a last resort, and intensifying counterterrorism efforts.⁴⁵⁹

Robert Kaufman, a renowned professor of politics, summarizes Obama's foreign policy in his first term as containing seven tenets: retreat from vindicationism, an embrace of multilateralism, strategic irrelevance of regime type, reluctance to use decisive military power, preference of soft power, and diplomacy, strategic retrenchment, and acceptance of multipolarity and collaborative engagement with potential rivals.⁴⁶⁰ The sum of Obama's first term can be described as one deeply enmeshed in undoing a number of Bush's decision that it ended up providing no clear road map for America's foreign policy in the post 9/11 security

⁴⁵⁶ Campbell, K. M., & Ratner, E. (2018). The China reckoning: how Beijing defied American expectations. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 60.

⁴⁵⁷ New York Times (2009) Text: Obama's speech in Cairo.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/04/us/politics/04obama.text.html>

⁴⁵⁸ McCrisken, T. (2013). Obama's war on terrorism in rhetoric and practice. In *Obama's Foreign Policy* (pp. 27-54). Routledge.

⁴⁵⁹ White House (May, 2010) National Security Strategy

https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

⁴⁶⁰ Kaufman, R. G. (2016). *Dangerous Doctrine: How Obama's Grand Strategy Weakened America*. University Press of Kentucky.

environment. This will, however, change during Obama's re-election in his second term as US president.

The next section discusses Obama's second term, the changes to his foreign policy outlook, and the role of neo-realism in this process.

6.3 Obama's Second Term and the Rise of 'Neo-Realism'

6.3.1 An Era of Pragmatism

Obama's second term has been described as "pragmatic" due to his readiness to prioritize America's national security interests and assert its hard power readily. Juneau Saunders describes this type of pragmatism in a *National Interest* article as one that enunciated realism and rooted in "an awareness of international anarchy, infused with a deep understanding of American power in service of a strategy based on American interests."⁴⁶¹ As Goldberg puts it, in Obama's second term, "America's foreign policy became a middle ground caught between internationalism and realism on one hand and engaged multilateralism and military restraint on another."⁴⁶²

Obama's pragmatism was demonstrated in his willingness to use America's military power more assertively in preserving the rules-based order and in projecting Washington's pre-eminence in world affairs. This was evident in the deployment of the US naval fleet to the Asia-Pacific to challenge China's military posturing and its territorial claims in the SCS. Also, in the deployment of troops to Iraq, Afghanistan, North Africa, Syria, and expanding drone strikes, and conducting limited military operations in Yemen and Libya. In addition to running a military budget of about \$600 billion per year.⁴⁶³ Saunders argues that the White House had aggressively portrayed Obama as "steely-eyed pragmatists judiciously making tough calls on both international and domestic policy."⁴⁶⁴ Though Obama denounced this characterization in the May 2014 Commencement speech at the US Military Academy in West Point, saying, "according to self-described realists, conflicts in Syria or Ukraine or the Central African Republic are not ours to solve."⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶¹ Saunders, P. J. (2014). The Wanderer. *The National Interest*, (133), 5-10.

⁴⁶² Ibid (Golberg, 2016).

⁴⁶³ Ibid (David Unger, 2016)

⁴⁶⁴ Saunders, P. J. (2014). Barack Obama is not a realist. *The National Interest*, 26.

⁴⁶⁵ White House (2014) Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony. May 28. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>

The 2015 *NSS*, or the ‘Second Obama Doctrine,’ further expressed some of the core principles that defined his second term. These included: (i) leading with all instruments of American powers, and prioritizing its long term security interests, though it expressed its willingness to work with partners and set an example through American leadership (ii) strengthening national defence, protecting the homeland, and combating terrorism, (iii) elevating the principle of strategic patience in the pursuit of US security objectives and (iv) preserving the rules-based order.⁴⁶⁶ While some of these principles were captured in the previous *NSS* document, the new *NSS* expressed a coherent pathway for maintaining American leadership and a response to the contemporary strategic challenges faced by the US.

6.3.2 Rise of Neo-Realism

The inadequacies of offensive liberalist and realist strategy in addressing the challenges of the US in the post 9/11 security environment spurred the rise of neo-realist ideas within the Obama administration. Revisiting Miller’s assessment of the offensive and defensive interpretations of US grand strategy (in chapters 2 and 3), following the end of the Bush administration, offensive liberalism and realism were no longer a suitable strategy for dealing with transnational terrorist groups due to the absence of imminent threats.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, offensive liberalism’s excessive reliance on hard power also proved incapable of providing an adequate response for dealing with the failure of Bush’s forcible regime change and vindicationism in Iraq. Likewise, implicit in offensive realism is the idea that state behaviour is a response to the anarchic nature of the international system.⁴⁶⁸ However, as Miller argues, it is a deficient strategy for dealing with the rise of an external threat (due to its inefficacy in dealing with imminent threats) or the antipathy generated by Bush’s preemptive and preventive wars.⁴⁶⁹ On the other hand, defensive realism assumes that the US is still growing in power and advocates for a multilateral approach that moves beyond the narrow focus on military power to elevate the role of US soft power.

According to Kaufman, In Obama’s second term, “neorealist ideas crossed from an academic debate to a popular and practical discussion that challenged elite opinion and conventional wisdom on the Washington consensus on US power.”⁴⁷⁰ The inadequacies of neoliberalist and realist strategies in addressing the strategic challenges faced by the US spurred the rise of neo-

⁴⁶⁶ Office of the Press Secretary, White House (2015) Obama’s National Counterterrorism Strategy

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid (Miller, 2010)

⁴⁶⁸ Kirshner, J. (2012). The tragedy of offensive realism: Classical realism and the rise of China. *European Journal of International Relations*, 18(1), 53-75.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid (Miller, 2010)

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid (Kaufman, 2016).

realist ideas in the Obama administration. Neo-realists such as Chuck Hagel oppose the view of democratic primacists such as Leon Panetta on how Washington must exercise its power and preserve its global liberal agenda. They maintain that retrenchment would lower the cost and risks of Washington's global posture, reduce its military footprint and security commitments while preserving US unipolarity.⁴⁷¹ Neo-realists share the view that offensive liberalism is ineffective for dealing with post 9/11 security threats and oppose the neoconservative squander of America's resources in costly wars due to its dangerous effect of overstretching America's hegemonic power.⁴⁷² These ideas are reflected in the grand strategy of the Obama administration.

6.3.3 Obama's Hybrid Defensive grand strategy

There are several interpretations of Obama's grand strategy. Brands, for instance, narrowed this down to three core elements: (i) preservation of the post-Cold War order of Washington's leadership and primacy in world affairs, (ii) avoiding costly wars and military overstretch, and lastly,, (iii) increasing US influence in the Asia-Pacific.⁴⁷³ Other analyses conceptualize it as a hybrid strategy that espouses multiple yet contradictory approaches. For example, Jack Holland portrays it as "an alloy of defensive neo-realism, multilateralism and anti-moralistic variants of classical realism and pragmatism."⁴⁷⁴ Thus, implying it is a strategy that exalts restraint and multilateralism and advocates for the use of Washington's soft power in global affairs. This symbolized a change in US grand strategy from one that emphasized unipolarity and unilateralism to one that encouraged burden sharing, greater cooperation, and incorporated multilateral engagement and projection of soft power.

Similarly, Colin Dueck, a renowned scholar on US grand strategy, also offered a hybrid analysis of Obama's grand strategy as one containing five basic alternatives: containment, regime change, integration, bargaining, and non-intervention.⁴⁷⁵ In explaining these elements, Dueck delimits them as one that espoused limited democratic intervention, dismisses vindicationism, and commits to exemplary leadership. Georg Lofflman expatiates this further, "under Obama's hybrid discourse, the US remained the world's dominant power tasked with exercising global leadership but had subverted the unilateralism of Bush and the

⁴⁷¹ Clarke, Michael, and Anthony Ricketts. "Did Obama have a grand strategy?" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 1-2 (2017): 295-324.

⁴⁷² Ibid (Kaufman, 2016)

⁴⁷³ Hal Brands, (2014) Breaking Down Obama's Grand Strategy | The National Interest <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/breaking-down-obamas-grand-strategy-10719>

⁴⁷⁴ Holland, J. (2016). Obama as modern Jeffersonian. In *The Obama Doctrine* (pp. 40-53). Routledge.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid (Dueck, 2017)

neoconservative vision of primacy with a more conciliatory approach of multilateral cooperation and consultation.”⁴⁷⁶

In sum, five core elements are identifiable from the preceding hybrid analysis of Obama’s grand strategy, namely: deep engagement, offshore balancing and restraint, strategic patience, economic globalization, and lastly, promoting an international rules-based order and preventing any affront to America’s hegemony.

Though Obama is credited as being a “careful planner who gave a good account of his policies,”⁴⁷⁷ his grand strategy is criticized as “lacking in substance” and ineffective in its goal of preserving America’s leadership in global affairs. As Mikael Blomdahl puts it, “Obama’s greatest policy ambitions were domestic than international, and this reflected in his grand strategy which prioritized damage control and the need for diplomatic outreach towards US rivals such as Iran and China.”⁴⁷⁸ Drezner argues that the tone of his grand strategy was “neither of American triumphalism, exceptionalism or decline”⁴⁷⁹ due to its inconsistent articulation and implementation. However, no grand strategy is flawless, and its success is mostly dependent on the goals of the political leader who also has domestic considerations in mind amidst prevailing issues in global affairs.

Having examined the elements of the grand strategy of the Obama administration, understanding the key aspects of Obama’s drone warfare is important for understanding their role in Obama’s grand strategy.

6.4 The Elements, Character, and Phases of Obama’s Drone Warfare

6.4.1 Obama’s Drone Warfare

During the Obama administration, drones became the cornerstone of US CT strategy in the Middle East. This was exemplified in the expansion of drone weaponry for targeted killing operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. Brennan argues that “drone strikes are so exceptionally surgical and precise that they pluck off terror suspects while not

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid (Loffman, 2017)

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid (Brands, 2014)

⁴⁷⁸ Blomdahl, M. (2016). Bureaucratic roles and positions: Explaining the United States Libya decision. *Diplomacy & statecraft*, 27(1), 142-161.

⁴⁷⁹ Drezner, D. W. (2011). Does Obama have a grand strategy? Why we need doctrines in uncertain times. *Foreign Affairs*, 57-68.

putting innocent men, woman, and children in danger.”⁴⁸⁰ The reliance on drones for CT under Obama is, however, not surprising, as Bush drone warfare set a precedent for their use, particularly due to its cost-benefit calculus and their efficacy in the WOT in targeted states.

Obama conducted his drone programme under the umbrella of two agencies – the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and the CIA – each with a different mode of operations for accomplishing its CT goals. The JSOC drone operations were publicly acknowledged, amenable to Congressional oversight, based on established rules of engagement, and limited to declared battle zones. Whereas CIA drone operations were clandestine, classified, and conducted outside declared battlefields such as Yemen, Libya, and Iraq – with minimal government oversight.⁴⁸¹ This meant information regarding targeting location, HVTs killed, or cases of miss or unintended civilian deaths were not accessible to the public or the Congress – only the CIA and the president. While this strategy was effective in decimating al-Qaeda and its affiliates, it has been critiqued as giving drones “the role of judge, jury, and executioner of the US demonstrated by its inordinate attachment to the rules and norms in an environment of international anarchy where there is no supreme enforcement authority.”⁴⁸²

6.4.2 Elements of Obama’s Drone Warfare

Four key elements characterized Obama’s drone warfare, namely: signature strikes, systematization of the drone kill list, legitimization of targeted killings, and the expansion of targeted killings to include Americans.

6.4.2.1 Signature Strikes

Signature strikes are defined as the targeting killing of an individual based on a suspicious pattern of life without confirmation of their identity to determine if they have links with terrorist activity or affiliation.⁴⁸³ This practice was the hallmark of CIA drone operations in Pakistan and subsequently in Yemen and Somalia under the Obama administration.⁴⁸⁴ It considered all military-age males in the drone strike zone as combatants unless there is explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent.⁴⁸⁵ This controversial drone strike differed from the

⁴⁸⁰ John Brennan cited in Zenko, M. (2013). *Reforming US drone strike policies* (No. 65). Council on Foreign Relations.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid (Boyle, 2016).

⁴⁸² Gonzales, A. R. (2013). Drones: The Power to Kill. *Geo. Wash. L. Rev.*, 82, 1.

⁴⁸³ Shah, N., Chopra, R., Morna, J., Grut, C., Howie, E., Mule, D., & Abbott, M. (2012). The civilian impact of drones: Unexamined costs, unanswered questions. *Center for Civilians in Conflict, Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic*, 20.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid

Bush-era personality strikes, which conducted targeted killing operations based on precise information of the intended target or pre-identified signature of suspicious behaviour.⁴⁸⁶ As an unnamed US official confirmed in 2011, “indeed, signature strikes have killed twice as many ‘wanted terrorists’ than in personality strikes.”⁴⁸⁷

Furthermore, while these strikes were effective in eliminating HVTs in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it was highly classified. The Obama administration did not publicly acknowledge this secret drone operation until when CIA drones targeting an al-Qaeda compound in Afghanistan mistakenly killed an American contractor and an Italian citizen in 2015.⁴⁸⁸ Also, earlier in 2012 in Yemen, a failed CIA signature strikes killed 55 civilians, mostly children, instead of terrorist targets.⁴⁸⁹ The 2015 incident, however, put unprecedented pressure on the Obama administration to review its policy guidance on targeting and procedures on the authorization of drone use outside declared battlefields.⁴⁹⁰ This was acknowledged by Obama in a speech given at the National Defense University, Fort McNair, in 2003, where he stated, “I authorized the declassification of this action, and the deaths of three other Americans in drone strikes, to facilitate transparency and debate on this issue and to dismiss some of the more outlandish claims that have been made.”⁴⁹¹

6.4.2.2 Systematization of Targeted Killing and Kill lists

Targeted killing is defined as the “intentional, premeditated and deliberate use of lethal force by states or their agents under the colour of law against a specific individual who is not in the physical custody of the perpetrator.”⁴⁹² Obama, compared to his predecessor, introduced a “kill over capture” policy using drones for the targeted killing of terrorists and their affiliates. This policy reversed the capture, torture, and detain policy of the Bush era and consequently led to the institutionalization of targeted killing. Frankel Pratt explains this to be a result of the “convention reorientation and redefinition of US targeted killing programme, which used the instrumentality of drones to bypass normative and strategic concerns over precision, which

⁴⁸⁶ Boyle, M. J. (2015). The legal and ethical implications of drone warfare.

⁴⁸⁷ Loewner, J. (2015). Make no drones about it: Evaluating the US drone program based on domestic policy standards. *Towson University Journal of International Affairs* 36–49.

⁴⁸⁸ Guardian (2015) Obama regrets drone strike that killed hostages but hails US for transparency <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/23/us-drone-strike-killed-american-italian-al-qaida>

⁴⁸⁹ Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2018

⁴⁹⁰ Becker, J., & Shane, S. (2012). Secret ‘kill list’ proves a test of Obama’s principles and will. *New York Times*, 29 (5).

⁴⁹¹ White House (2013) Obama’s Remarks at National Defense University Fort McNair <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>

⁴⁹² Alston, P. (2011). The CIA and targeted killings beyond borders. *Harv. Nat'l Sec. J.*, 2, 283.

resultantly removed the bureaucratic structures concerning the use of force for CT operations and the greater use of its weaponry by the CIA under Obama.”⁴⁹³

Kimberly Dozier further argues that the institutionalization of targeted killings under Obama “transformed ad-hoc elements into a CT infrastructure capable of sustaining a seemingly permanent war.”⁴⁹⁴ The aftermath of which facilitated the systematization of the ‘drone kill list’ or ‘kill list’– which is a list comprising of those to be selected and prioritized terrorist members for targeted drone strikes. In describing the kill list process, Greg Miller, a *New York Times* reporter in 2012 following interviews with 60 Obama advisers, depicted the kill list process as a “...weekly Pentagon-run videoconference in which over 100 national security officials review the names and biographies of the suspected terrorist member before recommendation decisions are put forward to the President.”⁴⁹⁵

The end product resulted in what Michael Leiter of the National Counterterrorism Center called the “disposition matrix,” which essentially is a catalogue of the biographies, locations, network, and organizational ties of targeted persons.⁴⁹⁶ Typically, these lists usually contained a list of twenty-four persons meant to be eliminated by drone strikes in a 30-day period.⁴⁹⁷

The normalization of the kill list under Obama underscores a precedent in the ‘dronification’ of state-sanctioned death that engendered what Shaw describes as “the decentralization of targeted killings and the simultaneous centralization of state power in the executive branch.”⁴⁹⁸ This is not radically different from what Prankel defined as “norm transformation of targeted killings” to explain how international and domestic prohibitions to targeted killings have not disappeared but merely changed in response to “practitioner-led changes in the conventions, technologies and bureaucratic structures governing the use of force in counterterrorism activities.”⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹³ Pratt, S. F. (2019). Norm transformation and the institutionalization of targeted killing in the US. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3), 723-747.

⁴⁹⁴ Kimberly Dozier, (2012) “Who will drones target? Who in the US will decide?” Associated Press, May 21

⁴⁹⁵ Greg Miller, “C.I.A. Seeks New Authority to Expand Yemen Drone Campaign,” *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2012.

⁴⁹⁶ Shaw, I. G. (2013). Predator empire: The geopolitics of US drone warfare. *Geopolitics*, 18(3), 536-559.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid (Shaw, 2013, pg. 2)

⁴⁹⁹ Pratt, S. F. (2019). Norm transformation and the institutionalization of targeted killing in the US. *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3), 723-747.

6.4.2.3 Expansion of the AUMF

Obama's drone warfare stretched the interpretation of the 2001 AUMF and the latitude of America's CT operations. Essentially, it expanded the scope of his predecessor's pre-emptive and preventive warfare to a more proactive strategy that did not consider issues relating to imminent threats or confined to fixed battlefields by directly taking the WOT to al-Qaeda and its affiliates. This was evident in the broader escalation of drone strikes into declared and non-declared battlefields outside the scope of the current AUMF. Though in theory, Congressional approval was needed to ratify any expansion, in principle, CIA covert strikes bypassed this bureaucracy. Bachman and Holland interpreted this to mean Obama's "sanguine, bureaucratic language to veil the act of killing"⁵⁰⁰ – that permitted him to exert his resolve to combat terrorism while avoiding Congressional oversight or the limitations of international laws of war. Obama took the position that targeted killing does not require "a separate self-defence analysis of what constitutes an imminent threat before targeted killings are authorized."⁵⁰¹

Furthermore, senior officials in the Obama administration such as Brennan have characterized drones as "precise," "indispensable," and "effective," and most of all, "lawful."⁵⁰² However, characterizing drones as lawful is abstract, considering there is no current US law passed by Congress or any existing federal regulations or adjudication by the court normalizing drone strikes. Thus, the effort to legitimise drone strikes as lawful is more of an unwritten law by the executive that is withheld from Congress and public scrutiny which inadvertently gives unrestrained powers to the presidency on how it conducts drone strikes.⁵⁰³

6.4.2.4 Legitimization of Targeted Killings

International law requires certain criteria to be met before targeted killings can be considered legitimate. They include: (i) that government needs to make multiple interpretative judgements or 'best case scenarios' before ordering strikes, (ii) that drone strikes are vetted, and engagement rules are clearly defined, (iii) and that it complies with international law benchmarks.⁵⁰⁴ While targeted killings during the Obama administration were characterized by

⁵⁰⁰Bachman, J. S., & Holland, J. (2019). Lethal sterility: innovative dehumanisation in legal justifications of Obama's drone policy. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 23(6), 1028-1047.

⁵⁰¹ Obama cited in McCrisken, T. (2013). Obama's drone war. *Survival*, 55(2), 97-122.

⁵⁰² Brennan cited in Boyle, (2016).

⁵⁰³ Jaffer, J. (2016). How the US justifies drone strikes: targeted killing, secrecy and the law. *The Guardian*, 15, 2017.

⁵⁰⁴ Davis, L. E., McNeerney, M., & Greenberg, M. D. (2016). *Clarifying the Rules for Targeted Killing: An Analytical Framework for Policies Involving Long-Range Armed Drones* (No. RR1610). RAND Corp Santa Monica CA Santa Monica United States.

mounting civilian casualties (as later parts of this chapter reveal, the number of civilian casualties increased exponentially compared to his predecessor) and ambiguities in the interpretation of international law, the endorsement by former US Department Legal Adviser, Harold Koh, constituted the legitimization of targeted killings during his administration. According to him, "...what I can say is that it is the considered view of the Administration – and it has certainly been my experience during my time as a legal advisor – that US targeting practices, including lethal operations conducted with the use of drones, comply with all applicable law, including the laws of war."⁵⁰⁵

This statement has been used to attest to the legality of drone warfare and justifies its compliance with extant international laws of war. Likewise, in a speech given at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law in 2010, Harold Koh asserts:

“This (Obama) administration has carefully reviewed the rules governing targeting operations to ensure that these operations are conducted consistently with the law of war principles, including Second, the principle of proportionality, which prohibits attacks that may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.”⁵⁰⁶

Consensus on the proportionality of drone strikes in targeted states remains a contested issue in international law due to the lack of a clear specificity and generality in the scope of its application.⁵⁰⁷ However, the systematization of targeted killing under Obama set a dangerous precedent for US drone warfare and CT operations as President Trump’s administration has further broadened the latitude and secrecy of US drone operations in declared and outside declared areas of active hostilities (examined in the next chapter).

6.4.2.5 Targeting American Citizens

Another element of Obama’s drone warfare was the use of drones for killing Americans abroad suspected of facilitating or supporting terrorism. Though this policy was viewed by many as a

⁵⁰⁵ Harold Koh cited in Schmitt, M. N. (2011). Drone Attacks under the Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello: Clearing the ‘fog of Law’. In *Yearbook of International Humanitarian Law-2010* (pp. 311-326). TMC Asser Press.

⁵⁰⁶ United States, “The Obama Administration and International Law”, speech given by the Legal Adviser of the US Department of State, at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law, Washington DC, 25 March 2010.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid (Schmitt, 2011).

violation of the rights of American citizens to due process, as enshrined in the US constitution, it was justified based on the premise that “when an American has made the decision to affiliate with al-Qaeda and target fellow Americans, there is a legal justification for to try and stop them from carrying out their plots.”⁵⁰⁸

Former US Attorney-General, Eric Holder, in defence of this practice, opined that “the internal processes of the Obama administration for determining if a US citizen can be killed in a drone strike are sufficient enough to count constitutes due process.”⁵⁰⁹ This principle was invoked in the killing of Anwar Al-Awlaki in 2011, a Yemeni-American Imam and chief external operator for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), who was killed by drone attack for his involvement in plotting the failed Christmas Day underwear bombing on 25 December 2009. Though President Obama, in a speech delivered at the Fort McNair in 2013, asserted it was unconstitutional for the government to kill US citizens with drones or other weapons without due process, he justified the killing of Awlaki as necessary and inevitable. He opined that his involvement as an American citizen does not exculpate him from lethal action (paraphrased).⁵¹⁰ Furthermore, the optimum protocols of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – a multilateral treaty adopted by the UN to protect the civil rights and political liberties of persons – of which America is a signatory, applies only when the targeted person is within the US and not outside.⁵¹¹

The next sub-section discusses the phases of Obama’s drone warfare.

6.4.3 Phases of Obama’s drone war

Obama’s drone programme can be divided into four main phases reflecting the utility of its weaponry in the CT strategy of his administration. These phases are described as (i) the peak, (ii) expansion, (iii) staggered, and (iv) denouement phases are outlined below.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid (Jaffer, 2016)

⁵⁰⁹ Eric Holder cited in Hunt, N. (2017). Due Process: A Casualty of the War on Terror. *Regent UL Rev.*, 30, 345.

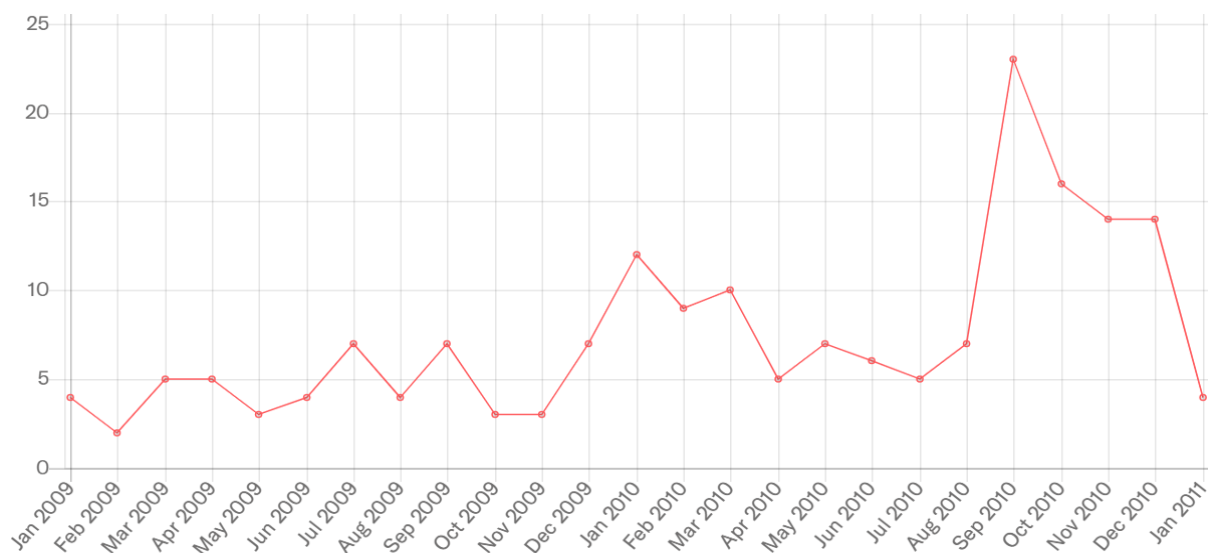
⁵¹⁰ White House (2013) Obama’s Remarks at National Defense University Fort McNair <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>

⁵¹¹ Sterio, M. (2012). The United States' use of drones in the War on Terror: the (il) legality of targeted killings under international law. *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.*, 45, 197. Rizwani, M. S. (2013). *The Use of Drones and Human Rights: Particular Focus on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Articles 2, 6, 12, 17 and 21* (Master's thesis).

6.4.3.1 The Peak Phase

The first two years of Obama’s administration (Jan. 2009 – Dec. 2010) can be regarded as the ‘peak of his drone warfare’ as this period marked the intensification of drone strikes for systematized killing operations in targeted states, mainly conducted by the CIA. Three days into the Obama presidency, he ordered the first drone strike in South Waziristan, and 12 months later, he had carried out 54 drone strikes in Pakistan alone.⁵¹² This figure surpassed the total drone strikes (53) conducted in the two terms of the Bush administration. Available data published by TBIJ and NAF estimate the total drone strikes conducted in this period as 300, with 186 of these strikes occurring in Pakistan (see figure 3 below).⁵¹³ In September 2010, Obama ordered the single highest (22) monthly drone strike in Pakistan’s FATA region out of the 87 drone operations that took place in the entire year.

Figure 3: CIA drone strike in Pakistan (Jan 2009- Jan 2011)



Source: TBIJ.⁵¹⁴

6.4.3.2 Expansion Phase

The main feature in the second phase (January 2011- December 2011) of Obama’s drone war was the expansion of drone operations outside traditional battlefields. This led to the broader escalation of targeted killing operations in Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. In Somalia on 23 June

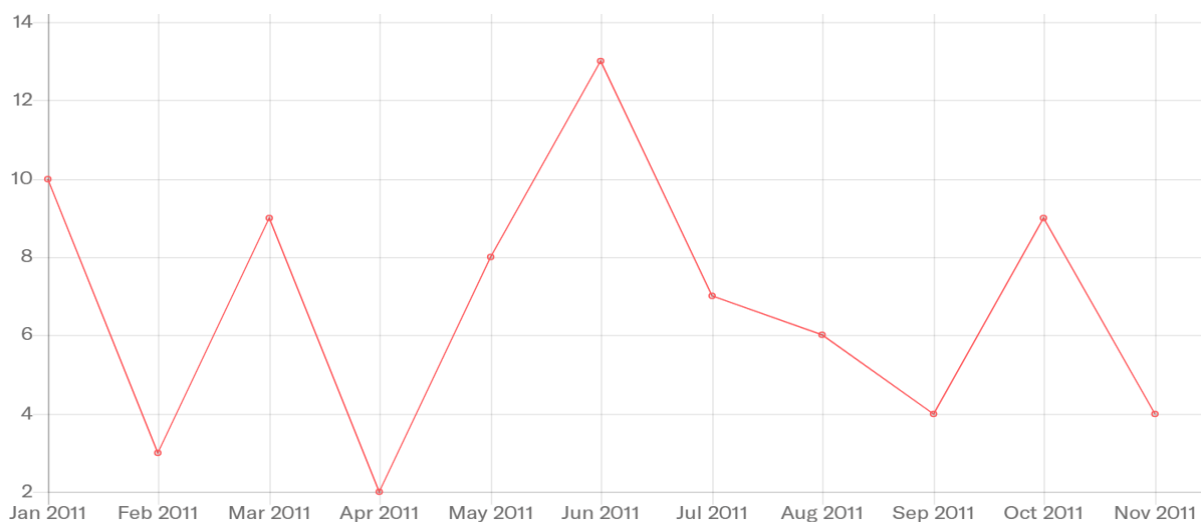
⁵¹² McKelvey, T. (2011). Covering Obama’s secret war. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 44-47.

⁵¹³ Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2010). The year of the drone. *New America Foundation*, 24; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, (2016) Obama’s covert drone wars in numbers: ten times more than Bush. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush>

⁵¹⁴ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, (2016) Obama’s covert drone wars in numbers: ten times more than Bush. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush>

2011, Obama authorized the first drone strike that led to the death of two al-Qaeda operatives. In Yemen, a targeted strike assassinated Anwar al-Awlaki and the two low-level AQAP terrorists in 2011.⁵¹⁵ During the Arab Spring in Libya in 2011, the US Air Force 324th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron also conducted drone operations from the American Naval Station in Sigonella, Italy. The first drone attack in June 2011 was carried out in Misrata, a Gaddafi regime fortress. It is estimated that more than 500 drone operations have been conducted to date in Libya since the first drone strike in 2011.⁵¹⁶ During this phase, drone operations still continued in Pakistan. Though according to data published by the TBIJ and NAF, the total number of strikes (64) dropped by 45 percent from the previous year (117) (see figures 4 and 5 below).⁵¹⁷

Figure 4: Total Drone Strikes in Pakistan in Obama’s Phase Two



Source: TBIJ

In the Af-Pak region, drone strikes plummeted in this phase (see 2010 - 2011 figures), from about 330 strikes from the first phase to 125 total strikes. A number of factors account for this, but one major event was the *Salala* incident when US-led NATO forces engaged and killed 24 Pakistani security forces along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border on 26 November 2011.⁵¹⁸ This caused the Obama administration to temporarily stop drone operations in the region until 10

⁵¹⁵ New America Foundation (2014) US Drone strikes in Yemen. <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/the-war-in-yemen/>

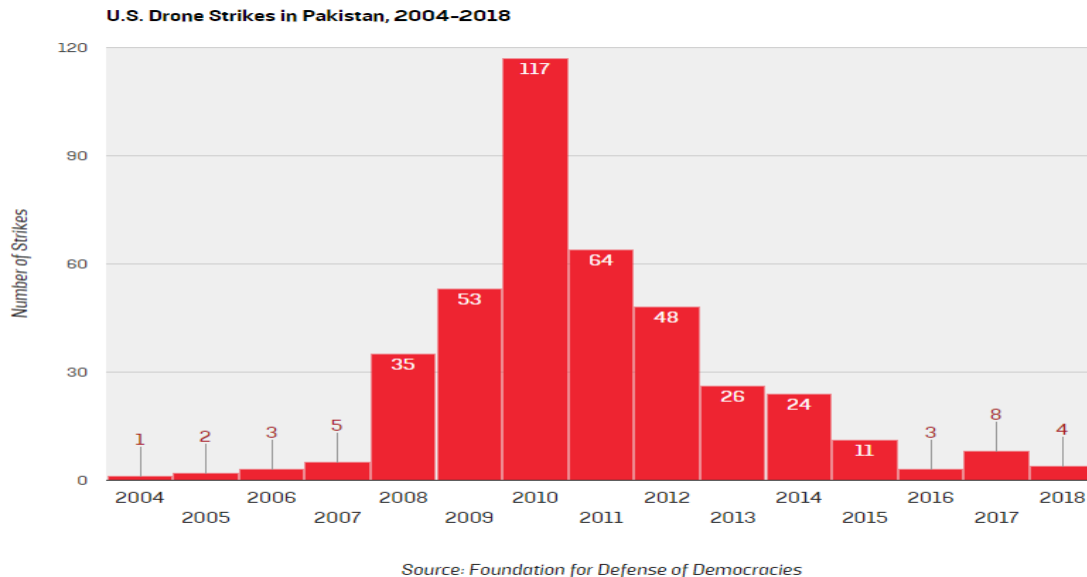
⁵¹⁶ Turse, N., Moltke, H., & Speri, A. (2018). Secret War: The US has conducted 550 drone strikes in Libya since 2011--More than in Somalia, Yemen, or Pakistan. *The Intercept*.

⁵¹⁷ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, (2016) Obama’s covert drone wars in numbers: ten times more than Bush. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush>

⁵¹⁸ Malik, A. R. (2012). The Salala incident. *Strategic Studies*, 32, 45-60.

January 2012. In this phase, however, an estimate of 10-21 drone strikes occurred in Somalia and about 15-62 strikes in Yemen in this phase.⁵¹⁹

Figure 5: Drone strikes in Pakistan from 2004-2018



Source: Federation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD) Long War Journal.⁵²⁰

6.4.3.3 Staggered Phase

The third phase of Obama’s drone warfare (January 2012 - December 2014) was marked by a further intensification of drone strikes outside non-declared battlefields, particularly in Libya where civil strife following the Arab Spring caused the US to order more than 100 strikes within this phase and a total of 263 strikes at the end of Obama’s presidency.⁵²¹ In principle, the bulk of drone strikes shifted from Pakistan to Libya. Available data published by TBIJ and FDD confirms this (see Tables 7 and 8 above). Drone strikes in Pakistan also continued to reduce – from 48 strikes in 2012 to 26 and 24 strikes in the following successive years (see table 9 below). TBIJ data estimates put the total strikes in this period at 77, which is 12.5 percent lower than the figure provided by FDD.⁵²²

⁵¹⁹ Byrne, M. (2016). Consent and the use of force: an examination of ‘intervention by invitation’ as a basis for US drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. *Journal on the Use of Force and International Law*, 3(1), 97-125.

⁵²⁰ Federation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD) Long War Journal (2020). Charting the data for US drone strikes in Pakistan, 2004-2021. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> (Accessed 10 November 2019).

⁵²¹ Turse, N., Moltke, H., & Speri, A. (2018). Secret War: The US has conducted 550 drone strikes in Libya since 2011--More than in Somalia, Yemen, or Pakistan. *The Intercept*.

⁵²² Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2017

Data from TBIJ, NAF, and Air Wars estimate the civilian casualty figures at the end of this phase as 1450-1650 as a result of drone strikes conducted in six targeted states – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq.⁵²³ This figure was 500 percent higher than the total of the two terms of the Bush administration (330).⁵²⁴

To address this mounting civilian casualty figure, the Obama administration on 23 May 2013 articulated the *PPG on Procedures for Approving Direct Action Against Terrorist Targets Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities*⁵²⁵, which required explicit presidential approval and a near certainty that drone strikes cause zero civilian death before deployment in targeted states.⁵²⁶ The PPG did not apply to Iraq, Afghanistan, Iraq, and some parts of Libya – as President Obama considered them as “areas of active hostilities” outside the ambit of the policy guidance and procedural mechanism for targeted drone operations.⁵²⁷ The PPG, however, led to a considerable policy re-examination of concerns regarding the lethality, transparency, efficacy, transfer, export, and the general operations of the US drone programme in the remaining part of the Obama administration.

6.4.3.4 Denouement Phase

The final phase of Obama’s drone war (2014-2016) saw a further drop in the number of drone strikes in Pakistan (see figure 8 above). As a result, it led to fewer civilian casualty figures. TBIJ estimate 350 deaths occurred during which is lower compared to previous phases.⁵²⁸ This period was also marked by a number of new drone policies such as the *Export Policy for Military Unmanned Aerial Systems* – a framework that governed the international sales, transfer, and use of drones based on the 2014 US Conventional Arms Transfer Policy (in response to global drone exports and proliferation). In this period, Obama also signed on 1 July 2016 the *United States Policy on Pre-and-Post-Strike Measures to Address Civilian Casualties in US Operations Involving the Use of Force*, which required acknowledgment and

⁵²³ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, (2016) Obama’s covert drone wars in numbers: ten times more than Bush. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush>. See also Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2010). The year of the drone. *New America Foundation*, 24

⁵²⁴ Ibid

⁵²⁵ Siemion, R. (2017). Presidential Policy Guidance: Procedures for Approving Direct Action Against Terrorist Targets Located Outside The United States and Areas of Active Hostilities. *International Legal Materials*, 56(6), 1209-1225.

⁵²⁶ Siemion, R. (2017). Presidential Policy Guidance: Procedures for Approving Direct Action Against Terrorist Targets Located Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities. *International Legal Materials*, 56(6), 1209-1225. doi:10.1017/ilm.2017.4

⁵²⁷ Ibid

⁵²⁸ Ibid (TBIJ, 2016)

investigative reports for civilian drone casualties. It also stipulated drone strikes in targeted states be published on an annual basis.⁵²⁹

Next, the role of drones in supporting Obama's grand strategy is examined.

6.5 The Utility of Drones in Obama's Grand Strategy

One of the arguments of this chapter is that the broader escalation of drone strikes in targeted states under Obama played a double-edged role as a tactical tool for CT and statecraft. To examine the utility of drones in facilitating the hybrid grand strategy of the Obama administration, the following roles are identified and analysed: (i) instrument of statecraft, (ii) casualty aversion, (iii) leveraging tools, (iv) facilitating local and regional cooperation (v) broader counterterrorism goals.

6.5.1 Instrument of Statecraft

Drones played an obtrusive role as a primary and comparatively low-cost tool of Obama's CT strategy and for the instrumentation of his surrogate warfare.⁵³⁰ From this lens, drones not only expressed the power projection capabilities of Obama's administration but also became a component of retrenchment as espoused in his grand strategy. As McDonald and Parent assert, this contributed to "...decreasing the overall costs of foreign policy by redistributing resources away from peripheral commitments and toward core commitments (great power competition, counterterrorism, and promotion of a rules-based order)."⁵³¹

The reliance and broad escalation of drone strikes in seven targeted states – Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen – during Obama's two terms underscore the centrality of drones as a tactical CT tool. Thus, the shift to the greater use of drones under Obama cut down the cost of prosecuting the WOT (see table 10 below), which he had previously argued, overextended America's resources. The cost-benefit of drones is evident in the annual budget released from the US Office of Management and Budget. A comparison of the WOT spending between Bush and Obama highlights this. While Bush spent \$192.5 billion and \$235.6 billion FY2007 and FY 2008 for its total WOT, Obama spent \$192.5 billion for

⁵²⁹ White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2016) United States Policy on Pre-and-Post-Strike Measures to Address Civilian Casualties in US Operations Involving the Use of Force <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/01/executive-order-united-states-policy-pre-and-post-strike-measures>

⁵³⁰ Ibid (Kreig and Rickil, 2014).

⁵³¹ MacDonald, P. K., & Parent, J. M. (2011). Graceful decline? The surprising success of great power retrenchment. *International Security*, 35(4), 7-44.

FY2009 and \$181.0 billion for FY 2010.⁵³² This figure further dropped to \$49.6 billion by FY 2013 (see table 10 below). While a number of factors, such as drawing down American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, contributed to this, the role of drones in cutting down deployment costs in the total WOT spending cannot be overstated.

Table 10: National Defence Budget of Bush and Obama administration

FY	War on Terror Overseas contingency Operations (OCO) in (\$billion)	DoD Budget Increase (\$billion)	Total War on Terror (\$billion)
2001	22.9	6.5	31
2002	16.9	40.8	59.1
2003	72.5	36.7	111.9
2004	90.8	11.6	105.0
2005	75.6	23.6	102.3
2006	115.8	10.5	127.0
2007	166.3	20.9	192.5
2008	186.9	47.5	235.6
2009	153.1	34.2	197.1
2010	162.4	14.7	181.0
2011	158.8	0.3	162.4
2012	115.1	2.2	119.6
2013	82	-34.9	49.6
2014	85.2	0.8	88.0
2015	62.9	1.0	65.7
2016	58.9	24.3	89.7

Source: Congressional Research Service⁵³³

Though Obama’s combined defence spending across the years exceeded that of his predecessor, the bulk of his overall budget spent on CT operations in Iraq was lower compared to his predecessor. This supports the argument that the extensive use of drones in CT operations in Pakistan allowed the US, under Obama, to reassign America’s military assets to areas of active hostilities such as Libya while delegating more CT operations to surrogate weapons (drones).

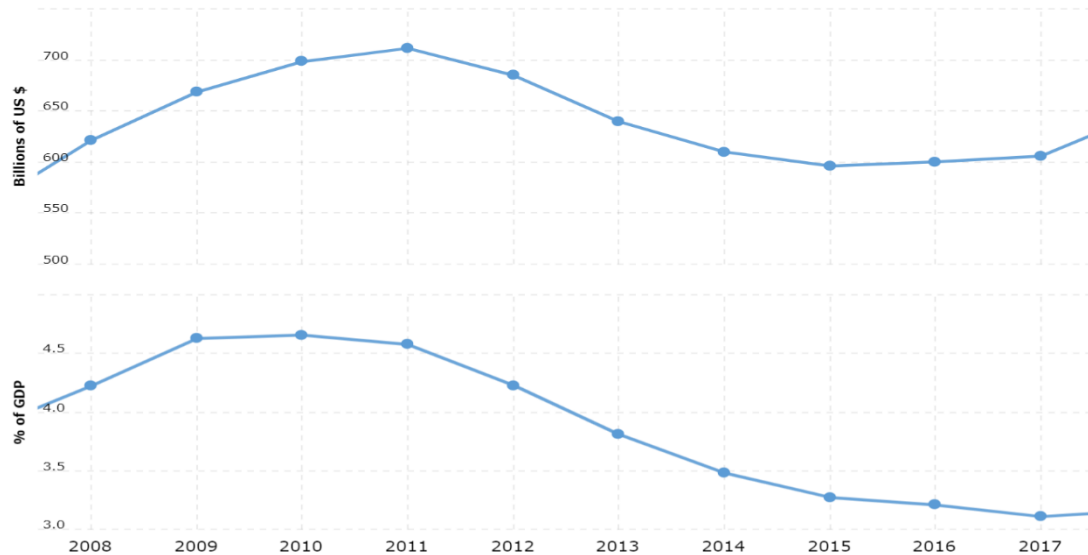
Furthermore, as figure 6 shows below, the total US military budget in relation to US GDP plummeted steadily under Obama (as part of the controversial ‘sequester’ or cap on military spending). While it may be an overstatement to expressly affirm that drones played a significant part in reducing overseas contingency operations (OCO) costs in the defence budget, the increased reliance on drones and the scaling back of CT military cost during his administration

⁵³² Congressional Research Service analysis of Department of Defense, Defense Budget Overview for FY2020, March 2019; DOD, National Defense Budget Estimates for FY2019.

⁵³³ Peters, H. M. (2019). Congressional Research Service. *US Department of Defence, 44116*.

occurred at the same time, suggesting a causal relationship. This is well articulated in the 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance* (DSG) that emphasized restraint as the watchword for US defence policy under Obama.

Figure 6: US Military spending under Obama in relation to GDP



Source: Macrotrends.⁵³⁴

6.5.2 Casualty Aversion Tool

The preceding argument fits with the casualty aversion theory in explaining the utility of drones under Obama. Casualty aversion recognizes the salience of public opinion, media coverage, and civilian casualty in assuaging or inflaming support for a war.⁵³⁵ It holds that the public tends to show approval or disapproval based on the balance of whether media coverage highlights its negative impact on the public or if their use does not elicit significant attention.⁵³⁶ The institutionalization of covert drone strikes is arguably a casualty aversion strategy under Obama – to prevent public or Congressional scrutiny on the impact of its drone operations – especially due to the civilian casualty figures. Obama’s speech delivered at National Defence University at Fort McNair in 2013 sums up the inherent casualty aversion tactic inherent in his administration’s preference for drones “...the very precision of drone strikes, and the necessary secrecy often involved in such actions can end up shielding our government from the public

⁵³⁴ Macrotrends (2019) US military defense budget and percentage of GDP (2008-2017). <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ranking/military-spending-defense-budget>

⁵³⁵ Schörnig, N. (2014). Liberal Preferences as an Explanation for Technology Choices. The Case of Military Robots as a Solution to the West’s Casualty Aversion. In *The Global Politics of Science and Technology-Vol. 2* (pp. 67-82). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.

⁵³⁶ Huntington, T. J. (2014). *Questioning Precision: Discourse Ethics and the Recognition of Non-combatants in Drone Warfare* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas).

scrutiny that a troop deployment invites. It can also lead a President and his team to view drone strikes as a cure-all for terrorism.”⁵³⁷

In the same speech, he further remarked that,

“Conventional airpower or missiles are far less precise than drones and are likely to cause more civilian casualties and more local outrage. The results would be more US deaths, more Black Hawks down, more confrontations with local populations, and an inevitable mission creep in support of such raids that could easily escalate into new wars.”⁵³⁸

Though public approval or support is not always a key determining factor for the conduct of wars – as the Vietnam War,⁵³⁹ there are several instances in history where it has. The American Civil War, for instance, caused significant civilian casualties, affected government approval ratings, and inevitably triggered a legitimacy crisis on the incumbent.⁵⁴⁰ The 2003 failed Iraq invasion is another classic case, as it caused a significant dip in President Bush’s approval ratings among the American public. A Pew Research survey conducted in 2008, sampling the perceptions of 1489 Americans on the Bush administration, indicated that a majority (64%) of the total respondents stated that the Bush administration was a failure, while 34 percent also gave poor approval ratings.⁵⁴¹ This was despite his CT efforts in his final year.

Drones under Obama serve as a casualty aversion strategy that recognizes the sensitivity of the US public and Congress to the blowback effect of US power projection in its CT operations. On this, Shane writes:

“...For a presidential candidate whose main ambitions lay in the domestic arena, drones seemed a godsend. It could lower the American profile in the Muslim world, depriving al-Qaeda of the foil that had allowed it to recruit an Iraqi branch of the terror network and reinvigorate anti-American passions. It offered

⁵³⁷ Office of the Press Secretary, White House (2013) Remarks by the President at the National Defence University, Fort McNair, Washington DC <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Gartner, S. S., & Segura, G. M. (1998). War, casualties, and public opinion. *Journal of conflict resolution*, 42(3), 278-300.

⁵⁴⁰ Gelpi, C., Feaver, P. D., & Reifler, J. (2009). *Paying the human costs of war: American public opinion and casualties in military conflicts*. Princeton University Press.

⁵⁴¹ Pew Research Center (Dec, 2008) Bush and Public Opinion: Reviewing the Bush years and the Public’s final verdict. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2008/12/18/bush-and-public-opinion/>

Obama the opportunity to take decisive action without the agony of American casualties.”⁵⁴²

A 2013 Pew Research surveying American citizens and Congressional support for drone strikes during the Obama administration draw close connections with the casualty aversion hypothesis (the implications for US grand strategy are explored deeper later in the thesis). The result showed that 56 percent of Americans supported the drone programme while 26 percent disapproved of it. In Congress, 68 percent of Republicans approved continued drone strikes, as did 58 percent of Democrats. Independents had a 31-50 percent margin for their drone approval support.⁵⁴³ Likewise, a Gallup survey in 2013 also reported that 65 percent supported the use of drones against terrorists.⁵⁴⁴ A Pew Research poll on Obama’s approval ratings in 2016 reported that 46 percent of Americans approved of Obama’s presidency (this figure is 12 percent higher than Bush and comparable to the 49 percent approval ratings given to Ronald Reagan in 1987).⁵⁴⁵ It is useful to note that these polling results were obtained when civilian casualty figures from drone strikes reported by investigative agencies in targeted states were at an all-time high (TBIJ put the figure at 1500 deaths) – these deaths are, however, not acknowledged by the CIA due to the nature of its covert operations.

6.5.3 Broadening the Latitude of Counterterrorism Cooperation

Drones were useful in facilitating local and regional CT cooperation with the government of targeted states, particularly in Yemen and Pakistan under Obama (the implication for US grand strategy is subsequently analysed). According to a 2018 Stimson Research report, drones “enabled direct action by foreign partners and allies by providing real-time intelligence to entities to enable them to undertake lethal action against terrorist suspects in their own territories.”⁵⁴⁶

The tactical utility of drones in providing ISR, containing local insurgencies, and eliminating HVTs helped in broadening the latitude of CT goals, especially with the domestic government. In Pakistan, for instance, drone strikes conducted in the FATA region with the support of the

⁵⁴² Shane, S. (2015). Drone strikes reveal uncomfortable truth: US is often unsure about who will die. *The New York Times*, 23, 2015.

⁵⁴³ Pew Research Center (2015) Public continue to back drone strikes. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/05/28/public-continues-to-back-u-s-drone-attacks/>

⁵⁴⁴ Gallup (2013) In the US, 65% support the use of drone attacks on terrorists abroad. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/161474/support-drone-attacks-terrorists-abroad.aspx>

⁵⁴⁵ Pew Research Center (2016) Presidential approval ratings from Ike to Obama. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/12/presidential-job-approval-ratings-from-ike-to-obama/>

⁵⁴⁶ Stimson Report (2018) Drones. <https://www.stimson.org/project/drones/>

Pakistani government achieved a two-fold result. One, it helped America in dismantling the Taliban formation, and two, it prevented the spread of al-Qaeda safe havens across the Pakistani border. For the Pakistani government, it enabled the deployment of its military into the “ungoverned spaces” of the FATA region and also prevented the scourge of local militants.⁵⁴⁷

Likewise, in Yemen, drones were valuable tools for rooting out AQAP HVTs and served as a policing mechanism for disrupting and tracking terrorist operations of local Islamist factions – which the Yemeni government proved incapable of containing due to the seizure of its capital, Sana’a.⁵⁴⁸ Further use of drones in Yemen proved instrumental in supporting the Yemeni military in expelling al-Qaeda forces who had claimed most part of the country in the wake of the Arab Spring. In Libya and Syria, drones supported local CT partners by providing aerial support for Syrian opposition groups. Though drone strikes spur public backlash and local discontent due to territorial violations and powerlessness against its strikes in targeted states, most drone strikes are done in conjunction with domestic governments and are usually based on reciprocal understanding. In Pakistan, for instance, the US provides civilian assistance programme and foreign aids, and in return, the Pakistani government allows drone strikes in designated strike zones in Pakistan. This leads to the next point.

6.5.4 Leverage tools

The word ‘leverage’ as used here refers to the political decision to use or hold off on potential drone strikes as a potential threat and a means of reassuring CT partners and in projecting America’s power position where necessary. The utility of drones as a tool for moderating the behaviour of CT partner states based on their “leveraging power” was evident under Obama. As Hazelton notes, “the lethality and precision of unmanned drone strikes create fear not only among terrorist groups but also by serving as a valuable tool for restraining US allies and partners in targeted states from acting provocatively, and for deterring US enemies from taking destabilizing actions.”⁵⁴⁹

In Afghanistan, for instance, following the phased withdrawal of American troops under Obama (from 183,300 in 2009 to 15,062 in 2016)⁵⁵⁰, the Afghan government, in partnership

⁵⁴⁷ Minhas, Z., & Qadir, A. The Us War on Terror and the Drone Attacks In FATA, Pakistan.

⁵⁴⁸ Hudson, L., Owens, C. S., & Callen, D. J. (2012). Drone Warfare in Yemen: Fostering Emirates through Counterterrorism? *Middle East Policy*, 19(3), 142.

⁵⁴⁹ Hazelton, J. L. (2017). Drone strikes and grand strategy: Toward a political understanding of the uses of unmanned aerial vehicle attacks in US security policy. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40(1-2), 68-91.

⁵⁵⁰ Department of Defence Contractor and Troop Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan: 2007-2017.

with the US, leveraged on drone strikes in preventing the Taliban from assuming power and in forestalling al-Qaeda threats and local insurgencies.⁵⁵¹ In Pakistan also, the decision to temporarily halt further drone strikes in the country following the targeted assassination of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 was negotiated between the US Ambassador to Pakistan and the US Secretary of State. The diplomatic decision and the resulting political approval reached with the Pakistani government demonstrated that drones were used to foster alliances that influenced targeting operations under Obama.

Having now considered the way drones support the US grand strategy under Obama, the next section discusses the way it has undermined it.

6.6 Dilemma of Obama's Drone Warfare for US grand strategy

Despite the political and tactical utility of drone strikes, as the preceding section has shown, the over-reliance and aftermath of drone strikes in targeted states engendered countervailing outcomes for Obama's grand strategy. This is evident in the rise of anti-American antipathy, mounting civilian deaths, and the blowback effect arising from the broader escalation of drone strikes in targeted states. These are further analysed.

6.6.1 Violation of Territorial Sovereignty and Anti-Americanism

A Pew Research conducted in 2013 surveying the impact of drone strikes and sovereignty violation in Pakistan showed that a majority of the respondents, mostly civilians (87%), believed that drones violate territorial sovereignty and cause visceral opposition among the local population.⁵⁵² (see figure 7 below).

Relatedly, a study investigating the impact of drone strikes in FATA, Pakistan, notes that "the intensification of drone strikes not only exposed the fault lines between the Pakistani Army and the democratically elected parliament, but culminated in the April 2012 political protest demanding for the immediate cessation of drone attacks inside Pakistan's territorial borders."⁵⁵³ A statement issued by the UN special rapporteur for Human Rights and Counterterrorism, Ben Emmerson, following a three-day visit to Pakistan in 2013 affirmed that "as a matter of international law, the US drone campaign in Pakistan is being conducted without

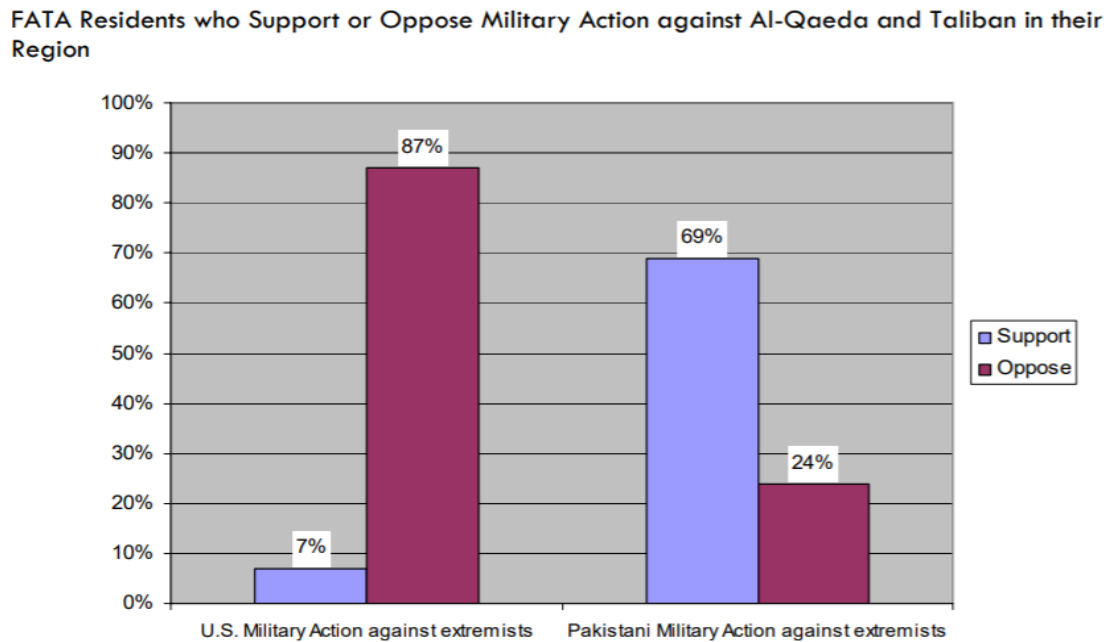
⁵⁵¹ Ibid (Clarks and Ricketts, 2017).

⁵⁵² Pew Research, 2013

⁵⁵³ Aslam, M. W. (2011). A critical evaluation of American drone strikes in Pakistan: legality, legitimacy and prudence. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 4(3), 313-329; Minhas, Z., & Qadir, A. The US War On Terror and the Drone Attacks In FATA, Pakistan.

the consent of the elected representatives of the people, or the legitimate government of the state.”⁵⁵⁴

Figure 7: FATA residents support for drone strikes



Source: Brookings Institution⁵⁵⁵

This statement contradicted the position made by Harold Koh and John Brennan, affirming the legality, constitutionality, and legitimacy of drone operations in targeted states. Apart from Pakistan, the expansion of drone strikes outside non-designated battlefields such as Libya, Syria, and Iraq, under the Obama administration not only violated the territorial sovereignty of these countries but inflamed anti-American sentiments by “upsetting local groups due to powerlessness over drone strikes, and cause fuelling political upheavals due to the perceived complicity of government in permitting these strikes.”⁵⁵⁶

The growing anti-American sentiment and visceral opposition due to the intensification of drone strikes in South Waziristan, Pakistan, during the Obama administration, culminated in a protest march in October 2012 in Mianwali, North Pakistan, led by Imran Khan, a former

⁵⁵⁴ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2013) Statements of the Special Rapporteur following meetings in Pakistan.

<https://newsarchive.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13146&LangID=E>

⁵⁵⁵ O'Hanlon, M. E., & Livingston, I. S. (2009). Pakistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Pakistan. Brookings.

⁵⁵⁶ Fair, C. C., Kaltenthaler, K., & Miller, W. J. (2014). Pakistani opposition to American drone strikes. *Political Science Quarterly*, 129(1), 1-33.

cricketer turned populist politician.⁵⁵⁷ The impact of the protest pushed anti-American drone politics to the forefront of Pakistani politics, the aftermath of which caused the former Pakistani President Ali Asif Zardari to distance himself from American drones for fear of complicity and civil action.⁵⁵⁸ Likewise, former Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani was vocal in his opposition to drone strikes asserting that it is “disastrous and prove counterproductive in efforts to isolate extremists and militants from the tribal population.”⁵⁵⁹ Furthermore, he shared the view that “the strikes create outrage and uproar among the people and drive a wedge between the government and the tribal population.”⁵⁶⁰

For Obama’s grand strategy that espoused American exemplarism and a “new beginning for the Muslim world,” the broader escalation of drone strikes was contrary to this ‘vision.’ This is because drones not only violate the territorial sovereignty of targeted states but generate a legitimacy crisis over their use within the local population by projecting the powerlessness of domestic government to dispel the negative impacts of drones within its borders. The blowback for the US grand strategy engenders hamstringing effects for further use of drones for CT operation in targeted states. For example, Pew Research in June 2012 revealed that 74 percent of Pakistanis consider the US as an enemy, and only 17 percent supported drone strikes if they are conducted with the support of their government.⁵⁶¹ Also, data published by the Brookings Institution (see figure 8 below) show that majority of the residents in FATA oppose the US military presence (84%) compared to fighters of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Arabs.

Thus, while drone strikes may have achieved Obama’s CT goals in the short term, evidence of anti-Americanism and visceral opposition creates a long-term problem for future CT missions in Pakistan. One that incites anger, opposition, and political crisis over the use of drones. In a speech, Hina Rabbani Khar, former Pakistani Foreign Minister, is quoted as saying:

“This has to be our war. We are the ones who have to fight against them (terrorist insurgents). As a drone flies over the territory of Pakistan, it becomes an American war again. And this whole logic of being our fight, in our own

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁵⁸ Aslam, M. W. (2011). A critical evaluation of American drone strikes in Pakistan: legality, legitimacy, and prudence. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 4(3), 313-329.

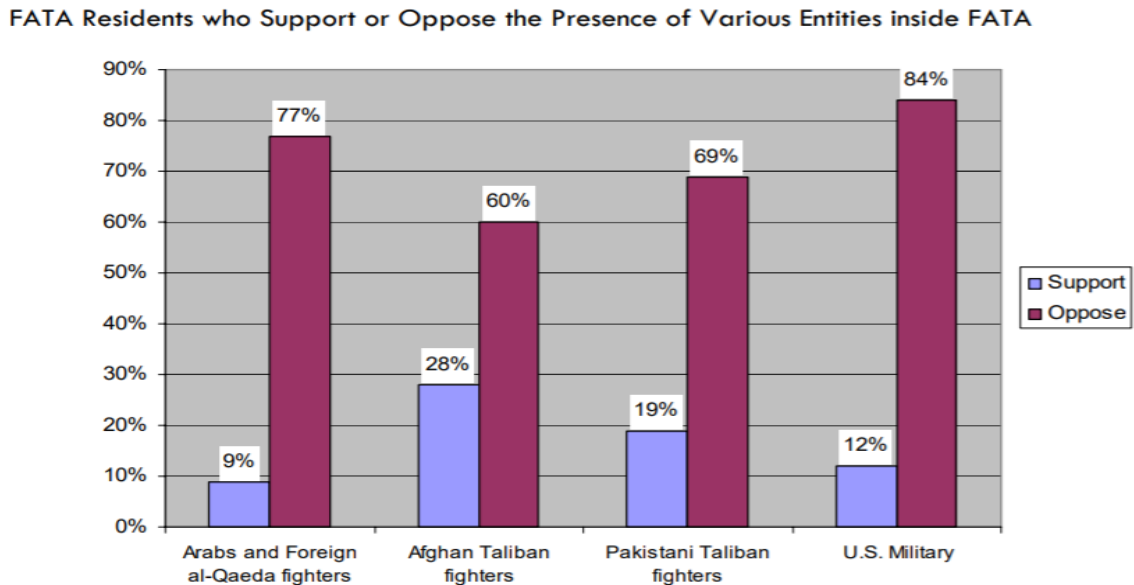
⁵⁵⁹ Yousuf Raza Gilani cited in Aslam, W. (2013). Drones and the issue of continuity in America’s Pakistan policy under Obama. In *Obama’s Foreign Policy* (pp. 149-171). Routledge.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid

⁵⁶¹ Pew Research Center (2012) Little Support in Pakistan for American Drones targeting Extremist Leaders. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2012/06/29/little-support-in-pakistan-for-american-drone-strikes-targeting-extremist-leaders/>

interest, is immediately put aside, and again it is a war which is imposed upon us.”⁵⁶²

Figure 8: FATA Resident support for US military compared to other entities



Source: Brookings⁵⁶³

In Yemen, CIA signature strikes that failed to distinguish fighters of a local secessionist movement and AQAP members angered the local population and inflamed anti-American perceptions of drone strikes in their country. Also, the 2 September 2012 drone strike incident in Ramaa, Yemen, that killed 12 people, as documented in the Alkarama report submitted to Human Rights Committee, was reported to have caused “anger within the local population.” The report also established that in the Radaa region, US extensive surveillance had caused the local resident to feel antipathy towards US drone use.⁵⁶⁴ Thus fuelling public demands to the Yemeni parliament to stop further drone use in the country.⁵⁶⁵

In sum, as Mark Moyar argues, the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of targeted states, in Obama’s drone campaign, “exposed the limits of implementing an existing hegemonic identity discourse in a reformulated vision in a new paradigm”⁵⁶⁶ This approximates

⁵⁶² Ibid (Aslam, 2013)

⁵⁶³ Ibid (O’Hanlon, M. E., & Livingston, I. S., 2009).

⁵⁶⁴ United Nations Treaty Database (n.p.d) US Drone strikes in Yemen.

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/USA/INT_CCPR_CSS_USA_16494_E.pdf

⁵⁶⁵ Anwar Altaj, Parliament asks the Government to forbid US drone strikes in Yemen, Yemeni Parliament Observatory, 15 December 2013. <http://www.yppwatch.org/news.php>

⁵⁶⁶ Moyar, M. (2015). *Strategic Failure: How President Obama's Drone Warfare, Defense Cuts, and Military Amateurism Have Imperiled America*. Simon and Schuster.

to Nysten Alexandria's argument that Obama's drone warfare in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, engendered the creation of lawless spaces in the WOT in targeted states. These 'lawless spaces,' according to his assessment, "creates a conducive environment for powerful international governments to designate frontier territories as "lawless" by rhetorically constructing them as exceptional legal spaces that do not deserve the same protections as areas ordered by sovereign ideals."⁵⁶⁷

6.6.2 Terrorist Recruitment and Retaliation

As figure 9 below shows, one of the impacts of sustained drone strikes in targeted states under Obama is its propaganda influence on terrorist retaliation. The figure shows that proportional increases in drone strike corresponded with the rise in terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The blowback effect is predicated on the notion that the "killing of suspected militants or civilians leads to marked radicalization of local populations to join or sympathize with al-Qaeda and its affiliate organizations."⁵⁶⁸ However, conditions for terrorist mobilization may vary widely within targeted states due to the difficulty in pinpointing the actual reasons individuals join local terrorist or militant groups. In the case of Pakistan and Yemen, evidence based on empirical studies in these states shows there is a strong correlation between increased targeted killing operations, heightened anger, and terrorist recruitment.⁵⁶⁹

In an interview with *the Guardian*, an anonymous Yemeni fighter stated, "if young men lose hope in the cause, they will be looking for an alternative."⁵⁷⁰ Furthermore, David Kilcullen, in a congressional hearing, affirmed the need to call off drone strikes not because they were ineffective as CT weapons for leadership decapitation and disrupting the command structure of terrorist organizations, but due to its potential recruitment effect on terrorist groups.⁵⁷¹ While the efficacy of drones as CT tools under Obama has weakened al-Qaeda's ability to re-group⁵⁷², the aftermath, as much literature suggests, emboldens terrorist willingness to retaliate and

⁵⁶⁷ Nysten, A. J. (2020). Frontier justice: international law and 'lawless' spaces in the "War on Terror". *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(3), 627-659.

⁵⁶⁸ Shah, A. (2018). Do US drone strikes cause blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and beyond. *International Security*, 42(04), 47-84.

⁵⁶⁹ Jaeger, D. A., & Siddique, Z. (2018). Are drone strikes effective in Afghanistan and Pakistan? On the dynamics of violence between the United States and the Taliban. *CESifo Economic Studies*, 64(4), 667-697. See also: Zimmerman, M. The Effect of US Drone Strikes on Terrorism in Pakistan and Yemen.

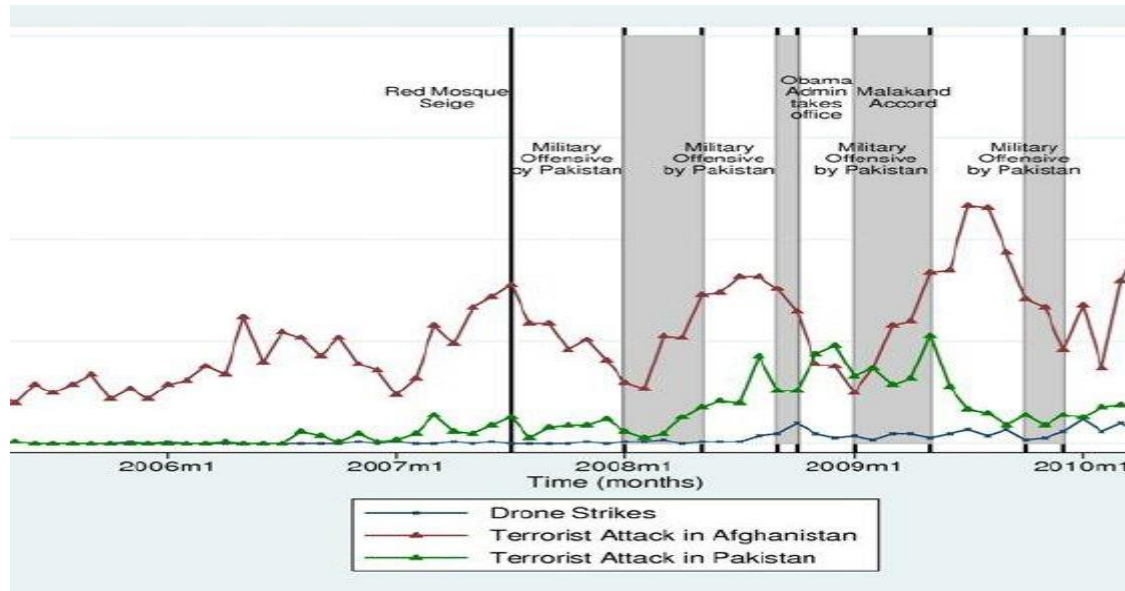
⁵⁷⁰ Greenfield, D., & Hausheer, S. A. (2014). *Do Drone Strikes in Yemen Undermine US Security Objectives?* Atlantic Council, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East.

⁵⁷¹ David Kilcullen, (2010) Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings on Afghanistan, 27th July 2010. <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/David%20Kilcullen.pdf>

⁵⁷² Johnston, P. B., & Sarbahi, A. K. (2016). The impact of US drone strikes on terrorism in Pakistan. *International Studies Quarterly*, 60(2), 203-219.

hinder any potential negotiations and settlements (this is further examined in subsequent chapters).

Figure 9: Drones strikes and terrorist retaliation in Pakistan and Afghanistan

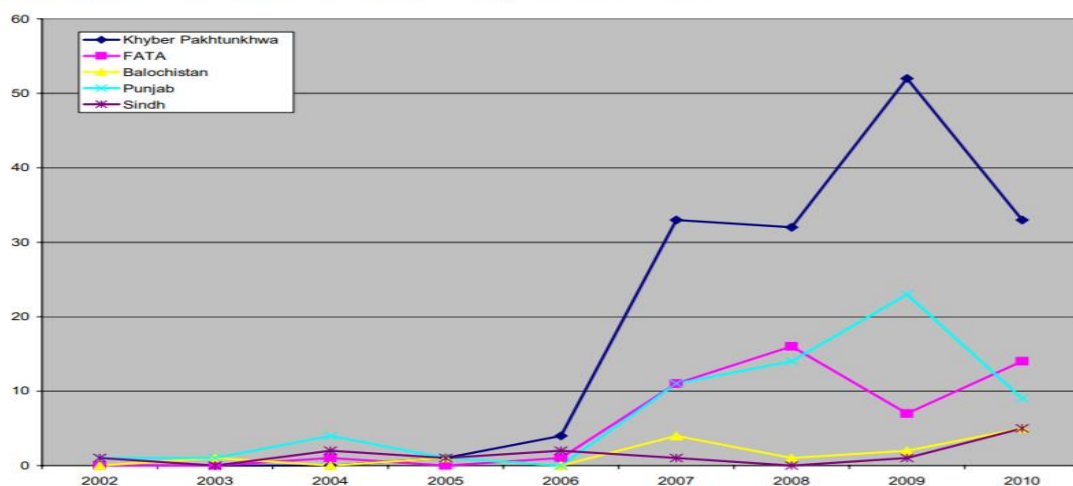


Source: Brookings Institution⁵⁷³

In Pakistan, as figure 10 below shows (note the spike in 2008 – 2009), the intensification of drone strikes increased the incidence of terrorist suicide attacks in different provinces in Pakistan.

Figure 10: Annual suicide attacks in Pakistan by province

Annual Number of Suicide Attacks by Province, 2002-2010⁴



Source: Brookings⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷³ Ibid (O'Hanlon, M. E., & Livingston, I. S. (2009).

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

Based on data published by Brookings Institution, the highest incidence of suicide attacks occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) – a stronghold of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorist group. The increase in suicide attacks corresponded with the surge in drone strikes during the Bush administration in 2008. However, under Obama, the level of suicide attacks increased to 52 in 2009. Though the drop in suicide attacks in Punjab and KP can be attributed to the efficacy of drones in disrupting terrorist attacks, the annual incidence of suicide attacks in retaliation to drones increased in other provinces – FATA, Balochistan, and Sindh. These provinces serve as bases for other terrorist formations in Pakistan, such as the Haqqani Network and al-Qaeda in Pakistan. In northern Pakistan, studies have reported civilians been tortured, bludgeoned, or killed by local militant groups such as the Khorasan Mujahedin in Waziristan as a retaliatory attack for supplying local intelligence that is used in coordinating US drone attacks.⁵⁷⁵

Likewise, in Somalia, the October 2011 bombing of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) compound in Mogadishu by al-Shabaab was conducted as a retaliation to the mounting levels of drone strikes against their members.⁵⁷⁶ Also, in Yemen, a US drone strike that killed Jabir al-Shabwani, a popular Sheik and Deputy Governor of the Maarib province, stirred retaliatory actions by AQAP that led to the bombing of critical oil installations. Yemen was estimated to lose nearly \$1 billion as 70 percent of its country's budget depended on oil.⁵⁷⁷

A study by Luqman Saeed and colleagues establish the connections between drone strikes and suicide attacks in Pakistan under Obama. Their study, based on a comparative assessment of data available in the different databases of TBIJ, NAF, and LWJ, reviewed 430 drone strikes incidents in Pakistan against the rate of suicide attacks published by the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST).⁵⁷⁸ Their investigation concluded that drone strikes in Pakistan elevated rates of suicide attacks with an average of 20 deaths in a one-month period compared to 5 deaths in a month, in the absence of drone strikes. Though their study acknowledges the incapacitating effect of Obama drone warfare in reducing the incidence of suicide attacks in Pakistan (28 suicide attacks in 2013, 19 in 2014, 14 in 2015, and 10 in

⁵⁷⁵ Boyle, M. J. (2013). The costs and consequences of drone warfare. *International affairs*, 89(1), 1-29.

⁵⁷⁶ Hudson, L., Owens, C. S., & Callen, D. J. (2012). Drone Warfare in Yemen: Fostering Emirates through Counterterrorism? *Middle East Policy*, 19(3), 142.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Saeed L., Spagat M, Overton I., (2019) Drone strikes and suicide attacks in Pakistan: an analysis <https://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Drone-strikes-and-Suicide-bombings-in-Pakistan-examined-1.pdf>

2016)⁵⁷⁹, the perpetuation of retaliatory attacks underlined the nexus between drone strikes and suicide bombings. The study also determined that between January 2011 and January 2019, 182 confirmed drone strikes in Pakistan resulted in 182 suicide attacks. Whereas in Afghanistan, 206 suicide bombings occurred after 5833 drone strikes, and in Yemen, 89 suicide attacks occurred after 323 drone strikes within the period.⁵⁸⁰ This underlines the paradox of the security argument made earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, though Obama espoused a strategic vision of America's exemplarism in world affairs, the continued reliance of drones in targeted states engendered countervailing impacts that served to undermine the legitimatization of his policy – by de-emphasizing the utility of non-military aspects of US power in dealing with terrorist threats.

6.6.3 Mounting Civilian Casualty

As the preceding analysis shows, the civilian casualty figure from drone strikes in targeted states surged under Obama. After two terms and over 540 drone strikes, available data published by TBIJ, LWJ, and NAF estimate that, on average, 2250 civilian deaths (in all seven targeted states) had occurred.⁵⁸¹ This was confirmed by the 18-month inquiry report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, affirming that the “use of drones for CT operations has caused disproportionate levels of civilian casualties.”⁵⁸² Thus, while drone weaponry may be precise in itself, the human operator may not. There are a number of useful literature⁵⁸³ on the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its effect on drone operators (but this is beyond the scope of this thesis).

The CIA, during Obama's administration, reported low civilian figures. For example, the agency published that between May 2010 and August 2011, there were zero civilian drone casualties and 600 militant deaths.⁵⁸⁴ In the same period, data from NAF and TBIJ estimated

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Byman, D. (2013). Why drones work: the case for Washington's weapon of choice. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 32.

⁵⁸² United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2013) Mr. Ben Emmerson, former Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism <https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Terrorism/Pages/BenEmmerson.aspx>

⁵⁸³ Chappelle, W., Goodman, T., Reardon, L., & Thompson, W. (2014). An analysis of post-traumatic stress symptoms in United States Air Force drone operators. *Journal of anxiety disorders*, 28(5), 480-487. See also, Chappelle, W. L., McDonald, K. D., Prince, L., Goodman, T., Ray-Sannerud, B. N., & Thompson, W. (2014). Symptoms of psychological distress and post-traumatic stress disorder in United States Air Force “drone” operators. *Military medicine*, 179(suppl_8), 63-70.

⁵⁸⁴ Plaw, A., Fricker, M. S., & Williams, B. G. (2011). Practice makes perfect? The changing civilian toll of CIA drone strikes in Pakistan. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 5(5/6), 51-69.

85 civilian deaths from drone strikes.⁵⁸⁵ The reason for the disparity is not surprising; one, the CIA, before PPG rules, ran a covert and unacknowledged signature drone operation that did not require public disclosure of strike data. Two, reporting a higher death count may elicit a negative reaction from the American public and the international community. However, evidence from a number of organizations investigating the incidents of civilian deaths following drone strikes in the Obama era provides the closest empirical data sets on death counts. While there may be diverse estimates, these data set consistently point to and report higher civilian deaths than those published by the CIA or any other American agency.

The adverse effect of civilian deaths for the US grand strategy under Obama lies in its violations of international laws of war requiring adherence to the principles of proportionality and distinction.⁵⁸⁶ Hence, discrediting the allure of America's exemplarism in targeted states by laying a negative precedent in the way it projects and uses its hard power. Though two separate arguments can be made that: Obama's PPG changed the nature of drone operations in his second term and that civilian casualties are inevitable in warfare. The challenge of civilian casualty due to drone strikes is the countervailing impact it engenders – such as retaliatory attacks and antipathy within the Muslim world – which America may be unable to dispel in the long term. Thus, while drones may be effective in the short term, their aftermath in targeted states is likely to outweigh their tactical and strategic relevance as a CT tool due to the inherent paradox linked with their use.

6.6.4 Counterterrorism Paradox

Counterterrorism policies expected to improve security often have counterproductive and paradoxical effects.⁵⁸⁷ This means actions taken by governments to prevent terrorist threats can undermine anticipated gains.⁵⁸⁸ For instance, we could imagine the security of the US homeland being strengthened through drone strikes while the security of US allies in the region potentially being reduced when terrorist retaliation and recruitment levels rise.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid (NAF, TBIJ, 2015)

⁵⁸⁶ Hajjar, L. (2019). The Counterterrorism War Paradigm versus International Humanitarian Law: The Legal Contradictions and Global Consequences of the US "War on Terror". *Law & Social Inquiry*, 44(4), 922-956.

⁵⁸⁷ Wolfendale, J. (2007). Terrorism, security, and the threat of counterterrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30(1), 75-92.

⁵⁸⁸ Field, A. (2017). The dynamics of terrorism and counterterrorism: understanding the domestic security dilemma. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(6), 470-483.

Cohen and his colleagues⁵⁸⁹ identify six main principles that underscore the paradoxes of COIN: (i) the more you protect your force, the less secure you are, (ii) the more force you use, the less secure you are, (iii) the best weapons for counterinsurgency do not fire bullets, (iv) them (people in the targeted states) doing something poorly is better than us doing it well, (v) if a tactic is not always a guarantee it would always work, and lastly, (vi) tactical success guarantees nothing.

Obama's drone warfare has reflected a CT paradox – which construes the use of drones in targeted states, as engendering contradictory outcomes for stated CT US policy – by creating more problems than they solve. This is closely approximate to all of Cohen's six COIN principles noted above. As George Mason, Professor Audrey Kurth Cronin avers, “terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda in Pakistan should be dealt as a COIN problem and not a CT issue.”

⁵⁹⁰ Her argument is premised on the view that while drones may be effective in leadership decapitation and disrupting terrorist formations, it places less emphasis on countering individual recruitment and, by extension, the retaliatory attacks that serve to further inflame terrorism. However, while replacing drones with US troops for CT is a devil's alternative, the continued reliance on drones under Obama potentially ignored other longer-term strategies that can foil the conditions that perpetuate terrorism and further disregards America's soft power.

Furthermore, while the technical and precision capabilities of drones diminish the practicalities of the aforementioned COIN paradoxes, as it removes the soldier from the equation and introduces remote warfare, it remains a deeply problematic approach for CT operations. The paradoxes of Obama's drone warfare are manifested in the following ways:

- (i) It eradicates the possibility of acquiring useful human intelligence from killed terrorist targets. As Daniel Byman acknowledges, “even though they work, killings are a poor second choice to arrests. Dead men tell no tales and thus are no help in anticipating the next attack or informing about broader terrorist activities.”⁵⁹¹ He submits that cooperative CT engagement with the government facilitating the arrest of a terrorist is a better alternative than outrightly killing them.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁹ Cohen, E., Crane, C., Horvath, J., & Nagl, J. (2006). *Principles, imperatives, and paradoxes of counterinsurgency*. Johns Hopkins University of Washington DC School of Advanced International Studies.

⁵⁹⁰ Cronin, A. K. (2013). Why drones fail: when tactics drive strategy. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 44.

⁵⁹¹ Byman, D. (2006). The decision to begin talks with terrorists: Lessons for policymakers. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29(5), 403-414.

⁵⁹² Ibid

- (ii) Drones as CT tools rarely lead to the complete demise of terrorist groups. This is evident in the further proliferation of terrorist groups since 9/11 despite the ramping up of CT operations. In targeted states, drones have not caused the demise of al-Qaeda, TTP, or its affiliates.
- (iii) Decentralized groups like AQAP make it difficult to ascertain the command and hierarchy of their organization and in selecting targets for signature strikes. As a consequence, drone strikes have killed more LVTs than HVTs due to the terrorist command and hierarchy structure that makes personality strikes difficult. Data published by NAF estimate that, of the 1260 militants that have been killed by drone strikes, only 36 have been leaders of al-Qaeda, Taliban, or its affiliates.⁵⁹³ Benedict Wilkinson, explaining the flawed logic of drone strikes in Yemen, argues that “when drones kill an AQAP leader, it increases local support for the group rather than diminish it.”⁵⁹⁴
- (iv) Terrorist groups are adjusting to drone strikes and devising mechanisms to evade strikes or stay undetected from their missiles. This goes to show that while drones may be effective, in the long-term terrorist groups may be capable of developing evasion strategies that make the precise target more difficult.

The point is, while drones from a strategic and tactical perspective are useful CT tools, the aftermath of drone strikes emboldens and empowers terrorists in two ways. First, the muscular American CT response gives credibility to terrorist organizations by conferring a legitimacy that it poses a significant threat to the US and warrants drone strikes.⁵⁹⁵ This credibility can have propaganda value for terrorist mobilization and reinforces the notion that US drone strikes represent a validation of their threat and cause. Second, the blowback effect associated with drones works at cross-purposes for the US government in targeted states when terrorist resentment, public backlash, international criticism, and antipathy grows. The countervailing effect of Obama’s activist drone policy is the negative precedent it sets for future American presidents and the risk that long-term strategic deployment of drones without established rules of engagement ratified under the law may harm the integrity of US CT operations.

⁵⁹³ Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (Eds.). (2012). *Talibanistan: negotiating the borders between terror, politics, and religion*. Oxford University Press.

⁵⁹⁴ Benedict Wilkinson, (2012) The Flawed Logic of US Drone Strikes in Yemen <http://blogs.org.uk/journal/articles/flawed-logic-us-drone-strikes-yemen>

⁵⁹⁵ Coyne, C. J., & Hall, A. R. (2018). The drone paradox: Fighting terrorism with mechanized terror. *The Independent Review*, 23(1), 51-67.

6.6.5 Drone Proliferation among Non-state Actors

Under Obama, drones proliferated significantly, particularly among non-state actors (see table 11 below). As Ash Rossiter notes, “several non-state actors incorporated drones into their operations by acquiring over-the-counter UAVs and in some cases militarizing them by imitating US drone operations.”⁵⁹⁶ In Syria, ISIS established its own drone formation named the – Unmanned Aircraft of the Mujahedeen – to coordinate drone assaults (again, the issue of proliferation of drones will be returned to in chapter 9). Though these drones are not full military-grade types, it is weaponized with explosives were used to run ISR operations in Eastern Syria and Northern Iraq.⁵⁹⁷ In 2016, ISIS used these drones to kill two Kurdish fighters.⁵⁹⁸ In Libya, a group of anti-Gaddafi rebels in Misrata employed small scout drones in organizing a rapid raid in the capital, Tripoli, in 2011. In Yemen, Houthi Rebels have employed unmanned maritime drones in attacking Saudi Navy sailors.⁵⁹⁹ Hezbollah has also deployed drones severally into Israeli air space between 2004 and 2006. Also, in 2016, the group launched an attack in rebel positions in Syria using quadcopter drones.

One common feature of all these examples of drone use among non-state actors is that it occurred under Obama. The over-reliance of drones for Obama’s CT operations inadvertently demonstrated to non-state actors the capabilities of their weaponry. Considering the impact of globalization in the present world order, it has allowed the unchecked diffusion and weaponization of commercial off-the-shelf drones by the very targets of drone strikes. Apart from non-state actors, regional actors such as Iran also have drone capabilities. This was demonstrated in 2014 when Hamas (a militant group) in Palestine used Iran-made drones (known as *Ababil*) for ISR and armed operations along neighbouring Israeli borders.

Resurgent powers such as China have developed drone capabilities, and this grew predominantly under the Obama era. For example, though China’s first drone – the Pterosaur 1, part of the Wing Loong series – were first operational in 2005, most of its new generation drones such as the Pterodactyl 1, Sky Saker, Wu-Zhuang Wu-Ren (WJ-1), and Gong-Ji-Wu-Ren-Ji (GJ-1) which are mainly attack drones, were made, and exported from 2014 onwards.⁶⁰⁰ The drone *arms race* under Obama embodies Tang’s security dilemma theory – by causing a

⁵⁹⁶ Rossiter, A. (2018). Drone usage by militant groups: exploring variation in adoption. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 34(2), 113-126.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid

⁵⁹⁸ See New American Foundation, (2018) on Non-state actors and drones

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰⁰ Michel, A. H., Gettinger, D., & Michel, H. (2018). Drone year in review: 2017. *Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College*.

security spiral among state and non-state actors. Thus, Obama’s drone warfare, as Kilcullen argues, “has demonstrated to rival competitors America’s technological advantages.”⁶⁰¹

Table 11: Non-state actors drone capabilities

Non-State Group	Country	Year of Acquisition	Type of Drones
Islamic State in Syria	Syria	January 2017 circa	Non-military grade quadcopters and small fixed-wing drones armed with explosives
Houthi Rebels	An Iran-backed rebel group in Yemen	January 30, 2017, circa	Armed unmanned maritime craft, AeroVironment RQ-11 Raven, Semi-military grade drones (Qasif 1, which resembled Iran’s Ababil 2).
Hezbollah	Lebanese militant group	2004	Misrad 1 military-grade surveillance drones, small quadcopters armed with explosives
Hamas	Palestinian Rebel group	2016	Iranian-made Ababil drones, surveillance quadcopters
Anti-Gaddafi Rebels	Libya	2011 circa	Aeryon scout drones

Source: NAF⁶⁰²

6.6.6 The Restraint Paradox

Restraint supporters advocate for the reduction of existing US defense commitments by minimizing forward-deployment of troops, the frequency of using force, and the cost of warfare.⁶⁰³ It is an embedded logic that by lowering the US military footprint in overseas territories, the unnecessary wars of the Bush-era would be drawn down during the Obama administration. However, rather than reduce the cost of CT operations for the US, the over-reliance on drones under Obama increased it. As our analysis shows, Obama’s military spending more than quadrupled that of Clinton though 7.2 percent less than President Bush’s war expenditure (on Iraq and Afghanistan wars).⁶⁰⁴ According to a report published by NAF, between 2009 and October 2012, the US engaged in 1,160 weapons releases from drones which more than doubled the amount released during Bush’s entire presidency in the Af-Pak region.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, (Kilcullen, 2013)

⁶⁰² New America Foundation (2018). World of Drones: Non-state actors with drone capabilities. <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/world-drones/non-state-actors-with-drone-capabilities/>

⁶⁰³ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2019). Realism and Restraint. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, (14), 12-31.

⁶⁰⁴ Cox, R. W. (2014). The Military-Industrial complex and US military spending after 9/11. *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, 2(2), 5.

⁶⁰⁵ New America Foundation (2014)

Furthermore, during his candidacy, Obama criticized the heavy cost America pays for conducting warfare and humanitarian missions during his presidential campaigns, yet, after his election, more money was spent on war than during Bush's presidency (\$866 billion and \$811 billion respectively). The cost of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria amounts to \$4.79 trillion and counting, the Watson Institute reports. This number is thrice the figure spent by Bush (between 8-11% of the defense budget).⁶⁰⁶

Robert Lieber puts it more lightly,

“Obama’s doctrine marked with inconsistency symbolized by the gap between identity and policy evident in his use of force. Thus, in ‘leading from behind in Libya, surging and, at the same time, announcing to withdraw in Afghanistan and to set up, but failing to militarily enforce ‘red lines’ in Syria, and his questionable policies seemed to question rather than confirm America’s singular exceptionalism and the country’s unique role as liberal hegemon.”⁶⁰⁷

Hence, Obama’s grand strategy, contrary to facilitating restraint, emphasized the same hard power muscularism championed by his predecessor – and demonstrated in his administration’s increased defence spending for US CT and broader military operations.

However, while drones have been effective in reducing the size of conventional forces in the Middle East, and effectively transferring battlefield operations to advanced technological warfare systems, the Pivot to Asia strategy under Obama made it “take its eyes off the ball” in the region, with early troop withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. This inadvertently caused the rise of ISIS, which filled the void left by al-Qaeda. Hence, while restraint reduced the cost of war by ensuring minimal soldier deployment, in the Middle East, it created under Obama new CT threats with the further spread of the ISIS caliphate into Syria and Afghanistan (Khorasan province).

6.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the foreign policy of the Obama administration has been critically assessed, and the evolution of his doctrine analysed. This chapter examined two key arguments on the role of drones for US grand strategy under Obama. First, it served as a double-edged instrument for facilitating the restraint side of the US grand strategy on the one hand and the offensive aspects

⁶⁰⁶ Watson Institute, (2018)

⁶⁰⁷ Lieber, R. J. (2016). *Retreat and its consequences: American foreign policy and the problem of world order*. Cambridge University Press.

on the other. Second, despite the political and strategic utility of drones under Obama, it engendered two paradoxes (restraint and security) that undermined rather than furthered its overall grand strategy. This is based on the negative precedent of his drone programme, which contributed to incentivizing drone proliferation, spawning blowback from anti-Americanism, increasing terrorist retaliation, and undermining the 'exceptionalism' espoused by Obama. These arguments were evaluated from the prism of Obama's drone warfare and the aftermath of drone strikes in targeted states based on the available data set. In the final assessment, the overall impact of Obama's grand strategy worsened America's exceptionalism due to the dilemma generated by drone strikes and the weakness implicit in the articulation of his grand strategy. In the next chapter, the role of drones in the grand strategy of the Trump administration is explored.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Trump Administration, Drones and US Grand Strategy

“From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward, it is going to be only America First.”⁶⁰⁸

7.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the role of drones in the grand strategy of Donald Trump’s administration. It is the argument of this chapter that the outsourcing, deregulation, and expansion in the use of drones in targeted states under Trump served strategic purposes for his counterterrorism statecraft. The strategic ends, as this chapter examines, are consistent with the doctrine of his administration which espoused a “nativist, protectionist, and nationalist-isolationist vision for the US under the populist slogan ‘American First,’ that challenges the post-Cold War Washington’s consensus on liberal hegemony.”⁶⁰⁹ However, like successive US administrations post 9/11, while drone strikes were effective in exterminating terrorist threats, the aftermath of their intensified use in targeted states engendered inimical outcomes for Trump’s grand strategy. This was manifest in the mounting civilian deaths, growing antipathy, and terrorist retaliation in targeted states.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it deciphers the doctrine of the Trump administration. The second part analyses the elements of Trump’s grand strategy and its intersection with drone warfare. The third part unpacks the continuities and discontinuities of Trump’s drone warfare. The final part assesses how drones use under Trump undermined his grand strategy.

7.1 Deciphering Trump’s Doctrine

The doctrine of the Donald Trump administration has been described as a hodgepodge of different American foreign policy traditions offering varying suggestions for Washington’s role in the world.⁶¹⁰ Many of these analyses emerge from Trump’s rhetorical and unorthodox approach to statecraft – that combined a Jacksonian strategic culture that espoused populist views and military strength with recrudescing isolationism – that is diametric to primacy but

⁶⁰⁸ White House (2017) Inaugural Address of the 45th President of the United States.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid (Brands, 2017).

⁶¹⁰ Renshon, S. A. (2020). The Trump Doctrine and Conservative American Nationalism. In *The Trump Doctrine and the Emerging International System* (pp. 3-38). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham; See also: Haines, J. R. (2017). Divining a “Trump Doctrine”. *Orbis*, 61(1), 125-136. Also see Yarhi-Milo, K. (2018). After credibility: American foreign policy in the Trump era. *Foreign Aff.*, 97

consistent with Washington's post-Cold War tradition on liberal hegemony.⁶¹¹ (this is elaborated upon later in this chapter).

Five identifiable traditions are consistent with the foreign policy of the Trump administration that has been identified in the recent academic literature as the disavowal of liberal internationalism, principled realism, neo-isolationism, Jacksonianism, populist sovereignty, and conservative American nationalism.⁶¹² Ville Sinkkonen's characterization of Trump's doctrine captures some of these elements.

“The “Trump doctrine” has been built in contradistinction to liberal internationalism, containing civilizational tropes drawn from neoconservatism, and is underpinned by a zero-sum materialist worldview borrowed from realism. Trump's approach to the international is also transactional, which means he intermittently draws upon (neo) isolationist themes.”⁶¹³

On liberal internationalism, Trump's doctrine has roots in some of the 9/11 traditions of his predecessors. Like George W. Bush's offensive liberal strategy that extols democracy promotion but eschews multilateralism and favours unipolarity, Trump's internationalism is assertive of America's economic, military, and post-Cold War hegemony but rejects the international institutions, binding treaties, and agreements that facilitate it.⁶¹⁴ This is akin to President Nixon's administration's emphasis on American national interest as the basis to ensure its greater power in waging renewed and heightened competition in world affairs.⁶¹⁵ The tenets of Trump's liberal internationalism were captured in the remarks of his Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, while delivering a speech at Brussels Forum. He notes that while Trump seeks to build a new liberal order that asserts American leadership and democratic values, it is distrustful of international institutions.⁶¹⁶ This has raised speculations similar to Obama's first term on the retrenchment of Washington's power position in the post-Cold War order and the

⁶¹¹ Clarke, M., & Ricketts, A. (2017). Donald Trump and American foreign policy: The return of the Jacksonian tradition. *Comparative Strategy*, 36(4), 366-379. 68. Cha, T., & Seo, J. (2018). Trump by Nixon: Maverick presidents in the years of US relative decline. *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 30(1), 79-96. Also see, Steff, R., & Tidwell, A. (2020). Understanding and evaluating Trump's foreign policy: a three-frame analysis. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 1-26.

⁶¹² Sinkkonen, V. (2018). Contextualizing the “Trump Doctrine”: Realism, Transactionalism and the Civilizational Agenda. *FIIA Analysis*, (10).

⁶¹³ Ibid, pp. 6

⁶¹⁴ Steff, R., & Tidwell, A. (2020). Understanding and evaluating Trump's foreign policy: a three-frame analysis. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 1-26.

⁶¹⁵ Cha, T., & Seo, J. (2018). Trump by Nixon: Maverick presidents in the years of US relative decline. *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 30(1), 79-96.

⁶¹⁶ United States Mission to the European Union (June 25, 2020) Secretary Pompeo's Remarks at Brussels Forum. <https://useu.usmission.gov/secretary-pompeos-remarks-at-brussels-forum/>

possibilities his stance will alter the existing balance of power in the global security landscape. For instance, Trump reduced America's funding for the United Nations, backed out and sought to re-negotiate many long-standing multilateral trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), pushed for Russia's readmission to the G-7, and rejects climate change as a pressing issue (by backing out of the 2015 Paris Agreement)

On isolationism, Trump's doctrine exemplified a transactional approach to international affairs, akin to the Jacksonian isolationist approach of the 1930s – that advocated an American foreign policy that is uninvolved and partly disentangled from international politics.⁶¹⁷ Clarke and Ricketts conceptualized Trump's 'transnationalism' as his inclination to "boil politics down to discrete deals and holding an unnerving belief in his ability to strike the best bargain, defined in accordance with his perception of America's national interests; in the international order."⁶¹⁸ This was boldly expressed in his 2016 foreign policy speech where he promised to put 'America First,' increase its defence spending, end US global humanitarian missions, and terminate the lopsided existing security relationship with allies. He avers:

“No country has ever prospered that failed to put its own interests first. Both our friends and our enemies put their countries above ours, and we, while being fair to them, must start doing the same. We will no longer surrender this country and its people to the false song of globalism. The nation-state remains the true foundation for happiness and harmony. I am skeptical of international unions that tie us up and bring America down.”⁶¹⁹

On principled realism, Trump's doctrine manifests strong realist tenets that accentuate a muscular economic and military approach and a zero-sum view of intra strategic competition. This is reflected in his 2017 *National Security Strategy* that construed the international sphere as an “arena of competition between sovereign states, engaged in an incessant competition over quantifiable power resources, which takes place in various domains, of which great powers are the most important.”⁶²⁰ Pompeo, in a speech delivered on Washington's policy toward Latin

⁶¹⁷ Wasiński, M. J. (2016). Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Stances in the Election Campaign: Unpredictability and Neo-isolationism.

⁶¹⁸ Clarke, M., & Ricketts, A. (2017). Donald Trump and American foreign policy: The return of the Jacksonian tradition.

⁶¹⁹ Donald Trump, “Trump on Foreign Policy,” *The National Interest*, April 27, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/trump-foreign-policy-15960>

⁶²⁰ National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017). Available at <https://ge.usembassy.gov/2017-national-security-strategy-united-states-america-president/#:~:text=The%202017%20NSS%20focuses%20on,Strength%3B%20and%20Enhance%20American%20Influence.>

America on 2 December 2019, re-affirmed this when he summarized Trump’s foreign policy as consisting of three core principles: realism, restraint, and respect, or altogether known as “principled realism.”⁶²¹

The NSS document defined ‘principled realism’ as a combination of realism and idealism – one that emphasized the maximization of state power in an anarchic and competitive system and respect for American principles and how other countries uphold theirs. This is equally embodied in the four pillars of the NSS, namely: (i) protecting the homeland, (ii) promoting American prosperity, (iii) preserving peace through strength and, (iv) advancing American influence.⁶²² President Trump invoked this principle in the relocation of America’s Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, averring “the foreign policy of the United States as grounded in principled realism, which begins with an honest acknowledgement of plain facts.”⁶²³ Trump appeared to give a justification for this approach in his second address to the UN General Assembly when he declared America “will no longer be held dogmas, discredited ideologies and so-called experts who have been proven wrong over the years, time and time again.”⁶²⁴

Though Trump’s principled realism has been critiqued as a “mere slogan,” “bumper sticker,” and a “shallow doctrine” without any meaningful foreign policy depth to it,⁶²⁵ for Trump and his team, the term is more than a catchphrase and an expression of America’s predominance in the arena of competition among sovereign states over quantifiable power resources.⁶²⁶

On populist sovereignty, Trump’s foreign policy thinking espoused a doctrine of political action and government priorities that is premised on political instincts.⁶²⁷ Populist sovereignty under Trump’s doctrine, as Aaron Ettinger argues, is a “reformulation of sovereignty along the lines of state-society relations embedded in a vision of an international order composed of

⁶²¹ United States Mission to the European Union (June 25, 2020) Secretary Pompeo’s Remarks at Brussels Forum. <https://useu.usmission.gov/secretary-pompeos-remarks-at-brussels-forum/>

⁶²² Ibid pp 1

⁶²³ White House, (2017) Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-jerusalem/>

⁶²⁴ White House (2017) Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>

⁶²⁵ Kirkey Sharon (2018) Is Donald Trump’s ‘Principled Realism’ a real doctrine? Available at <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/is-donald-trumps-principled-realism-a-real-doctrine>

⁶²⁶ Sinkkonen, V. (2018). Contextualizing the “Trump Doctrine”: Realism, Transactionalism and the Civilizational Agenda. *FIIA Analysis*, (10).

⁶²⁷ Ettinger, A. (2020). Principled realism and populist sovereignty in Trump’s foreign policy. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(3), 410-431.

independent and strong countries free from restraint; on their own course of action.”⁶²⁸ In essence, it is sovereignty that views government matters as serving the interest of its own people and should be prioritized.

Stanley Rehnson describes Trump’s doctrine as “conservative American nationalism” to explain the intersection between his psychology, thinking, orientation to the use of force, and view about the world. He identified five key elements that characterized it. First, it places America first in its policies. The second is that it exalts American national identity as the basis for its interaction with the world. Third, it places a high premium on America’s strengths, and, fourth, it champions the goals of highly selective engagement with the world. Fifth, it espouses the doctrine of maximum repeated pressure in pursuit of maximum tactical and strategic goals.⁶²⁹

Thus, from the preceding analysis, Trump’s doctrine can be summed as a composite of “principled realism” with isolationist undertones – that embraces a conservative American nationalism and a zero-sum worldview – premised on a materialist conception of power, and international order and a recrudescence of populist sovereignty.

7.1.1 Does Trump have a Coherent Doctrine?

There are speculations in academic literature that question if Trump had a coherent foreign policy at all. It is not surprising that Zenko and Lissner⁶³⁰ declared Trump had no foreign policy before his inauguration. Reuben Steff and Alan Tidwell’s analysis, based on a three-frame analysis, described Trump’s foreign policy as “disruptive and iconoclastic” due to his exceptional behaviour, unusual qualities, and worldview about politics and the global arena. This they explained from the ambit of Trump’s foreign policy outlook, which they argued reflected three ideals: “Art of making deal,” “Making America Great Again” (MAGA), and a projection of the president as a “Stable Genius.”⁶³¹ In a similar assessment, Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich⁶³² also pose the question regarding the nexus between Trump’s eccentricities, rhetoric, and leadership qualities as a determinative criterion for establishing his foreign policy

⁶²⁸ Ibid

⁶²⁹ Rehnson, S. A. (2020). The Trump Doctrine and Conservative American Nationalism. In *The Trump Doctrine and the Emerging International System* (pp. 3-38). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

⁶³⁰ Zenko, M., & Lissner, R. F. (2017). Trump is going to regret not having a grand strategy. *Foreign Policy*, 13, 2-7.

⁶³¹ Steff, R., & Tidwell, A. (2020). Understanding and evaluating Trump’s foreign policy: a three-frame analysis. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 1-26.

⁶³² Dombrowski, P., & Reich, S. (2017). Does Donald Trump have a grand strategy? *International Affairs*, 93(5), 1013-1037.

formulation. According to them, “there is a significant gap between what the political leadership often says and the way in which the military operates, between rhetoric and behaviour.”⁶³³

Thus, in attempting to analyse Trump’s grand strategy, in their argument, a consideration of the shifting external environment, the vagaries of America’s expanding national security bureaucracy (the blob), and, most importantly, the constraints imposed by diverse operational demands must be considered.⁶³⁴ This explains John Haine’s conception of Trump’s strategy as a “divination” process, one of which contains several aphorisms having different pieces of a puzzle of his grand strategy, when put together highlights a unilateralist approach in defining American interest and a strategic ambiguity in dealing with its adversaries.⁶³⁵

The chapter now turns to consider the grand strategy of Trump’s presidency.

7.2 The Grand Strategy of the Trump Administration

7.2.1 Framing Trump’s Grand Strategy

There are several framings in academic literature purporting an explanation of Trump’s grand strategy. Some view it as a continuation of Obama’s hybrid grand strategy but employing a different tone and more ambitious language.⁶³⁶ This stems from Trump’s commitment to geopolitical competition with the world’s greatest military powers and the formal and informal alliances that comes with it. Trump has threatened new wars to avert nuclear weapons proliferation and continued his predecessor’s drone programme, and inherited wars against the Taliban, ISIS, Iraq, and Syria. Another analysis construes Trump’s strategy as a composite of rollback, offshore balancing, retrenchment, and selective engagement⁶³⁷ with vestiges of primacy.⁶³⁸ Most of these analyses have stemmed from Trump’s willingness to decisively engage the utility of America’s power (although he was very restrained with its use, except for eliminating ISIS and for his drone program), they, however, fail to provide an encompassing frame to understand some critical aspects of his strategy. For example, President Trump, in a speech delivered at the United Nations General Assembly on 24 September 2019, declared he

⁶³³ Ibid, pp. 1

⁶³⁴ Ibid, pp. 2

⁶³⁵ Haines, J. R. (2017). Divining a “Trump Doctrine”. *Orbis*, 61(1), 125-136.

⁶³⁶ Conley, R. S. (Ed.). (2017). *Presidential Leadership and National Security: The Obama Legacy and Trump Trajectory*. Routledge.

⁶³⁷ Wolf, A. B. (2018). After JCPOA: American grand strategy toward Iran. *Comparative Strategy*, 37(1), 22-34.

⁶³⁸ Dombrowski, P., & Reich, S. (2017). Does Donald Trump have a grand strategy? *International Affairs*, 93(5), 1013-1037.

was a “globalist and nationalist”⁶³⁹ Peter Harris, however, argued that this characterization as exaggerated, as Trump was sceptical of isolationism due to “multilateral security partnerships that are essential to defeating and deterring foreign threats to US national security, and the reliance of US domestic prosperity on the existence of an open world economy, which also required the unstinting application of US power abroad.”⁶⁴⁰ Also, it was never realistic Trump would become isolationist; instead, he sought to reposition the US within international structures – reducing ties to some (like the World Health Organization and the Paris Agreement) and adjusting ties to others (NAFTA and NATO).

A framework model for explaining Trump’s grand strategy as put forward by Hal Brands, however, fits with the focus of this chapter. It is outlined and analysed below.

7.2.2 ‘America First’ and ‘Fortress America’ Grand Strategy

Brands consider Trump’s grand strategy along a spectrum, with Fortress America at one end and America First at the other. He defined “Fortress America” as “a hard-line approach that espouses a scaling back of the post-Cold War international order with elements of unilateralism and Jacksonian isolationism of the 1930s.”⁶⁴¹ This is predicated on three premises that underscored Trump’s near zero-sum approach to world affairs: (i) the notion that other countries have over the years exploited America’s economic, political and military largesse, (ii) the contention that globalization has left America weaker and more susceptible to forces that undermine its sovereignty and promotion of liberal values, and (iii) that America should readily express the fungibility of its power by being aggressively prepared to use its enormous military strengths to protect its national interests instead of protecting allies or enforcing international security.⁶⁴²

The key elements of Fortress America are rooted in several ideas. The overarching pillar being economic nationalism. This was reflected in Trump’s inaugural address, which stated, “protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.”⁶⁴³ The main goal was to engender economic sovereignty and achieve a unilateral advantage over trade competitors such as China

⁶³⁹ White House (2019) Remarks by the President at the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly New York. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-74th-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>

⁶⁴⁰ Harris, P. (2018). Why Trump Won’t Retrench: The Militarist Redoubt in American Foreign Policy. *Political Science Quarterly*, 133(4), 611-641.

⁶⁴¹ Brands, H. (2018). *American grand strategy in the age of Trump*. Brookings Institution Press.

⁶⁴² Ibid, pp, 1-10

⁶⁴³ White House (2017) The Inaugural Address. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>

instead of embracing the global economic principles of “rules of the road.”⁶⁴⁴ The second element is the rollback from Washington’s alliance and security commitment, which in his view, weakened rather than strengthened Washington’s predominant power position. Third and relatedly is the emphasis on the pursuit of muscular but aloof military strength – with a narrow focus on US defence. This means a reversion to nationalistic policies that embody vestiges of isolationism. This was expressed in Trump’s speech to a Joint Session of Congress where he remarked that “...to those allies who wonder what kind of friend America will be, look no further than the heroes who wear our uniform.”⁶⁴⁵

Fourth, it advocated the withdrawal of some US overseas commitments. Fifth, it embraced a “win and go home” approach to CT. Sixth, and relatedly, it rescinds from military and non-military democratic promotion. Seven, it espoused a stringent measure to strengthen American sovereignty that cuts back refugees, particularly from Muslim countries. Eight and finally, it frees America from the shackles of international laws, multilateralism, and international institutions on the grounds that it inhibits the US from exerting its unmatched power.⁶⁴⁶

The “America First” spectrum advanced a more disciplined approach to asserting US interests. The model emphasized striking better deals, a more even burden sharing, and better protection of American sovereignty and finite resources while still preserving – even strengthening – America's global role in proactively sustaining the international system.⁶⁴⁷ It rejects the pursuit of US national interests from an internationalist standpoint, instead advocated for a stark, pugilistic form of nationalism that steers America away from post-war grand strategic traditions.⁶⁴⁸

Brands identify several key elements of the “America First” model. First, it holds that the US would lead an open global trading system to act more aggressively to combat discriminatory measures and ensure fair access and equal opportunity for US companies and goods. Second, it advocated for a burden-sharing arrangement between the US and its allies – based on a renegotiation of existing agreements to align with US strategic interests. Third, it pushed for a significant military build-up to address the US relative military decline. The fourth element is the intensification of military campaign efforts against radical Islamic elements that pose

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid

⁶⁴⁵ White House (2017) Remarks by President Trump in Joint Address to Congress. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-joint-address-congress/>

⁶⁴⁶ Brands, H. (2017). US grand strategy in an age of nationalism: fortress America and its alternatives. *The Washington Quarterly*, 40(1), 73-94.

⁶⁴⁷ Brands, H. (2018). *American grand strategy in the age of Trump*. Brookings Institution Press.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid

immediate threats to the US. This leads to the fifth element: cooperation with America's Muslim partners and providing military and non-military support in aggressively combating terrorist finances and ideology and funding post-conflict reconstruction.⁶⁴⁹

The sixth element advocated for pragmatic cooperation that upheld US interests, restrained great-power rivals, and pushed back more sharply when cooperation is infringed. The final aspect of this strategy stressed America's stance in international institutions – that is, using its leverage to shape and reform them – through funding cuts and withdrawal of its membership.

In sum, Trump's grand strategy sits between the two spectrums incorporating the elements of the former and not dismissive of the former. His policies have often reflected Fortress America in stricter immigration laws, a trade war with China, the building of the 'wall' along the US-Mexican border, a new Afghan strategy, and in the escalation of drone warfare in targeted states. Also, it has been manifested in the relocation of the US embassy in Tel Aviv, in the increased funding for the US military, and in cutting off funding and ties with WHO due to its 'handling' of the Covid-19 pandemic – and electing instead to blame China. In contrast, America First has been reflected in the renegotiation of the NAFTA agreement and in the review of existing agreements that stifle America's economic potentials and national interest.

Thus, Trump's grand strategy can be summed up as a "nativist-isolationist vision for America couched in a populist America First slogan that defies Washington's consensus on liberal hegemony."⁶⁵⁰ It espoused a muscular CT strategy with the further expansion of drone strikes, expressed confidence in the fungibility of America's military power, and committed to promoting America's economic, political, and strategic interests when dealing with other states in international affairs.

The next section examines Trump's drone warfare and the linkages to his grand strategy.

7.3 Trump's Drone Warfare

Trump's drone warfare has reflected some critical aspects of his grand strategy that embraces a commitment to protecting America's interest and continuing the war against the transnational terrorist threat. At the tactical level, Trump's drone warfare seeks to advance the strategic goals of US CT – focused on the expansion of information sharing, border security, combating terrorist financing, recruitment, and mobilization, and countering transnational terrorist

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid

⁶⁵⁰ Brands, H. (2018). *American grand strategy in the age of Trump*. Brookings Institution Press.

threats⁶⁵¹ – that are largely unchanged in the longer trajectory of post-9/11 statecraft. Under President Trump, drones have significantly expanded in use, target, and lethality, especially in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, with Afghanistan as the epicenter of his drone combat operations.⁶⁵² There are, however, some continuities and discontinuities in Trump’s drone policy that are worth highlighting.

7.3.1 Continuities in Trump’s Drone Warfare strategy

As aforementioned, the use of drones under Trump is not new or surprising. Trump drone policies, however, have some degree of continuities in terms of their use that coheres with the policies of the Bush and Obama administrations. For instance, the core rule of law authority for the use of drones overseas is firmly set in the Bush era, while the actual strategy for using military force (including drones) in Iraq and Syria find some levels of parallel to Obama’s final military strategy of using indigenous forces backed by American airpower and Special Forces to combat ISIS.⁶⁵³

The continuities in Trump’s drone discourse have also been manifested in his administration’s CT policies. As Biegon and Watts puts it,

“... despite Trump’s rhetoric of isolationism and alleged break with the past, current US operations resemble a fusion of George W. Bush-era “world is a battlefield” global militarization doctrine with Obama-era “tools of remote warfare, with “light footprint” and aversion to ground operations....”⁶⁵⁴

Instead of sharp reversals, considering his penchant for rhetoric and maverick bombast, the Trump administration has maintained Obama’s CT playbook and embraced the objectives of his predecessor’s CT efforts, particularly in the utility of drones for American statecraft. Like Obama, Trump has ordered more drone strikes, widened the geographical latitude of drone warfare, deepened the use of Special Operation Forces (SOF), continued reliance on security

⁶⁵¹ White House (2018) United States National Strategy for Counterterrorism. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>

⁶⁵² Rubin, G. (2020). Donald Trump, Twitter, and Islamophobia: The End of Dignity in Presidential Rhetoric About Terrorism. In *Presidential Rhetoric on Terrorism under Bush, Obama, and Trump* (pp. 105-128). Palgrave Pivot, Cham.

⁶⁵³ Biegon, R., & Watts, T. F. (2020). When ends Trump means: continuity versus change in US counterterrorism policy. *Global Affairs*, 6(1), 37-53.

⁶⁵⁴ Watts, T. (2019). Foreign policy issues for America: The Trump years; Counterterrorism from the Obama administration to President Trump: caught in the fait accompli war. pp.6

cooperation, and expanded DoD funding on counterterrorism-related security cooperation programmes.⁶⁵⁵

As a component of an America First strategy, Trump's approach to transnational terrorism called on partners of the US to commit more resources in the fight against radical Islamic extremism. Also, under Trump, the focus of Congressional interest in the drone program was still limited to the tactical rather than the strategic aspects of their use – regarding who is being targeted, what their importance is, and the drone platforms and weapons that are used.⁶⁵⁶ The emphasis on the tactical over the strategic has sustained the same blind spots in Congressional oversight akin to the Obama drone policy management approach in his first term.

However, there were several aspects of Trump's drone warfare that are contra to previous administrations. These discontinuities, as the next section argues, are radically aligned with the 'American First' and some aspects of 'Fortress America' notions of his grand strategy.

7.3.2 Discontinuities in Trump's Drone Warfare strategy

7.3.2.1 Return of Covert Drone Strikes

Trump's drone warfare loosened the Obama-era second term restraints on the CIA that prevented them from conducting covert drone strikes in targeted states. Trump's national security advisers replaced Obama's PPG on drones – which established new standard operating procedures for lethal and non-lethal uses of force against terrorist targets outside the US and in areas of active hostilities⁶⁵⁷ – with what they termed Principles, Standards, and Procedures (PSP), which gave the US military, a broader latitude to conduct covert drone operations outside conventional battlefields, than the PPG.⁶⁵⁸ Under the PSP, the military and the CIA no longer needed a high-level vetting of the targets of proposed strikes or required to show that potential targets pose a specific threat to America's interest.⁶⁵⁹ It also set back the trend towards drone transparency that started in the second term of Obama's presidency in 2013, which sought to disclose more about its drone program – that is, its highly classified rules, its

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid (Biegon, R., & Watts, T. F., 2020)

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Executive Office of the President, "Presidential Policy Guidance: Procedures for Approving Direct Action Against Terrorist Targets Located Outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities," May 22, 2013, https://www.justice.gov/oip/foialibrary/procedures_for_approving_direct_action_against_terrorist_targets/download

⁶⁵⁸ Swan, R. (2019). *Drone Strikes: An Overview, Articulation and Assessment of the United States' Position Under International Law* (No. LLNL-TR-800242). Lawrence Livermore National Lab (LLNL), Livermore, CA (United States).

⁶⁵⁹ Calhoun, L. (2018). Totalitarian tendencies in drone strikes by states. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 11(2), 357-375.

implementation, policies, and strategies – that guided their use in view of the changing domestic and international perception to drone strikes.

Contra to the above, Trump's PSP pushes the limits of the geographical latitude of drone strikes and has engendered a reversion to covert strikes in non-combat theatres. This has led to the renewal of CIA strikes in Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and pushed the limits on other forms of covert operations outside conflict zones, including in Syria and Iran. This meant a reversal to the era of non-transparency, lack of public acknowledgment of successful drone strikes, and a revivification of secretive drone kills.

7.3.2.2 Reporting of civilian deaths

On 6 March 2019, President Trump signed *Executive Order on Revocation of Reporting Requirement* that revoked the short-lived requirement, formulated in the second term of the Obama administration, that required US intelligence officials to publicly report the number of civilians killed in CIA drone strikes outside declared war zones. It also removed: (i) limitation of drone strikes to HVTs in declared combat theatres, (ii) the need for interagency approval before drone strikes can be authorized outside of active war zones and, (iii) the prerequisite for government assessment regarding civilian and combatant casualties from drone strikes.⁶⁶⁰

This resembled George W. Bush's presidency and the first term of Obama's presidency, where the US government did not publicly acknowledge the intended targets of drone strikes. Though under Trump's PSP, the Obama's PPG's standard of "near certainty" that civilians would not be injured or killed in a strike was maintained, the new executive orders run contra to the aforesaid. This is because the lower threshold of drone targets engendered the possibilities of collateral damage, unintended deaths, and accidental drone hits.

7.3.2.3 Deregulation of remote warfare

Compared to the previous administration post 9/11, Trump entrusted drone warfare command and operations to his generals. Whereas Obama operationally expanded but bureaucratically constrained drone use. This way, military commanders were allowed to conduct drone strikes without requiring approval for the 'kill order' from the White House. Inadvertently, this

⁶⁶⁰ Biegon, R., & Watts, T. F. (2020). When ends Trump means: continuity versus change in US counterterrorism policy. *Global Affairs*, 6(1), 37-53.

allowed hawkish officials and senior military commanders to release the throttle on America's immense capabilities for global strikes.⁶⁶¹

For instance, upon taking office, Trump granted requests to declare three provinces in Yemen to be "areas of active hostilities" – this allowed military commanders to conduct covert strikes for six months without requiring Congressional approval.⁶⁶² Likewise, in March 2017, Trump designated large parts of Somalia as areas of active hostilities for at least 180 days in which local commanders were given the authority to carry out offensive strikes against al-Shabaab militants.⁶⁶³

Bruce Hoffman offered a potential explanation for the Trump administration's decision to outsource drone warfare to military generals. He posits that "the operational loop in CT is very small, and you have to give the commanders on the ground the authority to act very quickly to take advantage of opportunities."⁶⁶⁴ In other words, the lower the bureaucracy in the drone strike authorization process, the higher the chances for timely strikes, which eliminates both LVTs and HVTs.⁶⁶⁵ This also makes sense from an operational standpoint, as terrorists operate without borders and in lawless frontiers – thus making quicker deployment of targeted strikes tactically sound.

7.3.2.4 A New Authorization for AUMF

The Trump administration pressurized Congress to pass a new AUMF to authorize drone strikes outside the territory of al-Qaeda, and associated forces – which are outside the ambit of US declared war zones.⁶⁶⁶ While the 2001 AUMF was expanded under Obama to include Syria and Libya, further expansion of drone warfare outside non-declared war zones under Trump necessitated a new AUMF. Hitherto, the Obama administration designated Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and parts of Libya as "areas of active hostilities" Trump added Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, and the entirety of Libya to the list, giving the US a broader latitude to conduct

⁶⁶¹ Malone, R. (2018). Trump's first year: Analyzing the Trump administration's use of drone strikes as a counterterrorism strategy in 2017. *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 6(2), 6-18.

⁶⁶² Nina S., (2017) Trump's drone surge. *Middle East Research Project*. <https://merip.org/2018/02/trumps-drone-surge/>

⁶⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁶⁴ Bruce Hoffman, "Episode 19 - Bruce Hoffman on ISIS in 2017 and Beyond," interview by Jeffrey Palmer, The Security Studies Podcast, Georgetown University, December 11, 2017, audio, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-19-bruce-hoffman-on-isis-in-2017-andbeyond/id1110393903?i=1000397125224&mt=2>

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid, Malone, (2018)

⁶⁶⁶ Yousaf, F. (2020). US drone campaign in Pakistan's Pashtun 'tribal region: beginning of the end under President Trump? *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 31(4), 751-772.

targeted drone operations.⁶⁶⁷ The Trump administration announced it was considering new rules that could permit the Pentagon's African Command (AFRICOM) to carry out offensive ground combat operations and drone strikes in North and West Africa, escalating deployments in a region that key lawmakers seem to have been unaware of before the deaths of the four US Special Operations Forces soldiers in the *Tongo Tongo* ambush in Agadez, Niger in October 2017.⁶⁶⁸

The Trump administration moved closer to arming surveillance drones that will fly over Niger and Mali in search of suspects and expanding archipelago of outposts and drone bases that AFRICOM has set up to patrol the Sahel and Central Africa region as part of US expanding remit in Africa.⁶⁶⁹ The introduction of drones to target terrorist groups is part of the Pentagon's expanding footprint in the African continent to increase its strategic interest in Washington. This led to the \$110 million installations in Agadez, Niger, that houses C-17 American transport planes and the MQ-9 Reaper drones.⁶⁷⁰

These new developments are, however, outside the purview of the existing AUMF, which allows the president to unilaterally declare war on terrorists in declared war zones. While a new AUMF is not fully in place, the expansion of drone warfare under Trump created such possibilities, particularly as the US declared it would permanently station weaponized drones in South Korea and announced that it had begun deploying upgraded UAVs in the Philippines to assist the growing confrontation with Islamist militants there.⁶⁷¹ Though intentions can change, these deployments have the potential to embolden China's aggressive military expansion in SCS. However, if finally deployed, drones in these locations could be used by the US to expand its strategic objectives in Southeast Asia, the SCS, and Northeast Asia.

7.3.2.5 A new Afghan strategy

Trump's drone strategy for Afghanistan differed remarkably from Obama's. In comparison, Obama focused on escalating drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan. For Trump, the cornerstone of his drone strategy concentrated on rooting out al-Qaeda and radical Islamic

⁶⁶⁷ Malone, R. (2018). Trump's first year: Analyzing the Trump administration's use of drone strikes as a counterterrorism strategy in 2017. *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 6(2), 6-18.

⁶⁶⁸ Department of Defense (2018) October 2017 Niger Ambush: Summary of Investigations. Available at https://dod.defense.gov/portals/1/features/2018/0418_niger/img/Oct-2017-Niger-Ambush-Summary-of-Investigation.pdf

⁶⁶⁹ Marks, E., & Kraft, M. B. (2017). The Evolving Terrorism Threat from Nixon to Trump. *American Diplomacy*, 1N-1N.

⁶⁷⁰ Gordon R., (2018) Forget 'America First'—Donald Trump's Policy Is Drones First. *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/forget-america-first-donald-trumps-policy-is-drones-first/>

⁶⁷¹ Greenberg, K. J. (2017). Marching as to War: Trump's New Militarism. *World Policy Journal*, 34(2), 83-86.

extremists' groups mainly in Afghanistan based on his new Afghan strategy declared at Fort Meyer, Virginia, on August 21, 2017, which focused on ensuring American security beyond the elusive siren song of nation-building:

“The American people are weary of war without victory. Nowhere is this more evident than with the war in Afghanistan, the longest war in American history – 17 years. I share the American people’s frustration. I also share their frustration over a foreign policy that has spent too much time, energy, and money and most importantly lives, trying to rebuild countries in their own image, instead of pursuing our security interests above other considerations.”⁶⁷²

President Trump then went on to explain the core pillar of the new Afghan strategy as:

“A core pillar of our new strategy is a shift from a time-based approach to one based on conditions. I have said many times how counterproductive it is for the United States to announce in advance the dates we intend to begin, or end, military options. We will not talk about the numbers of troops or our plans for further military activities. Conditions on the ground – not arbitrary timetables – will guide our strategy from now on. America’s enemies must never know our plans or believe they can wait us out. I will not say when we are going to attack but attack; we will.”⁶⁷³

His strategy also jettisoned the Obama’s phased withdrawal strategy that was tied to a calendar timetable rather, replacing it, howbeit grudgingly and against his instincts (as he has shown greater determination to pull the US out of Afghanistan in recent years), with an open-ended strategy that boosted the troop level to recognize, ‘local political and security conditions on the ground.’⁶⁷⁴

In the next section, the phases of Trump’s drone warfare are assessed, and its role in supporting his grand strategy is analysed.

7.4 Phases of Trump’s Drone Wars

Two phases categorized Trump’s drone war: an escalation phase and a spike phase. The escalation phase took place within the first 18 months of Trump’s presidency and was

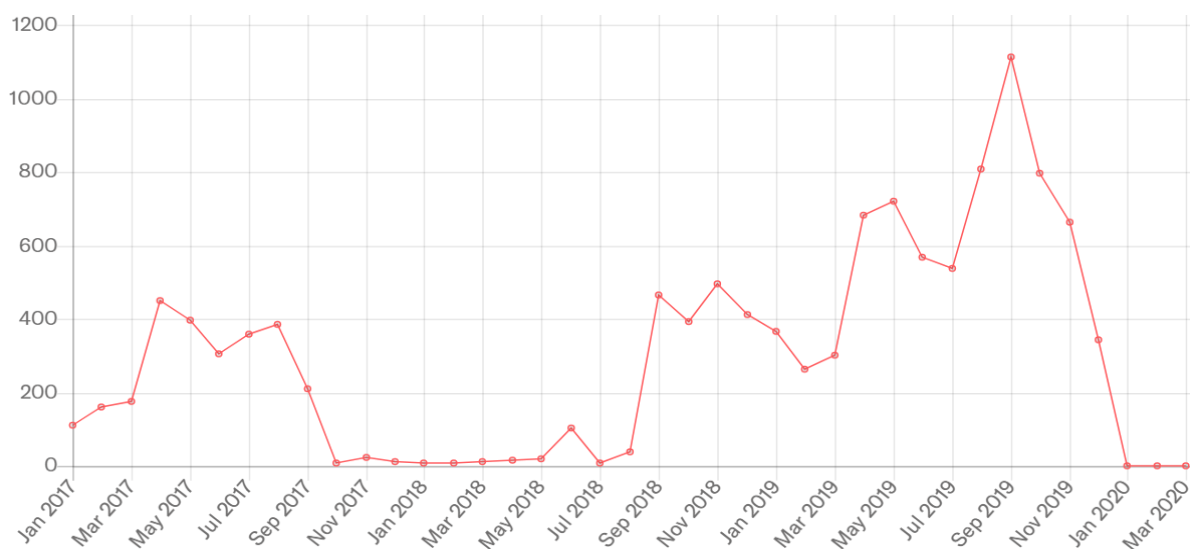
⁶⁷² White House (2017) Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia. Available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/>

⁶⁷³ Ibid

⁶⁷⁴ Brands, H., & Feaver, P. (2017). Trump and terrorism: US strategy after ISIS. *Foreign Aff.*, 96, 28.

characterized by a surge in drone strike operations globally, particularly in Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, and some parts of Pakistan. The surge signals, paradoxically, an embrace of both Obama’s drone warfare and a stark militarization of Bush's pre-emptive and preventive warfare. It also underscored Trump’s drone warfare as a reflection of Fortress America – due to its hard-line muscular posture on terrorist groups. In both tempo and geography, Trump’s drone warfare during this period, in many measures, surpassed that of President Obama, who was regarded as the ‘drone king.’⁶⁷⁵ According to a 2018 report in *The Daily Beast*, Trump launched 238 drone strikes in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan and 1300 strikes in Afghanistan alone within his first two years in office.⁶⁷⁶ This is much higher than the 186 drone strikes launched under Obama (see figures 11, 12, and 13 below). TBIJ counted 2,243 drone strikes in the first two years of Trump’s drone warfare compared to 1878 in the entire eight years of Obama’s administration.⁶⁷⁷ Another estimation puts it that in his first 74 days in office, about 75 drone strikes have been launched by Trump – one strike a day on average – which represents a five-fold increase over Obama’s rate.⁶⁷⁸

Figure 11: Trump drone strikes in Afghanistan (Jan. 2017-March 2020)



Source: TBIJ (2020).⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ Krieg, A. (2016). Externalizing the burden of war: the Obama Doctrine and US foreign policy in the Middle East. *International Affairs*, 92(1), 97-113.

⁶⁷⁶ Daily Beast (2018) Trump Ramped Up Drone Strikes in America Shadow Wars. Available at <https://www.thedailybeast.com/trump-ramped-up-drone-strikes-in-americas-shadow-wars>

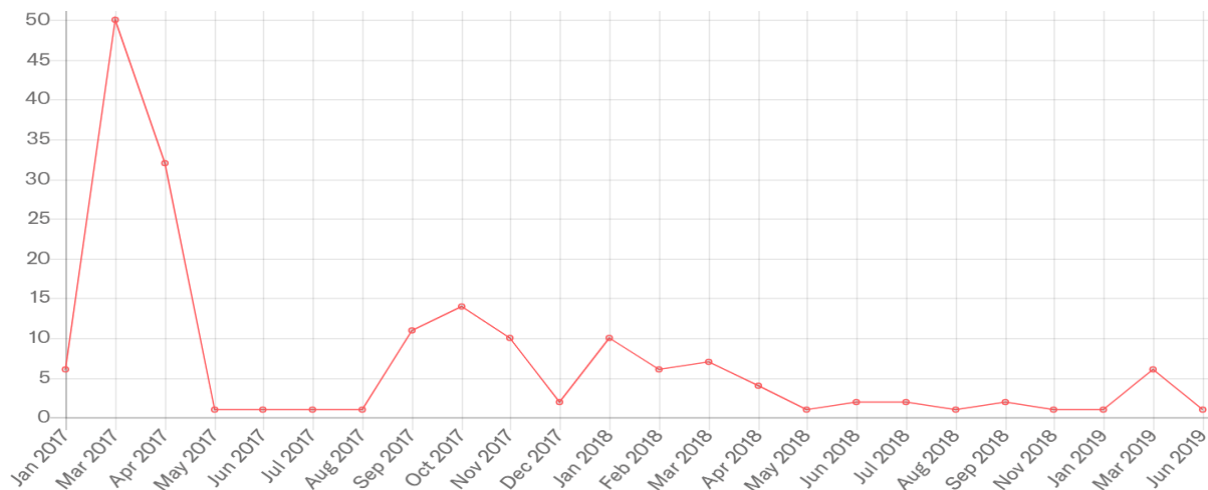
⁶⁷⁷ Purkiss, Jessica (2019) The Bureau of Investigative Journalism: Trump Rolls Back Transparency on Civilian Drone Deaths. Available at <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-03-07/trump-tells-cia-dont-tell-world-about-dead-civilians>

⁶⁷⁸ Zenko, M. (2017). Trump Could Take Obama’s Drone War Further into the Shadows. *Foreign Policy*. February, 2.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid (TBIJ, 2020).

Outside of America’s official battlefields, Yemen has been the central target of Trump’s drone bombardment. In Yemen alone, the Trump administration had carried out 176 strikes in just two years, compared to 154 strikes during the entire eight years of Obama’s tenure, according to a count by *The Associated Press* and TBIJ.⁶⁸⁰ Most of these strikes have been targeted against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in central Yemen and the emergent ISIS branch in Yemen.

Figure 12: Trump drone strike in Yemen (Jan 2017- June 2019)



Source: TBIJ (2020).⁶⁸¹

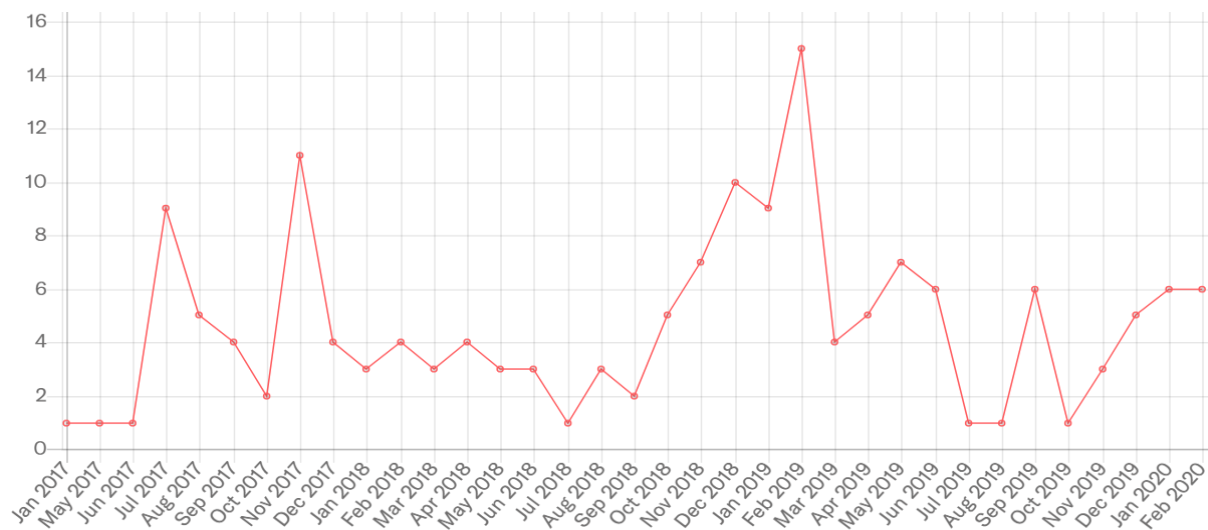
In Somalia, Trump’s drone warfare focused on al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab and a small local branch of ISIS that has emerged in the north (see figure 13 below). Aside from *Operation Odyssey Lightning*, the US under Trump had earlier not considered Libya an area of active hostilities (which became a CT focus under Obama following the intervention of the US and its European allies in the civil war, ousting Gadhafi and, in the process, opening the country up to chaos and terrorism). However, in 2017, the Trump administration designated the rest of Libya as an “area of active hostilities.” This led to the conduct of drone strikes on the ISIS training camp in Libya by AFRICOM. So far, more than 15 strikes have been conducted, which is a 20 percent increase from Obama’s administration and points to Trump’s perception of Libya as a harbinger of radical Islamic terrorism.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid Purkiss, (2019)

⁶⁸¹ Ibid (TBIJ, 2020).

⁶⁸² Purkiss, J., (2019) *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism: Trump Rolls Back Transparency on Civilian Drone Deaths*. Available at <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-03-07/trump-tells-cia-dont-tell-world-about-dead-civilians>

Figure 13: Trump drone strike in Somalia (January 2017 - February 2020).



Source: TBIJ, (2020)⁶⁸³

The peak phase of Trump’s drone operations began in September 2018 and continued through to February 2020, and focused on Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria (as part of US coalition strikes), and was mostly carried out by JSOC. In Afghanistan, there was a marked increase in US drone strikes in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region following the rollout of the new Afghan strategy, in which he vowed to “no longer be silent about Pakistan’s safe havens for terrorist organizations.”⁶⁸⁴ The US military, within this period, dropped three times as many bombs on the Taliban and the newly formed branch of ISIS in Afghanistan than it did in the escalation phase.⁶⁸⁵ From about 868 in previous years to about 4280 drone strikes in the spike phase.⁶⁸⁶ Likewise, in Somalia, the drone strike figures doubled in 2019, further exceeding the drone strikes figure of the first two years of Trump’s presidency.⁶⁸⁷

Having examined the ambit, continuities, discontinuities, and dynamics of Trump’s drone warfare, the next section explores the intersection with his grand strategy.

7.5 The Role of Drones in Trump’s Grand Strategy

One of the arguments of this chapter is that the expansion in the lethality, target, and use of drones under Trump served strategic purposes for his statecraft. The strategic goal is consistent with the doctrine of his administration which espouses a ‘nativist, protectionist, and nationalist-

⁶⁸³ Ibid (TBIJ, 2020).

⁶⁸⁴ White House (2017) Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/>

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid (Purkiss, J, 2019).

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid

isolationist vision for the US under the populist slogan ‘American First,’ that challenges the post-Cold War US consensus on liberal hegemony. From this lens, drone use under Trump serves the following purposes: (i) dronification as an ‘America First’ approach (ii) drones and Fortress America (iii) instrument of post-9/11 statecraft. These are discussed below.

7.5.1 Dronification as an “America First” Approach

Dronification, as conceptualized by Shaw and Ahkter, refers to the distinctly bureaucratic conduct of targeted killings. That is defined by: (a) the relocation of sovereign power from the uniformed military to the CIA and Special Forces; (b) the technopolitical transformations performed by the Predator drone; (c) the bureaucratization of the kill-chain; (d) the individualization of the target.⁶⁸⁸ The concept is related to Krieg and Rickli’s conceptualization of “surrogate warfare,” which describes a “patron’s outsourcing of the strategic, operational, or tactical burdens of warfare, in whole or in part, to human and/or technological substitutes in order to minimize the costs of war.”⁶⁸⁹

To a large extent, Trump’s drone use establishes a *dronification* logic in his American First strategy, evident in the dramatic change in US CT policy discourse. Trump’s drone warfare promotes an America First approach premised on the notion that, in putting America first, the US must avoid being “taken advantage of” in its CT commitments, whether by allies, international organizations, or adversaries.⁶⁹⁰ The ‘America First’ frame is designed to project an image of an unabashed nationalism, conveying the sense of a clear break with the internationalism (or “globalism”) of successive administrations post 9/11. In a broader sense, it undermines US security by ignoring allies and multilateralism, particularly in its CT missions. Hence, while the notion of America First is on a scale more isolationist than globalist and ostensibly less burdensome security arrangement, Trump’s drone warfare suggests otherwise. Discursively, it rolls back the Bush administration’s expansive WOT discourse and rejects Obama’s restraint, rather than espousing a commitment to hegemony and a muscular military strategy for combating “Radical Islamic Terrorism.”⁶⁹¹ The role of drones, from this

⁶⁸⁸ Shaw, I., & Akhter, M. (2014). The dronification of state violence. *Critical Asian Studies*, 46(2), 211-234.

⁶⁸⁹ Krieg, A., & Rickli, J. M. (2018). Surrogate warfare: the art of war in the 21st century? *Defence studies*, 18(2), 113-130.

⁶⁹⁰ Biegon, R., & Watts, T. F. (2020). When ends Trump means: continuity versus change in US counterterrorism policy. *Global Affairs*, 6(1), 37-53.

⁶⁹¹ Kraft, M. B., & Marks, E. (2017). *US counterterrorism: From Nixon to Trump—Key challenges, issues, and responses*. CRC Press.

prism, is akin to performing the strategic functions of entrenching US structural power in international relations.

7.5.2 Drones and Fortress America

Trump's CT policy has so far continued to serve a larger agenda for his Fortress America grand strategy.⁶⁹² Beyond the rhetoric often obscured in his personalized political style, tweets and eccentricities, the Trump administration's approach to statecraft blends security and economic interests in a traditional manner. This has manifested in his drone warfare that has emphasized the military-centric and strategic components of this strategy. President Trump's particularly combative stance toward ISIS has underscored the Jacksonian worldview inherent in his grand strategy, which combines a practice of overwhelming force against powers that have directly harmed the US with powers that do not intrude upon American affairs.⁶⁹³

This has been evident in Trump's appetite for military spending that has ramped up the acquisition of drone munitions by more than 40 percent from 2016.⁶⁹⁴ This move was consistent with the President's intention to intensify US military campaigns and capabilities. For instance, the DoD budget for 2018 was \$648.80 billion – a 7.1 percent increase from 2017. This was increased by 3.5 percent in 2019 to \$686.1 billion, with \$69 billion alone for war funding efforts.⁶⁹⁵ As Trump put out on Twitter, "I will make our military so big, powerful, and strong that no one will mess with us."⁶⁹⁶ Thus, reiterating his continued commitment to the idea of the US having a larger military.

Trump's generals and others in his national security leadership have shown strong inclinations in prosecuting a "long war" against terrorists, extremists, and instability, however covertly through drones.⁶⁹⁷ This has been demonstrated with Trump's penchant for initially appointing active-duty and retired military officers to key civilian positions, as well as his reported willingness to grant the military considerable discretion on the use of force and further deregulating the drone battlefield. While it can be stated that Trump's outsourcing of drone operations, and more widely, CT functions to his national security team is a demonstration of

⁶⁹² Brands, H. (2018). *American grand strategy in the age of Trump*. Brookings Institution Press.

⁶⁹³ Ibid

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid (Amy Belasco, 2018)

⁶⁹⁵ Department of Defense (2018) DoD Releases Fiscal Year Budget 2018 Proposal. Available at <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/1190216/dod-releases-fiscal-year-2018-budget-proposal/>

⁶⁹⁶ Donald Trump on Twitter on Jan 25, 2016. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/691276412666261504?lang=en>

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid (Biegon and Watts, 2020).

his belief in America's military general. The irony of the process engenders what Steve Bannon terms the emergence of 'globalists' within the military leadership of Trump's administration (akin to the hawkish neo-conservatist in the Bush-era).⁶⁹⁸ Krats Michael and Edward Marks describe these globalists such as Gary Cohn, the former Director of the United States National Economic Council, and Jared Krushner, Senior Advisor to Trump, as "pragmatic internationalists deeply committed to the United States' leadership role within the global alliance structure...with a penchant for military solutions to global problems."⁶⁹⁹ They embrace what Micah Zenko has described as a CT ideology within the national security state whose mindset is bipartisan and transcends presidential administrations, and which "is virulent and extremist, characterized by tough-sounding clichés and wholly implausible objectives."⁷⁰⁰ As military historian Andrew Bacevich critically notes, "the same group of generals who oversaw the counterproductive WOT is also spearheading a more muscular version of a military-centric 'Fortress America' approach."⁷⁰¹

7.5.3 Instrument of post-9/11 statecraft

As an instrument of statecraft, drone use under Trump fits with one of the elements of his Fortress America strategy – which seeks to lower the US military commitment threshold overseas based on a 'win and go home' approach. It is predicated on the notion that the use of force is critical to defending core US interests, and a large US military presence abroad has the dangerous unintended effect of weakening US relative power by increasing military spending and overcommitting US troops to stabilization and nation-building missions.⁷⁰²

The tactical utility of drones has been manifested in their continued use under Trump. Drones provide air support, contain local insurgencies, and facilitate targeted killings while at the same time achieving the CT goals of his administration. In Afghanistan, drone strikes have been conducted against the threat of ISIS at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Specifically, to eliminate HVTs and to dismantle terrorist safe havens while at the same improving internal security. In Yemen, drones have been valuable in targeting AQAP leadership and provided a policing mechanism for rooting out insurgent operations and local Islamist factions, which the

⁶⁹⁸ Steve Bannon cited in Cassidy, J. (2017). 'Steve Bannon is losing to the Globalists'. *New Yorker*, 12.

⁶⁹⁹ Kraft, M. B., & Marks, E. (2017). *US counterterrorism: From Nixon to Trump—Key challenges, issues, and responses*. CRC Press.

⁷⁰⁰ Zenko, M. (2017). The (not-so) peaceful transition of power: Trump's drone strikes outpace Obama. *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2.

⁷⁰¹ Bacevich, A. J. (2017). Saving America First: What Responsible Nationalism Looks Like. *Foreign Aff.*, 96, 57.

⁷⁰² Mir, A., & Moore, D. (2019). Drones, surveillance, and violence: Theory and evidence from a US drone program. *International Studies Quarterly*, 63(4), 846-862.

Yemeni government was unable to undertake following the group's seizure of its capital Sana'a.⁷⁰³ They have also been used to help Yemeni ground forces expel al-Qaeda forces who had taken advantage of the Arab Spring to seize a swath of territory in the south of the country. In Libya and Syria, Trump's utilization of American airpower (including drones) has also been used for coalition strikes and to support local surrogates and allies. Likewise, in Somalia, the escalation of drone strikes against al-Shabaab has destabilized their operations and curtailed their spread.

Having examined the strategic and tactical utility of drones, the next section examines the argument that drones hamper aspects of Trump's grand strategy.

7.6 Dilemma of Drone Warfare for Trump's Grand Strategy

7.6.1 The outsourcing quagmire

The outsourcing and delegation of targeted drone strike authority to military commanders in the Trump administration further compound the concerns relating to the lack of oversight, transparency, accountability, and justice that have pervaded the US drone programme.⁷⁰⁴ This approximates to what political geographer Ian Shaw described as "rationalized death management"⁷⁰⁵ to buttress how the delegation of war-making authority and the final decision on who dies or lives in targeted states negate international laws of war.

However, while it can be stated that delegating these functions to military commanders facilitate targeted killing operations (due to its effectiveness against terrorists, which in turn reduces the terrorist threat to the US and to the Middle East/Northeast region), it removes the bureaucratic requirement and minimizes political interference in military matters in US leadership, it undermines the saliency of oversight and introduces new dynamics to the use of drones that are not covered by the AUMF or international laws of war.⁷⁰⁶

As many critics have pointed out, drones enable a form of remote killing that removes the realities of war from those who pull the trigger and the various sectors of the public who allegedly authorize them.⁷⁰⁷ Gregoire Chamayou posits, "drones change the nature of warfare

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid (Niva, S., 2017).

⁷⁰⁵ Shaw, I. G. (2016). Scorched atmospheres: The violent geographies of the Vietnam War and the rise of drone warfare. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 106(3), 688-704.

⁷⁰⁶ Shaw, I., & Akhter, M. (2014). The dronification of state violence. *Critical Asian Studies*, 46(2), 211-234.

⁷⁰⁷ Malone, R. (2018). Trump's first year: Analysing the Trump administration's use of drone strikes as a counterterrorism strategy in 2017. *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 6(2), 6-18.

from a martial dual or conflict between two sides, to a unilateral form of war as man hunting – a predator-prey relationship – that transforms warfare into preemptive campaigns of extrajudicial executions.”⁷⁰⁸ This has been evident in how Trump has utilized drones within and outside targeted states, which not only deepens the notion of surrogate warfare – that prioritizes killing adversaries faster than they can regenerate and fosters a machine-like nature of US CT operations that champions zero transparency and non-reporting of civilian casualties.⁷⁰⁹

Furthermore, it eroded mechanisms for democracy oversight that are necessary to ensure that drone warfare is taking place within the legal bounds of the use of force in the theatres they occur. The effect, as Krafts and Marks posit, engenders a “highly complex, morality-straddling, multifaceted use of deadly force by America around the world.”⁷¹⁰ For Trump’s grand strategy that purports to put America First and to ‘Fortress America,’ the controversial legacy of Trump’s drone strikes sets a dangerous and negative precedent at the global level and for US rival competitors on how America uses drones in waging wars.

7.6.2 *Civilian Casualty*

The Trump administration’s reversal of Obama’s PPG rules has taken US drone warfare two steps backward – a period of non-transparency, secrecy, devoid of public acknowledgement, disregard for civilian casualty, and lack of Congressional oversight on how drones are used in prosecuting the WOT in targeted states. Research shows that non-transparency leads to the disproportionate use of drones.⁷¹¹ Under Trump, the re-institutionalization of CIA drone strikes has exacerbated the tragedy of civilian deaths living in targeted states. Trump’s drone policy has caused more civilian casualties (see next paragraph for statistics) and had put drone controversy back in the limelight – like the first term of the Obama era – where support for drones diminished when they were used in targeted killings of Americans abroad and following the accidental killing of two hostages – an American and Italian citizen in 2015.

The civilian casualty figures from Trump’s drone wars are evidently glaring, setting record figures higher than his predecessors. For example, in the overall course of the first and second terms of the Obama administration, only 5 percent non-combatant deaths were recorded in

⁷⁰⁸ Chamayou, G. (2015). *Drone theory*. Penguin UK.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid (Niva, S., 2017)

⁷¹⁰ Kraft, M. B., & Marks, E. (2017). *US counterterrorism: From Nixon to Trump—Key challenges, issues, and responses*. CRC Press.

⁷¹¹ Ron, J., Lavine, H., & Golden, S. (2019). No, Americans do not support airstrikes that kill civilians, even when they target terrorists. *Washington Post*.

Somalia, 12.9 percent in Yemen, and 18.6 percent in Pakistan.⁷¹² Despite these numbers, the Obama administration saw a general decrease of non-combatant deaths in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan over its second term, decreasing from 12.54 percent non-combatant deaths at its highest in 2013 to 2.75 percent non-combatant deaths at its lowest in 2015.⁷¹³ The first year of strikes under the Trump administration has not demonstrated much improvement in minimizing or reversing non-combatant fatalities. While the Trump administration saw a decrease in non-combatant deaths in Yemen and Pakistan, a larger percentage of civilians have died from drone strikes in Somalia in 2017 than the average deaths over President Obama’s second term. Overall, the Trump administration saw a percentage of 6.52 percent non-combatant deaths in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan in 2017, and this figure has more than doubled by 2019 (see table 12 below). This number is up from the overall percentage of non-combatant deaths under the Obama administration in 2014 (4.23 percent), 2015 (2.75 percent), and 2016 (3.07 percent).^{714 715}

Table 12: Civilian casualty deaths from drone strikes under Trump (2017-2020).

S/N	Country	Strikes	Total Killed	Civilian Deaths
1	Yemen	336	1020-1389	174-225
2	Pakistan	9	27-37	None reported
3	Afghanistan	12837	3144-8642	516-1622
4	Somalia	176	1119-1272	42-74

Source: TBIJ, 2020.

Several other independent reports record different counts of civilian deaths under Trump’s drone warfare. According to the UNAMA, US drone strikes in Afghanistan have killed more than 150 civilians in the first nine months of 2018.⁷¹⁶ Amnesty International reports drones have killed at least 14 civilians in Somalia since 2017, and as of January 2020, US drone strikes fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria have killed at least 1,257 civilians.⁷¹⁷ From a Fortress America standpoint, these deaths may be justified as inevitable consequences of war, from the view of “fight them over there” so that (terrorists) are deterred from getting back to the Fortress (American homeland). However, from a moral prism, it highlights the foibles of Trump’s

⁷¹² Malone, R. (2018). Trump’s first year: Analysing the Trump administration’s use of drone strikes as a counterterrorism strategy in 2017. *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 6(2), 6-18.

⁷¹³ Ibid

⁷¹⁴ Ibid

⁷¹⁵ McCrisken, T. (2013). Obama's drone war. *Survival*, 55(2), 97-122.

⁷¹⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) 24 February 2019 *Civilian Deaths From Afghan Conflict In 2018 At Highest Recorded Level – UN Report* <https://unama.unmissions.org/civilian-deaths-afghan-conflict-2018-highest-recorded-level-%E2%80%93-un-report#:~:text=KABUL%20%E2%80%93%20More%20civilians%20were%20killed,3%2C804%20civilian%20deaths%20in%202018>

⁷¹⁷ Ibid

grand strategy. Besides, every civilian death has the unintended likelihood of incentivizing reprisal attacks and motivating terrorist groups to carry out retaliatory attacks on US interests. A case in point is the 2 January 2020 drone strike ordered by Trump against the head of Iran's elite Quds Forces, General Qassem Soleimani. The General's death inflamed major protests, sparked violent protests, and threatened to raise the tempo for an unpredictable conflict in the Middle East and renewed hostility between America and Iran.

7.6.3 Soft Power Declinism and Global Leadership

The trajectory of President Trump's isolationist-nationalism undertones, as espoused in his grand strategy, ran counter to the post-1945 American tradition of global leadership and liberal interventionism. There are three inherent pitfalls in Trump's grand strategy that affects US soft power and global leadership. First, by defining American power narrowly in terms of material capabilities, the administration eschewed the importance of legitimacy and soft power tools as important components of America's global role. Second, Trump's penchant for military expansionism risked escalating regional tensions and further contributing to a drone arms race (this is examined in greater detail in the next chapter).

Third, the transactional nature of his grand strategy, which embraced the 'Art of the Deal'⁷¹⁸ over long-term strategic thinking, undercut the potential for the prudent use of American power – this is due to Trump's penchant to reduce politics and matters of national interest to “making and securing deals” with other states which have underlying boomerang effects. This has been evident in his engagement with multilateral systems, bilateral communication with other world leaders, which have proved devastating in alienating international powers and allies and further causing a decline in America's reputation on the world stage. Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and his refusal to allow the appointment of appellate members to the World Trade Organization further underscore this view. A global public opinion poll organized by Pew Research Center determined that 64 percent of the 32 countries surveyed stated they lacked confidence in the Trump administration, with only 29 percent giving his administration approval ratings. In the Middle East and Africa, these perceptions are more negative, with only one-in-five expressing a favourable opinion of the US.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ Ibid (Steff and Tidwell, 2020)

⁷¹⁹ Pew Research (2020). Trump's Ratings Remains Low around the Globe, while Views of the US mostly stay favourable. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/01/08/trump-ratings-remain-low-around-globe-while-views-of-u-s-stay-mostly-favorable/>

Considering these shortcomings, Trump's grand strategy engender a detrimental outcome for the future of US global leadership in an increasingly complex post-9/11 security environment. It is also reflective of the same pattern of poor results at home and abroad that the US has experienced since the end of the Cold War. As Barry Posen asserts:

“...Trump's administration is overcommitted militarily; it is cavalier about the threat of force; it has no strategic priorities whatsoever; it has no actual plan to ensure more equitable burden-sharing among US allies; under the guise of counterterrorism, it intends to remain deeply involved militarily in the internal affairs of other countries, and it is dropping too many bombs in too many places on too many people.”⁷²⁰

With the intensification of drone strikes throughout his administration, the cost-benefit analysis for US power, particularly in undeclared war zones, is already showing telling results akin to Bush's failed democratization mission in Iraq.

7.6.4 Hegemonic Overreach

One of the central contradictions of US foreign policy for the past century has been between the imperatives of hegemony and the sense of messianic mission (overstretch) developed in America's formative years and enlarged in scope as US power expanded. These two basic elements do not always conflict; however, in certain key crises, the American belief in its special mission in the world causes it to make foreign policy choices that ultimately undermine its hegemonic position.⁷²¹

Despite Trump's preference for principled realism, it is far from preordained that it will successfully resist the perennial pull of hegemony in the long run. Currently, this raises three dilemmas that are likely to engender a dangerous precedent for US power predominance. The first of these derives from Trump's drive to foster international respect for the US by concentrating on the build-up of material power capabilities.⁷²² The second is tied to the power and purpose connected to Trump's pugilistic nationalism and isolationist rhetoric and what it means for US security arrangements. The third emerges from his transactional mindset that adversely affects the prudent use of American power when addressing foreign policy

⁷²⁰ Posen, B. R. (2018). The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 20.

⁷²¹ Florig, D. (2010). Hegemonic overreach vs. imperial overstretch. *Review of International Studies*, 1103-1119.

⁷²² Rubin, G. (2020). Barack Obama: From an End to Terror to Drone Wars and ISIS. In *Presidential Rhetoric on Terrorism under Bush, Obama and Trump* (pp. 81-103). Palgrave Pivot, Cham.

problems.⁷²³ Though deployment of drone capabilities does not always equate to their use, it, however, risks escalating ongoing tensions in regional theatres. Thus, the increased deployment of drones in South Korea is likely to provoke retaliation from China and hamper US strategic interests in Asia akin to Obama's Pivot to Asia strategic policy failure (these issues are examined in the next chapter).

7.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the intersection of Trump's grand strategy with its drone warfare. One of the key arguments is that drones served strategic purposes in supporting the America First grand strategy of the Trump administration – that challenged the post-Cold War US consensus on liberal hegemony. As the preceding argument in this chapter has shown, the aftermath of drone strikes in targeted states engendered the same pattern of inimical outcomes evident in Trump's predecessor's CT operations. For the Trump administration, the aftermath has been manifest in the decline of US soft power, diminution of US global leadership credentials, civilian deaths, and hegemonic overreach.

In the next chapter, the dilemma of drone warfare in targeted states is analysed and critically explored to establish its nexus with the post 9/11 US grand strategy.

⁷²³ Sinkkonen, V. (2018). Contextualizing the "Trump Doctrine": Realism, Transactionalism and the Civilizational Agenda. *FIIA Analysis*, (10).

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Dialectics and Dilemma of US Drone Warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan

“Drones are industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machines...”⁷²⁴

8.0 Introduction

After examining the impact of drones in targeted states from the lens of successive US administrations post 9/11 in the preceding chapters, an in-depth analysis of the dilemma of drones from the lens of targeted states is undertaken in this chapter. This is undertaken by investigating the impact of drone strikes based on four impacts: (i) blowback effect, (ii) civilian casualties, (iii) terrorist retaliation/violence, and the (iv) counterterrorism paradox. These impacts are analysed based on a critical exploration of the aftermath of drone attacks in the two case countries and their impact in facilitating or impeding US strategic objectives. The two countries – Afghanistan and Pakistan – were selected based on three reasons. First, the post 9/11 legacy of drone strikes in these countries. Second, the two main types of US drone operations – CIA and JSOC – have occurred in them, respectively. Third, the availability of anecdotal and published evidence assessing the impact of drone strikes in these states. While there are other case studies like Iraq (where drones have been integral in decimating al-Qaeda and ISIS), which provide useful insight to explain the use of drone warfare in targeted states since 9/11, this thesis considers the two selected case studies to have the most available data set that best assesses the impact of drones.

This chapter argues that local factors within targeted states such as domestic politics, insurgencies, religious and tribal affiliations, and public opinion about US drone warfare undermine US strategic objectives. In building these arguments, this chapter is structured into five parts. The first part examines US drone targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The second part explores the argument for and against the use of drones as a CT tool in targeted states. The third part contains an in-depth analysis of the impact of drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan based on the four themes mentioned above. In the fourth part, the impact of drones on US strategic objectives is analyzed. The conclusion highlights the key findings and re-litigates the argument that drones undermine US grand strategy in targeted states based on the evidence assessed in this chapter.

⁷²⁴ John Nagl cited in Foust, J. (2011). Unaccountable killing machines: The true costs of US drones. *The Atlantic*.

8.1 US Drone Targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US has carried out drone operations for targeted killing operations in more than ten states, mainly in North Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Two countries have remained at the epicenter of these operations – Afghanistan and Pakistan – and there are ominous signs that they will remain the key focus. While the DoD conducts direct military and ISR operations using drones in Afghanistan (a declared war zone of the US since 2001)⁷²⁵, the CIA conducts drone operations in Pakistan, particularly over FATA for secretive targeted killings. Though differing in the mode of operation and public acknowledgement of strikes, both operations remain focused on eliminating terrorist threats. In the next section, drone targets in Pakistan and Afghanistan are examined, and the utility and efficacy of drones are analysed.

8.1.1 Drone Targets in Pakistan

There are three main terrorist groups in Pakistan that have been targeted by US drone strikes since 9/11: Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), al-Qaeda in Pakistan, and the Haqqani Network. These groups, though divergent in name, objective, and mode of operations, espouse similar ideological belief in Salafi Jihadism – a distinct ideological movement in Sunni Islam that propagates a radical version of Islam and rejects westernization as an abhorrent concept or *haram* (forbidden).⁷²⁶ These groups mainly operate in the FATA region of Pakistan (made up of Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan.⁷²⁷) – often described as a “lawless frontier” due to its quasi-autonomous status distinct from the Pakistani state.⁷²⁸

The emergence of al-Qaeda in Pakistan or the Pakistani Taliban can be linked to the Soviet-Afghan War of the 1980s (when Russia sought to introduce communism into Afghanistan).⁷²⁹ Shortly after the war, the Mujahideen, or “freedom fighters” who fought against the Soviets, returned to the FATA and constituted a militant force in the region.⁷³⁰ Following the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the most senior leaders and core fighters of al-Qaeda sought shelter away from America’s aerial bombardment in Northwest Pakistan and consequently

⁷²⁵ Boyle, M. J. (2015). The legal and ethical implications of drone warfare.

⁷²⁶ Maher, S. (2016). *Salafi-Jihadism: The history of an idea*. Oxford University Press.

⁷²⁷ Qadir, A., & Alasuutari, P. (2013). Taming terror: domestication of the war on terror in the Pakistan media. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 23(6), 575-589.

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

⁷²⁹ Gunaratna, R. (2002). *Inside Al Qaeda: global network of terror*. Columbia University Press.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

formed al-Qaeda in Pakistan.⁷³¹ Since its inception, the group has been consistently targeted by CIA drone strikes as part of US CT operations against al-Qaeda – for sponsoring the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The group’s primary objective is to spread Salafi Jihadism across the Muslim world and to conduct terrorist attacks against the West.⁷³² Al-Qaeda in Pakistan extends from the second strata of the core al-Qaeda enterprise. Mendelsohn Barak identifies a five-part structure to al-Qaeda’s formation: (i) the al-Qaeda core, (ii) al-Qaeda allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan, (iii) its affiliates in other parts of the Muslim world, (iv) its sleeper cells and sympathizers around the globe, and (v) the idea of global Jihad itself.⁷³³

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged in 2007 when forty (40) Islamic militant leaders and other militant groups within the FATA and Khyber region joined forces to oppose Pakistani military operations against al-Qaeda militants in their region. Since its formation under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud of South Waziristan (later killed by a drone strike in 2009 near the Afghan border), the group has morphed into a rampaging and dangerous Islamist militant organization – and have been targeted by US drone strikes.⁷³⁴ TTP’s primary objectives revolve around three core elements: (i) overthrow the Pakistani government and replacing it with a Sharia regime predicated on Salafist ideals, (ii) carrying out Jihad against the Pakistani army and the government, (iii) seeking the release of their leaders and uniting against NATO forces.⁷³⁵ Though TTP claims to be ideologically different from al-Qaeda in terms of its objectives, it embraces similar ideological beliefs in Salafi Jihadism and anti-westernization.

The Haqqani Network emerged in the 1980s, and it derives its name after Jalaluddin Haqqani, the founding leader. The group is a Sunni Islamist organization operating in the South-Eastern region of Afghanistan and North-West FATA. Though the group is autonomously from TTP and al-Qaeda in Pakistan, it aligns ideologically with the objectives of other terrorist groups and has been reported to engage in joint tactical cooperation and attacks in the pursuit of these objectives.⁷³⁶

⁷³¹ Bergen, P., & Schneider, E. (2014). Why ISIS is Spreading Across Muslim World. *CNN*, Accessed on: November, 19, 2020.

⁷³² Bergen, P., Schneider, E., Sterman, D., Cahall, B., & Maurer, T. (2014). Jihadist Terrorism and Other Unconventional Threats. *Bipartisan Policy Center*, 1-61.

⁷³³ Mendelsohn, B. (2015). *The al-Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of al-Qaeda and its Consequences*. Oxford University Press.

⁷³⁴ Mahmood, S. (2015). Decapitating the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: An Effective Counter-Terrorism Strategy? *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 7(6), 24-29.

⁷³⁵ Abbas, H. (2008). *A profile of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*. Military Academy West Point Ny Combating Terrorism Center.

⁷³⁶ Dressler, J. A. (2010). The Haqqani Network. *Afghanistan Report*, 6.

Since 9/11, Pakistan has been the focal point of US drone strikes (mainly in the FATA). In 2012, the CIA regarded FATA as “the most dangerous region on earth” that gives sanctuary to thousands of Taliban militants who are actively plotting terrorist threats against the US and its interests.⁷³⁷ Several factors account for the FATA’s notoriety as a lawless entity and harbinger for terrorist activities. One, it is a characteristically mountainous region which makes conventional combat operations difficult. Two, the Frontier Crimes Regulation of 1901 constrained the government of Pakistan from conducting asymmetric warfare or deploying military assets into the region (this was replaced in 2018 by the FATA Interim Governance Regulation – which is an interim rule set for two years meant to govern FATA till it merges with Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). The third is the geographical contiguity of the FATA with Afghanistan, making it easy for terrorists to traverse the two countries across the Durand (border) line with ease (see figure 14 below).

Figure 14: Map showing the proximity of FATA with Afghanistan



Source: Congressional Research Service, (2018).⁷³⁸

These factors made drones the ideal counterterrorism weapon of choice for dismantling terrorist groups in Pakistan. This is because, compared to manned aircraft, drones can hover over a target for weeks before the targeted killing is initiated, thus, making its weaponry best

⁷³⁷ CIA cited in Mendelsohn, B. (2015). *The al-Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of al-Qaeda and its Consequences*. Oxford University Press.

⁷³⁸ Thomas, C. (2018). Afghanistan: Background and US Policy. *Congressional Research Service*, 10.

for achieving leadership decapitation. Second, deploying American soldiers to the FATA region increases the risk of soldier and civilian deaths as well as the political costs for US leaders, while the remote capabilities of drones greatly minimize this risk. More of these arguments are examined in the latter part of this chapter.

8.1.2 Drone Targets in Afghanistan

There are four main targets of US drone targeted killing operations in Afghanistan: al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), and the Islamic State in Afghanistan or the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP).

The al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, like its Pakistani counterpart, traces its evolutionary origin from the Soviet-Afghan War (1979 – 1989). The aftermath of the war incentivized the rise of both Islamic Jihadism and militant Mujahideen groups, initially backed by the US.⁷³⁹ The ousting of the Taliban regime on December 9, 2001, by US forces and its allies, caused the further spread of al-Qaeda, particularly in Eastern and Southwestern Afghanistan. With the intensification of drone attacks, the al-Qaeda core in Afghanistan modified its operations from one focused on openly championing al-Qaeda's global and anti-American agenda in the context of local insurgencies to working more covertly through local proxies.⁷⁴⁰ This signalled an approach that further buoyed the proliferation of al-Qaeda terrorist groups within the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and North Africa.⁷⁴¹

The second group, the Afghan Taliban, emerged in the 1990s, developed its military capabilities by taking advantage of sanctuaries in Pakistan's FATA, especially in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, including Karachi and Quetta.⁷⁴² Following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the group moved deeper into Afghanistan and maintained strategic strongholds in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan provinces while also operating freely in Pakistan's Quetta Shura province.⁷⁴³ The Afghan Taliban group, though distinct from the al-Qaeda core in terms of mode of operation, share a similar belief in Salafi Jihadism.

The Islamic State in Afghanistan, also known as Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), emerged in 2014, and it is a Salafi militant group composed of different Taliban splinter groups

⁷³⁹ Sageman, M. (2009). Confronting al-Qaeda: Understanding the threat in Afghanistan. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 3(4), 4-25.

⁷⁴⁰ Minhas, Z., & Qadir, A. (2014). The US War on Terror and the Drone Attacks In FATA, Pakistan.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Armitage, R. L., Berger, S., & Markey, D. (2010). US Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. *New York: Council on Foreign Relations*.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

and other militant formations. This group operates predominantly from the Eastern Nangarhar province in Afghanistan and also parts of Pakistan. Though they share parallel ideology with ISIS and claim allegiance to it, they are not affiliated.⁷⁴⁴ The group's ideology is rooted in the extremist interpretation of Islamic scripture and anti-Shiite sectarian views. Particularly, it propagates a strict version of Salafism called Wahhabism – a puritanical form of Sunnism practiced mainly in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.⁷⁴⁵ The overarching goal of ISKP is to maintain Khorasan province as a global IS caliphate in Afghanistan and to support the expansion of the IS in Iraq and Syria.⁷⁴⁶

The fourth group is al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) which is an Islamic militant organization operating in Afghanistan from al-Qaeda core, with a sole mission of establishing an Islamic State and waging Jihad against the government of Pakistan, India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.⁷⁴⁷ Its overarching goal has remained to strengthen the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, defending it and bringing stability to it. Over the years, the operation of the group has extended from the Shobarak district in Kandahar to Eastern and South-eastern Afghanistan.

Before exploring the role of drones in Trump's grand strategy, it is important to examine the geopolitics of the US drone pact/agreement in these countries and how it has shaped drone use.

8.2 Geopolitics of US Drone Pact in Afghanistan and Pakistan

The US has drone pacts with both Afghanistan and Pakistan for facilitating its drone warfare and obtaining approval from domestic governments of targeted states. Drone pacts here refer to bilateral agreements between the US and the states authorizing the use of drones over their governed spaces. In Pakistan, the first of these agreements was signed in 2004 during the Bush administration. This pact, referred to as the US-Pakistan drone pact, confined US drone strikes to within certain demarcated flight boxes in FATA, particularly the Khyber and Mahmood agencies but excluded South and North Waziristan – which was the hub for terrorist activities in the region and mostly populated by Pashtuns.⁷⁴⁸ The restriction of drone strikes in these areas was against the backdrop that the Bush administration might use drone ISR capabilities to conduct unrestrained surveillance and espionage on sites critical to Pakistan's national

⁷⁴⁴ Johnson, C. G. (2016). *The rise and stall of the Islamic State in Afghanistan*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

⁷⁴⁵ Blanchard, C. M. (2007, January). The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya. Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service.

⁷⁴⁶ Osman, B. (2016). The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar. *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, 27.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid. (Mahmood, 2014).

security interest.⁷⁴⁹ The agreement also had other caveats. First, it stated that the final authorization for a drone strike in the designated flight box would lie with the Pakistani government. Second, the pact, limited drone strikes to narrow corridors of the tribal areas to ensure the US does not venture into Islamabad's nuclear facilities and mountain camps that housed Kashmir militants (training to repel possible Indian attacks).⁷⁵⁰ The effect of this pact accounted for the limited amount of drone strikes in Pakistan under the Bush era.

This, however, changed under Obama with the signing of a new US-Pakistan drone agreement in 2009. The pact expanded the scope of US drone operations in the FATA region, extending into the Waziristan agency and allowing unlimited ISR missions. Though the agreement exempted the Bajaur agency, as the Pakistani government feared public backlash, it, however, allowed the Obama administration to tap into their radio and land-line communications system.⁷⁵¹ This consequently led to a higher number of drone strike authorizations in Pakistan compared to his predecessor (from an average of one strike in 40 days to one in every four days by mid-2011).⁷⁵² Negotiations with the Taliban and changes to US drone policy (see previous chapters) in the last years (2014-2016) of the Obama administration led to the denouement of drone strikes in the FATA region, Pakistan. This trajectory has continued under the Trump administration, with Pakistan no longer the main focus of the US CT campaign; rather, the focus has shifted to Afghanistan, particularly the Haqqani Network (due to their role in providing terrorist safe havens) (see figure 15 below).

Unlike Pakistan, Afghanistan is a declared war zone of the US and the first state in which the US conducted lethal drone strikes. Since the inception of the US-Afghan War in 2001 against the Taliban regime, the US has conducted airstrikes with coalition forces in the region but has also carried out several JSOC drone strike operations. The peak of US drone strikes in Afghanistan occurred during the Obama administration based on his Af-Pak strategy. The strategy led to the expansion of drone operations into Kandahar, Kabul, Helmand, Nangarhar, and other provinces in West Afghanistan that were initially safe havens for al-Qaeda terrorist groups.⁷⁵³ Under Trump's 'New Afghan Strategy' as captured in the 2017 NSS, Afghanistan

⁷⁴⁹ Ali, I. (2012). United States-Pakistan Relations: Facing a Critical Juncture. *Islamabad: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding*. https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/2012_US-Pakistan-Relations_Intiaz-Ali.pdf

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

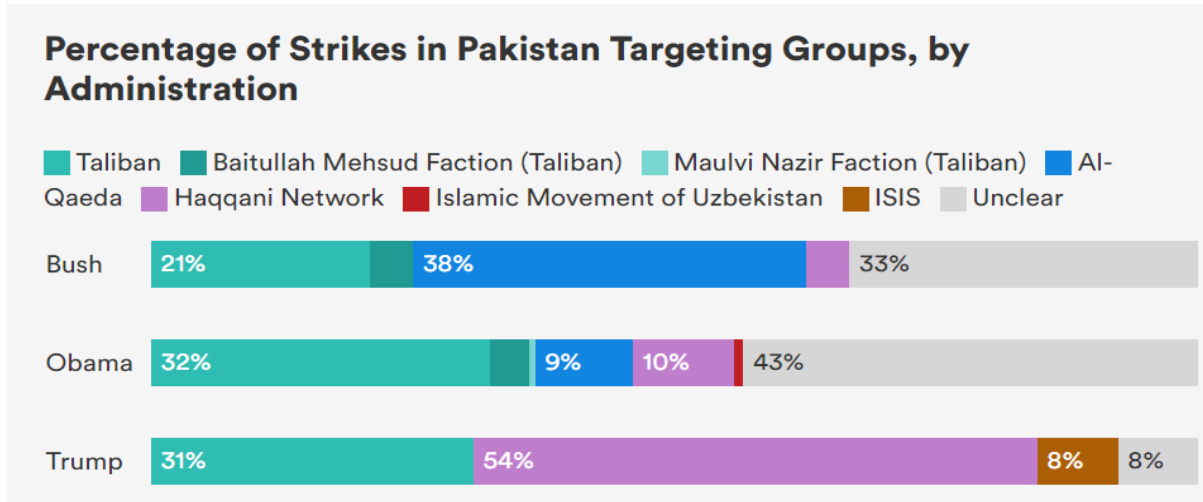
⁷⁵¹ Ibid. (Shah, 2018).

⁷⁵² Shane, S. (2015). Drone strikes reveal uncomfortable truth: US is often unsure about who will die. *The New York Times*, 23, 2015.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

remains the focal point of his drone campaign for dismantling al-Qaeda and ISIS influence in the country.

Figure 15: Percentage of Drone Strikes in Pakistan by Successive US Administrations since 9/11



Source: Brookings Institution.⁷⁵⁴

The US had initially, under Obama, entered a bilateral security partnership (Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement) with Afghanistan in Tokyo in 2012 to facilitate a peace deal. The deal aimed to: (i) facilitate the reconciliation of the Taliban with the Karzai government and (ii) scuttle radical mobilization of Taliban fighters. However, it has not been successful in ending hostilities, preventing insurgencies, and forging lasting peace in the region.⁷⁵⁵ The prospects for peace in Afghanistan appeared to grow under President Trump with the signing of a peace deal in Doha, Qatar, in February 2020. The agreement signed on 29 February 2020 between the United States and the Taliban consented to a complete withdrawal of US and allied forces in Afghanistan within 14 months of its signing. In exchange, Taliban leaders acceded to breaking ties with terrorist organizations in the region that frustrate US operations, a permanent ceasefire, and open talks for peace with the Afghan government. It is too early to ascertain this agreement will prevent further drone actions against terrorists in Afghanistan as analysts believe the chance of peace is low, and the Taliban are stringing along the US with the intention to betray any agreement once US force leaves.⁷⁵⁶ Second, two annexures of the deal were classified by the Trump administration and kept away from Congressional oversight and public

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid (Brookings, 2019).

⁷⁵⁵ Arzhad, R. (2016). Strategic Partnership Agreement between Afghanistan and US (Effects and impacts of the agreement on security in the region). *International Relations and International Law Journal*, 66(2).

⁷⁵⁶ Behuria, A., Hassan, Y. U., & Saroha, S. (2019). US-Taliban Talks for Afghan Peace: Complexities Galore. *Strategic Analysis*, 43(2), 126-137.

scrutiny. This makes it difficult to ascertain how both parties have agreed to live up to their end of the bargain. There is evidence that since the agreement was signed, aerial attacks from the Afghan military against the Taliban have continued, further highlighting the inherent gaps in the deal.

Next, the arguments for and against the use of drones in targeted states are examined.

8.3 Arguments for Drone use in Targeted States

Since the 2001 terrorist attacks, drones have played an important yet controversial role in the CT strategy of the US. There are several arguments in the literature outlining the rationale for drone use in targeted states, namely: tactical effectiveness, light footprint to warfare, precision targeting, preventing dangerous deployments, and projecting US power.⁷⁵⁷ The ISR and combat readiness of drones in hard-to-reach areas and their ability to process battlefield information rapidly further establish their preference over humans in targeted states.⁷⁵⁸ Compared to manned aircraft, they are more likely to discriminate between civilians and combatants – as their Hellfire missiles are likely to cause less unwarranted deaths than cluster munitions. For instance, a typical Hellfire missile carries a 20-pound explosive charge compared to the AGM-65 Maverick, which carries a 126-pound warhead.⁷⁵⁹ While collateral damage due to drone strikes has been reported in several instances, the impact of their damage is still lower compared to the AGM-65 munitions due to the explosive charge of their strike radius.⁷⁶⁰

Drones further give the US the tactical latitude to wage remote wars and re-assign its troops to regional theatres where great power competitions occur while delegating CT functions to machine surrogates (UAVs). For instance, a single MQ-1 Predator or MQ-9 Reaper can replace the function of 20-30 soldiers in battlefield deployments.⁷⁶¹ Also, MQ-1's can also carry two AGM-114 Hellfire air-to-ground missiles, and the MQ-9 can carry two 500-pound bombs and Hellfire missiles, which gives these drones the equivalent firepower of an F-16 against small targets and the fighting power of more than 50 soldiers.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁷ Brunstetter, V. D., & Braun, M. (2011). The Implication of Drones. *art. cité*. Also see, Hazelton, J. L. (2012). Drones: what are they good for? *Parameters*, 42(4/1), 29.

⁷⁵⁸ Boyle M. J. (2013). The costs and consequences of drone warfare. *International Affairs*, 89(1), 1-29.

⁷⁵⁹ Fowler, M. (2014). The strategy of drone warfare. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 7(4), 108-119.

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶¹ McLean, W. (2014). Drones are cheap, soldiers are not: a cost-benefit analysis of war. *The Conversation, The Conversation US, Inc*, 25.

⁷⁶² Fowler, M. (2014). The strategy of drone warfare. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 7(4), 108-119.

Empirical evidence based on data obtained from US drone operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan indicates that drones are effective tools for achieving leadership decapitation and organizational splintering – as terrorists have found it harder to train, operate, and relocated to mountainous regions for fear of drones.⁷⁶³ Anecdotal evidence indicates that drones instill a climate of fear and uncertainty among terrorists and have made it harder for terrorists to freely move, openly train their operatives, or plan operations further afield.⁷⁶⁴ Describing the devastating effect of drones, one al-Qaeda operative acknowledged, “they cause carnage, destruction, pursuit... but they themselves remain unseen, just like Satan and his ilk who see us while remaining unseen.”⁷⁶⁵

8.4 Arguments Against the Use of Drones in Targeted States

While drones have been effective CT tools in eliminating HVTs such as Saad bin Laden (Osama bin Laden’s third son); Abu Laith al Libi (highly ranked member of the al-Qaeda core); Osama al Kini (al-Qaeda chief operations officer); Khalid Habib (commander of the Lashkar al Zil); Abu Khabab al Masri (al-Qaeda’s weapons chief) and Saleh al Somali (head of al-Qaeda’s operations outside Afghanistan), controversial aspects of drone use since 9/11 have called into question the political, tactical, and strategic benefits of drone strikes for the US government. The morality of drone strikes, unintended death of non-combatants, generation of anti-American sentiment, alienation of the US from targeted states, dent in US global image, and the possibility that drone strikes facilitate militant recruitment have questioned the utility of drones for facilitating US strategic objectives. For instance, while drones have been used in eliminating “bad guys” and drawing down troops in the Middle East, it also generates adverse outcomes such as terrorism recruitment and anti-drone protests.⁷⁶⁶ Thus, highlighting the inherent paradox of their use.

There are also legal, moral, political, and ethical concerns that have further questioned drone use. The legal questions surrounding drones have centered around territorial encroachment, sovereignty intrusion, and violations of war conventions. Most of the debates stem from whether drones comply with the principle of distinction under international law, as provided by Article 48 of the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions of 1977. The protocol

⁷⁶³ Jordan, J. (2014). Attacking the leader, missing the mark: Why terrorist groups survive decapitation strikes. *International Security*, 38(4), 7-38.

⁷⁶⁴ Byman, D. (2013). Why drones work: the case for Washington's weapon of choice. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 32.

⁷⁶⁵ Boyle, M. J. (2013). The costs and consequences of drone warfare. *International affairs*, 89(1), 1-29.

⁷⁶⁶ Wolfendale, J. (2007). Terrorism, security, and the threat of counterterrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30(1), 75-92.

establishes the importance of protecting non-combatants during war and issues limitations on the prosecution of the war.⁷⁶⁷ There are currently no specific international conventions or regulations that proscribe the use of drones; as Emmanuel Bossios posits, this has caused the US to “engage in a largely covert campaign of targeted killings engendering, in effect, a secret war governed by a secret law (referring to the AUMF) beyond the purview of international laws of war.”⁷⁶⁸ Relatedly, the legal question of whether drones or the human operator in the loop should be held accountable for collateral damages and accidental kills following drone strikes in targeted states is also a key concern.⁷⁶⁹ Related to this, drones facilitate the deprivation of life without the due process of law and impinge on the right to self-defence by facilitating the *dronification* of state violence.⁷⁷⁰ However, considering that US drone strikes have been largely covert and unacknowledged, they “evade” these legal spotlights.

From an ethical standpoint, drones remove human personnel and states from the potential consequences of international law violations. These ethical concerns were evident in the Obama administration’s preference for the use of drones to eliminate HVTs, rather than capturing and bringing them to justice. While the former makes sense from a tactical and strategic standpoint, it fosters the arbitrary use of US power – that neglects the territorial and sovereignty rights of states to maintain internal security and protect their citizenry. Furthermore, the notion that drones can be “suitable” for targeted states but generate controversy and negative public opinion in the US when their citizens are killed underscore the lopsidedness of US drone warfare. Like Obama, the expansion of drone warfare under President Trump also continued to ignore the ethical concerns of drone use in targeted states. Former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, describes drones as introducing a “bloodless, painless, and odourless type of warfare that desensitizes as well as dehumanizes.”⁷⁷¹ Considering that drones are likely to remain the de facto counterterrorism strategy, the long-term impact of their ethical and moral violations in targeted states potentially overshadows their short-term uses.

⁷⁶⁷ Pilloud, C., Sandoz, Y., Swinarski, C., & Zimmermann, B. (Eds.). (1987). *Commentary on the additional protocols: of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

⁷⁶⁸ Bossios, E. G. (2014). The proliferation of drones: A new and deadly arms race. *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 9(4), 387-392.

⁷⁶⁹ Sterio, M. (2012). The United States' use of drones in the War on Terror: the (il) legality of targeted killings under international law. *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.*, 45, 197.

⁷⁷⁰ Barela, S. J. (2016). *Legitimacy and Drones: Investigating the Legality, Morality and Efficacy of UCAVs*. Routledge.

⁷⁷¹ Jaffe, G. (2013). Former Defense Secretary Gates Warns against Lure of Drone Warfare. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/former-defense-secretary-gates-warns-against-lure-of-drone-warfare/2013/10/23/c5bdc734-3c2d-11e3-a94f-b58017bfee6c_story.html

From a political perspective, drones avert the need for direct military confrontation and serve as a cost-effective strategy that prevents dangerous rescue and recovery operations (like the embarrassing Blackhawk Down incident in Somalia) in combat zones. However, their negative aftermath has elicited reactions from citizens and government officials in targeted states – that further point to their countervailing effects.⁷⁷² Based on the proviso of international laws, targeted killing – defined as the “deliberate killing of an individual, specified in advance as a target approved by an authorised part of government bureaucracy without an independent judicial process”⁷⁷³ – permissible in states under certain conditions. Rogers and McGoldrick⁷⁷⁴ identify them as follows:

- i. Targets are legitimately classified as combatants.
- ii. The targeted location lies within the lines of battle.
- iii. Civilian casualty can be minimized.
- iv. The threat is clear, imminent, and not distant, unviable, and unforeseeable
- v. The targeted individual is actively involved in the imminent attack and not punished due to past events
- vi. The collateral damage has been weighed
- vii. The government carrying out the targeted killing has articulated the legal basis for their intended action.

US drone strikes in targeted states have violated some of these criteria. One of the major issues emanates from the drone authorization process by governments in targeted states. According to Michael Fowler, sovereign countries may choose to grant drone strike authorization privately or publicly.⁷⁷⁵ The challenge, however, with private authorization is that it leads to a “do not ask, do not tell”⁷⁷⁶ policy, in which case, the striking country conducts targeted killing operations without public acknowledgement.⁷⁷⁷ The blowback of this process is that it perpetuates a “shadow weapon that operates based on secretive conditions to achieve covert

⁷⁷² Barela, S. J. (2016). *Legitimacy and Drones: Investigating the Legality, Morality and Efficacy of UCAVs*. Routledge. 112-114

⁷⁷³ Blum, G., & Heymann, P. (2010). Law and Policy of Targeted Killing, 1 *Harv. National Security Journal*, 145, 147.

⁷⁷⁴ Rogers, A. P., & McGoldrick, D. (2011). III. Assassination and Targeted Killing—The Killing of Osama Bin Laden. *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, 60(3), 778-788.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid* (Fowler, 2014)

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

goals.” This has been most reflected in CIA drone operations in non-declared traditional battlefields.

The cumulative impact has elicited reactions from targeted states. For instance, on 13th May 2013, a Peshawar High Court sitting in Pakistan ruled that the US has not received proper consent from the Pakistani government to conduct drone strikes.⁷⁷⁸ The basis of this ruling was predicated on findings that former President Musharraf gave only verbal consent to US drone operations. Though the court failed to determine if written consent was required to facilitate drone strike operations, it was unanimous in its decision that the legacy of drone operations in Pakistan had violated the doctrine of sovereignty and self-defence codified in Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.⁷⁷⁹ Furthermore, as Fowler adds, the secretive nature of the drone strikes in Pakistan and elsewhere engenders plausible deniability and limits the targeted countries’ liability for perceived and actual violations of its sovereignty.⁷⁸⁰ Carl Levin, former Chair of Senate Armed Services Committee, however, criticized the Pakistani government for their lopsided view of US drone operations, noting that “Washington was hamstrung by Pakistan’s frequent criticism of its drone program.”⁷⁸¹ He stated that the Pakistani government “...give us (the US) the green light privately for drone strikes but condemn their impact publicly...”⁷⁸²

The next section takes an in-depth analysis of the arguments against drones in targeted states by assessing their impact based on four themes central to this thesis.

8.5 Assessing the Impact of Drone Strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan

This section examines the impact of drone strikes in targeted states based on four themes: blowback effect, terrorist violence, civilian casualty, and counterterrorism paradox. The analysis gauges how local factors within targeted states such as domestic politics, insurgencies, religious and tribal affiliations, territoriality, and public opinion, and their nexus with drones impact US strategic objectives.

⁷⁷⁸ Horowitz, J., & Rogers, C. (2013). Case Watch: A Court in Pakistan addresses US drone attacks. *Open Society Foundations*, 28.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁸¹ Carl Levin quoted in Joshua Kucera, “Pakistan: US Officials Working to Sway Hearts and Minds in Islamabad,” *EurasiaNet.org*, July 7, 2009, <https://eurasianet.org/pakistan-us-officials-working-to-sway-hearts-and-minds-in-islamabad>

⁷⁸² Ibid

8.5.1 The Blowback Question

The term “blowback” was originally coined by the CIA to explain the unintended and negative effects (such as retaliatory attacks and increase in terrorist violence) following covert operations.⁷⁸³ In reference to US drone strikes and their blowback effect in targeted states, Shah avers that “each miss that kills civilians, or even each hit that kills a militant, angers locals near the blast zone and inflames national sentiment against the US in ways that aid militant recruitment.”⁷⁸⁴

There is, however, a lack of consensus in the literature on whether drones trigger blowback effects in targeted states. Those who support the blowback thesis opine that drones spur terrorist reprisal attacks rather than reduce the overall number of attacks.⁷⁸⁵ Blowback due to drones have been conceptualized⁷⁸⁶ to occur on three different levels:

- i. Locally, when family members are killed by drone strikes which then become the basis for retaliation and anti-American sentiments.
- ii. Nationally, when drone strikes occur in countries that oppose their use due to the humiliating impact on sovereignty and territorial integrity. This inadvertently arouses national sentiments and mobilizes militant actions against drones – that translate into anti-drone protests geared at exerting pressure on national governments to stop drone authorizations.
- iii. Transnationally, when other targeted states where drone strike radicalizes against their use in the Muslim world. This also means drones serve as a propaganda tool that arouses anti-American/Western sentiments that promotes Salafi-Jihadism at the transnational level.

The above arguments are well established in the existing literature. One of the arguments is that drones incentivize militant and insurgent groups to seek revenge for the death of their relatives or Muslim brothers.⁷⁸⁷ This is tied to the concept of *Pashtunwali*, also known as

⁷⁸³ Feffer, J. (2016). The coming drone blowback. *Foreign Policy in Focus*.

⁷⁸⁴ Shah, A. (2018). Do US drone strike cause blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and beyond. *International Security*, 42(04), 47-84.

⁷⁸⁵ Cronin, A. K. (2013). Why drones fail: when tactics drive strategy. *Foreign Affairs*, 92, 44. See also: Kilcullen, D., & Exum, A. M. (2009). Death from above, outrage down below. *New York Times*, 16, 535; Fair, C. (2010). Drones Over Pakistan--Menace or Best Viable Option? *V Huffington Post*, August, 2

⁷⁸⁶ Shah, A. (2018). Do US drone strike cause blowback? Evidence from Pakistan and beyond. *International Security*, 42(04), 47-84; Sauer, F., & Schörnig, N. (2012). Killer drones: The ‘silver bullet’ of democratic warfare? *Security Dialogue*, 43(4), 363-380.

⁷⁸⁷ Anderson, K. (2013). The case for drones.

familial or tribal revenge. It is a Pashtun tribal code concerned with maintaining an honourable reputation. The code is what led Mullah Omar, the founder of the Afghan Taliban, to continue to shield Osama bin Laden from the US following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.⁷⁸⁸ The Pashtunwali tenet of *Badal* was also invoked in TTP's attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar that led to the death of 150 people on 16 December 2014.⁷⁸⁹ A spokesperson of the TTP, speaking after the incident, stated the attacks were a response to drone strikes in the FATA region and anger towards the overbearing incursion of the Pakistani military in the region.⁷⁹⁰

The Pashtunwali code reflects the nexus between ethnic and religious identity and, according to Jonathan Hawkins, serves as an explanation why Sunni Muslims perceive any "external threat to their tribe as a parallel threat to Islam and a provocation to incite Jihad."⁷⁹¹ While establishing the connection between religious and ethnic identity and Salafi Jihadism is not within the scope of this thesis, it offers possible explanations on why Pashtuns living in targeted zones may seek to avenge the death of relative kin or family members that have been killed by drone attacks.⁷⁹² This leads to the question of whether drones cause blowback.

8.5.1.1 Do Drones Cause Blowback in Targeted States?

Though the argument that drones inflame anti-American sentiments and spur militant retaliation in targeted states is well documented in the literature, the cognitive effects in targeted states are difficult to empirically measure; however, a critical assessment of their effect is based on available evidence is possible.

A number of authors argue that drones cause blowback. According to Audrey Kurth Cronin, a founding director of the Centre for Security, Innovation, and New Technology state, "drones increase the likelihood of attacks over the long term by embittering locals and cultivating a desire for revenge."⁷⁹³ According to two other prominent experts, Kilcullen and Exum, "drones have a negative net effect on terrorism – as some of those who support terrorist groups or become terrorists may be motivated by the desire to seek revenge for loved ones killed in drone

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid (Shah, 2018)

⁷⁸⁹ Malik, A. (2015). Godless gods–The Peshawar School Attack and the Formidable Adversary. *Harvard Human Rights Journal Online. BBC News Asia. Revived from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-30491435>*

⁷⁹⁰ Malik, A. (2015). Godless gods–The Peshawar School Attack and the Formidable Adversary. *Harvard Human Rights Journal Online. BBC News Asia. Revived from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-30491435>*.

⁷⁹¹ Hawkins, J. (2009). The Pashtun cultural code: Pashtunwali. *Australian Defence Force Journal*, (180), 16.

⁷⁹² Mufti, M. (2012). Religion and militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan: a literature review: a report of the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation/author Mariam Mufti.

⁷⁹³ Cronin, A. K. (2013). Why drones fail: when tactics drive strategy. *Foreign Aff.*, 92, 44.

strikes.”⁷⁹⁴ Boyle draws a connection between blowback and civilian casualty figures based on the impact of every unintended death following drone strikes. According to him, “every dead non-combatant represents an alienated family, a new desire for revenge and an incentive for militancy to grow exponentially.”⁷⁹⁵

In an assessment of drone strikes in Pakistan, Bergen and Tiedemann determined a plethora of potential sources of militant mobilization, namely: radicalization, social factors, psychological reasons, and religious/ideological reasons. They, however, argue that drones give a recruitment boost (as a propaganda tool) for terrorists, as the carnage left after targeted strikes encourage relatives and friends of the victims to join terrorist groups to fight the US and the Pakistani government (for their complicity in authorizing such strikes).⁷⁹⁶ For instance, increase in the membership of TTP, as Mahmood notes, has been from “new groups pledging their allegiance and from new recruits joining the rank and file of the terrorist group, some of whom were motivated by the rise of the ISIS and others by the revulsion over drone strikes.”⁷⁹⁷

Anecdotal evidence establishing the intersection between drones and blowback has been based on poll data from citizens living in targeted states. For instance, a 2010 Pew Research based on a sample of 1000 FATA residents showed that 76 percent opposed drone strikes, and only 16 percent thought that targeted strikes accurately hit their intended target. Forty-eight percent believed that strikes killed civilians largely.⁷⁹⁸ In the same poll, 60 percent of the residents thought suicide attacks against the US were “sometimes” or “always” justified.⁷⁹⁹

Similarly, a survey conducted by Bergen and Tiedemann, based on reported data of drone strikes in Northwest Pakistan from 2004-2010, determined that “one of the motivations spurring anti-American sentiments arise from the anger at drone strikes on militants living in the area.”⁸⁰⁰ Their data share parallel findings with poll data published by the Brookings Institution on the number of FATA residents who support or oppose military action against terrorist organizations in the region. The result showed (see figure 16 below) that more of the

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid (Kilcullen & Exum, 2009).

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid (Boyle, 2016b)

⁷⁹⁶ Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2011). Washington's Phantom War: The Effects of the US Drone Programs in Pakistan. *Foreign Aff.*, 90, 12.

⁷⁹⁷ Mahmood, S. (2015). Decapitating the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: An Effective Counter-Terrorism Strategy?. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 7(6), 24-29.

⁷⁹⁸ Kohut, A. (2012). Pakistani public opinion ever more critical of us: 74% call America an enemy. *Retrieved from the Pew Research Global Attitudes Project website <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/06/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Pakistan-Report-FINAL-Wednesday-June-27-2012.pdf>*

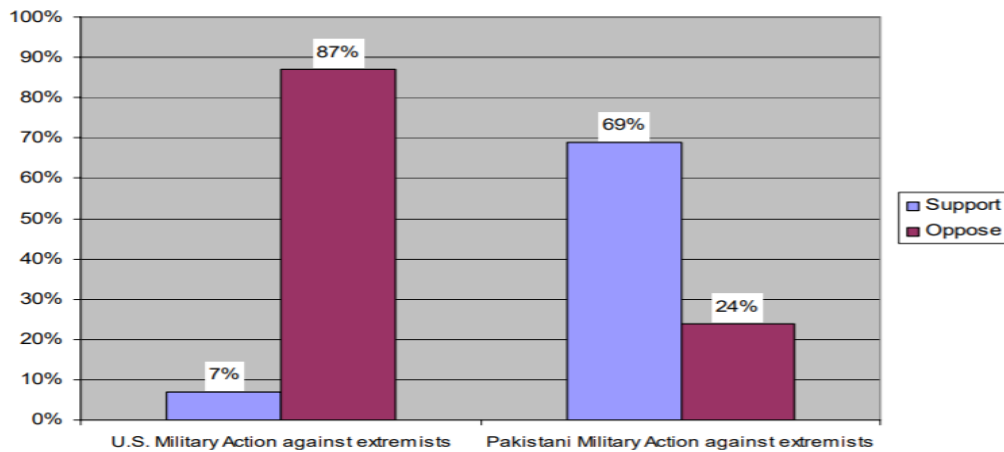
⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ Bergen, P., & Tiedemann, K. (2010). The year of the drone. *New America Foundation*, 24.

residents supported Pakistani military action (69 percent) compared to 7 percent that believed US actions were justified.

Figure 16: FATA Residents who support or oppose military action against al-Qaeda and Taliban in their region.

FATA Residents who Support or Oppose Military Action against Al-Qaeda and Taliban in their Region



Source: Brookings Institution.⁸⁰¹

A 2018 report published by Shah discredits the credibility of the blowback hypothesis of drone impact in Pakistan. His claims were based on 147 interviews conducted in North Waziristan, Pakistan – regarded as one of the most targeted drone strike districts in the FATA region – and on a survey involving 500 detained terrorists from Southern Sindh province. His findings determined that 79 percent of the respondents support US drone campaigns, with the majority sharing the view that strikes rarely killed non-combatants. Furthermore, his research findings stated there is a lack of overwhelming evidence establishing drone strikes as the basis for terrorist recruitment or retaliation.⁸⁰² From his research, the main sources of militant recruitment in Pakistan are namely: (i) identity crisis of young immigrants, (ii) political grievance, (iii) weak governance structures, (iv) inadvertent exposure to radical extremist ideologies online and, (v) coercive recruitment by militant groups.⁸⁰³ Furthermore, Shah further debunks the blowback claims made by previous studies. He asserts that Kilcullen and Exum's research lacked empirical data to back up their blowback claims. Likewise, he dismisses Bergen and Tiedemann's study on the basis of social desirability bias – or socially acceptable

⁸⁰¹ Ibid (Brookings, 2019).

⁸⁰² Ibid (Shah, 2018).

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

responses – which, in his own opinion, prejudiced their findings. However, Shah’s critique of the blowback thesis is dismissive of a number of considerations.

- i. Blowback does not require universal opposition to be tenable. Hence, when few young men join terrorist groups or act as a determined lone bombers in carrying out attacks in retaliation to drone strikes, this counts as blowback.
- ii. His interviews, as he admits, were not scientifically representative. Yet, he used it to draw his research conclusion regarding blowback for the whole of the FATA. Even if the plausibility of statistical representation can be made, his conclusion on the absence of blowback is a giant leap. Also, his study lacks an empirical basis to generalize the blowback hypothesis, as the cognitive impact of drone strikes in other targeted states may confirm otherwise.
- iii. Shah opines that a high level of support for drone strikes (79 percent) in the FATA refutes the blowback hypothesis. However, this does take into consideration the degree of blowback – which can range from little, medium, or large – depending on the threshold used in analysing it. This prejudices his findings. As John Feffer argues, “blowback would exist even if only 0.1 percent of the FATA’s residents joined TTP out of anger over drone strikes” (see table 13 for blowback threshold). As Feffer further adds, “there are over 4 million people living in the FATA region. A fighting force composed of 4,000 people is one percent of the entire population – and that easily falls within the 21 percent of the respondents that disapprove of drones in Shah’s findings.”⁸⁰⁴
- iv. Lastly, his findings ignore the human side of war and suggest that little blowback is no blowback.

Table 13: Threshold of Blowback

Blowback	Threshold	Examples
Small	A lone-wolf attack or reprisal attack over the death of a family /terrorist member.	Times Square Bomber, Faisal Shahzad
Medium	A coordinated attack by a terrorist group that results in significant casualty figures	Charlie Hebdo; Peshawar school attacks
Large	A transnational terrorist attack that results in large civilian casualty figures	9/11 terrorist attacks

Source: Author’s Adaptation

⁸⁰⁴ Feffer, J. (2016). The coming drone blowback. *Foreign Policy in Focus*.

A recent study by Jaeger and Siddique, analysing the effect of drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan (based on empirical data collected from NAF, Worldwide Incidents Tracking Systems, and the National Counterterrorism Centre from 1 January 2007 – 3 September 2011), suggest that drones cause blowback effects in targeted states. Their study was conducted based on a critical examination of different time periods and lag structures of drones in Pakistan and Afghanistan based on a vector autoregressive approach. Their findings established a positive correlation between drones and blowback. According to them,

“There are stronger effects of drone strikes on subsequent Taliban and al-Qaeda attacks in Pakistan than Afghanistan. In Pakistan, the probability of a terrorist attack was determined to increase in the first week following a drone strike. However, the impact is negative in the second week when considered against the backdrop of terrorist attacks by the Taliban and al-Qaeda.”⁸⁰⁵

In addition, they determined that drone strikes in North Waziristan had an impact on Taliban violence in parts of Afghanistan under the control of the Haqqani Network. Likewise, in South Waziristan, drones caused retaliatory action by the Meshud faction of the Taliban – by targeting citizens they believed assisted the US in enabling drone strikes.⁸⁰⁶

8.5.2 *Civilian Casualty Question*

A key concern relating to drone weaponry has been the civilian casualty figures in targeted states and its impact in altering the perception of US drone operations. Civilian casualty can occur as a result of accidental kills, collateral damage (death as an inevitable consequence of war), double strikes (ordering a second strike after the first, the latter is mostly imprecise and leads to unintended deaths), direct targeted killing, missile miss, and from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of drone operators (due to the tension, moral injury, and negative mental impact of sustained operations of drone killing machinery).⁸⁰⁷

The utility of drones as discriminate weapons is worth highlighting. “Discriminate,” as applied to the context of the above discussion, questions the efficacy and propriety of drones in distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants in targeted states. The ability of drones to discriminate, as Brunstetter and Braun contend, is based on “the extent that their human

⁸⁰⁵ David A Jaeger, Zahra Siddique, (2018). Are Drone Strikes Effective in Afghanistan and Pakistan? On the Dynamics of Violence between the United States and the Taliban, *CESifo Economic Studies*, Volume 64, Issue 4, December, Pages 667–697, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cesifo/ify011>

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid (Enemark, 2013).

operators choose to employ them.”⁸⁰⁸ Thus, if applied correctly, drones, due to their in-built functions and operational capabilities, can prevent unintended deaths. Kenneth Anderson’s explanation on the linkage between drones, discrimination, and civilian casualty puts it more clearly:

“If the intended use of the weapon is only against remote military targets where civilians are not likely to be present, then the weapon, in that context, will be perfectly discriminate. If the intended use of the weapon is against relatively sizeable military objectives, such as military bases or fortifications where civilians may be close but generally not close enough to be within the weapon’s blast radius, then there too the weapon can be expected to be discriminate. If, however, the weapon is intended to be used in densely populated urban areas against terrorists or insurgents, then the weapons could be expected to be indiscriminate even if a drone missile, which is exceptionally accurate and much less destructive compared to most aerial weapons and is expected to kill everything within a blast radius of 15-20 meters.”⁸⁰⁹

The technological features of drone weaponry, however, support the idea that it discriminates effectively between civilians and combatants and minimizes collateral damage due to its precision capabilities.⁸¹⁰ This is based on the capabilities of drones to effectively discriminate against its target due to: (i) accuracy of visual identification, (ii) physical proximity, (iii) discernment of clear rules of combat by a human operator(s), and (iv) ISR capabilities of the drone itself.⁸¹¹ However, if the argument that drones are effective at discriminating between civilians and combatants is to be upheld, the legacy of drone strikes in targeted states post 9/11 suggest the contrary, as evidenced by the glaring figures of civilian deaths (see previous chapters on the civilian death figures following drone strikes in successive US administrations post 9/11).

This links back to the civilian casualty question from drone strikes and their impact on US strategic objectives. In the preceding chapters, this has been discussed in the context of successive US administrations since 9/11. However, understanding the dynamics of civilian

⁸⁰⁸ Brunstetter, V. D., & Braun, M. (2011). The Implication of Drones. *art. cité*.

⁸⁰⁹ Anderson, Kenneth, The Case for Drones (June 1, 2013). *Commentary*, Vol. 135, No. 6, pp. 14-23 (June 2013), American University, WCL Research Paper No. 2014-12, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2047537>

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⁸¹¹ Enemark, C. (2011). Drones over Pakistan: secrecy, ethics, and counterinsurgency. *Asian Security*, 7(3), 218-237.

death from the perspective of local factors and impact in targeted states is important. Evidence on civilian casualty figures from drone strikes has been published by the CIA and several other journalistic and academic databases such as the NAF, TBIJ, and LWJ. These databases report different figures. The US government disputes these figures and classifies the casualty figures (except for those released between 2014 and 2016 under Obama’s PPG). Table 14 below reflects some of these discrepancies.

Table 14: Estimate of Civilian Casualty between CIA and other Sources.

Source	Estimated civilian casualty figure (%)	Source of Information
CIA	0 -1	Published report on drone operations in targeted states
NAF	6-17	Media and local intelligence
LWJ	8.5 – 10	Media and local intelligence
TBIJ	13 – 34	Media and local intelligence
Others	20 – 35	Media reports

Source: Author’s Adaptation. (Others*** here refers to sources outside the ones identified above).

Apart from these sources identified above, other sources include *Brookings Institution*, the *New York Times*, *Human Rights Watch*, *Air Wars*, *Reuters*, and *Washington Post*. Their estimates fall within the range of the three main databases identified above. From the table above, it is evident that the CIA figures are statistically lower compared to other databases (this has been answered previously in Chapter 6). This has made it difficult to empirically determine the accurate number of drone strikes, the military necessity of such strikes and the success rate, thus, making the outcome partly speculative.

For example, in an interview conducted with American officials in 2011 by Scott Shane, an American journalist with the *New York Times*, the US government claimed it had killed more than 2,000 militants and only 50 non-combatants since 2001.⁸¹² This figure is, however, statistically lower when compared to other sources. The TBIJ, for instance, estimates that from 2004 – 2012, drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan have resulted in more than 550 deaths of non-combatants.⁸¹³ Table 15 below further reflects some of the contradictory statements and disparities in the reported casualty figures of drone strikes in targeted states.

⁸¹² Shane, S. (2015). Drone strikes reveal uncomfortable truth: US is often unsure about who will die. *The New York Times*, 23, 2015.

⁸¹³ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (2017) Drone Wars: The Full Data. <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-01/drone-wars-the-full-data>

Table 15: Contradictory US statement on drone strikes Sept 2010 – circa April 2012

Drone strike Date	US Statements	TBIJ Reported Data (estimates)	Other Sources (Civilian Death Estimates)
Sept 2010 – May 2011	A US official speaking to the National Journal states that only 30 civilians have been killed from drone strikes since the beginning of 2009 and none recently.	73-183	53 deaths (Associated Press).
Sept.10 - June 2011	John Brennan, the former Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, posits that there has been no single collateral death because of the exceptional capabilities of drones.	87-223	7 deaths (CNN)
Sept 2010- July 2011	A senior US official asserts there have been no single civilian casualty in the last year and the inaccuracies of other journalistic sources.	92-233+	45-56 deaths (TBIJ)** additional from individual strikes
17 March 2011	The US government agreed on the difference in views on drone strikes with the Pakistani government	32-42	19-30 deaths (anonymous Pakistani official)
22 April 2011	A US official, while responding to CNN, refutes claims from Pakistani intelligence services that the April 22 drone strike killed any civilian in North Waziristan.	5-8	Nine deaths (Pakistani government official)
10-11 August 2011	John Brennan refutes claims that civilian deaths have occurred from US drone operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere	112-276+	53 deaths (Associated Press)
31 October 2011	A US official told ABC News that the CIA drone strike killed two militants and did not kill 16-year-old Tariq Khan	2	2 (New York Times and Guardian UK confirmed Tariq's death)
Circa Jan. 2012	President Obama claims that drones are kept on a very tight leash and does not inflict a civilian casualty	297-569+	282 and 535 (New York Times, CNN, Associated Press)
Circa Feb. 2012	Anonymous US counterterrorism official acknowledges the US has no reliable evidence of civilian deaths following a drone strike	53	25 (Associated Press)
Circa April 2012	Brennan stated that the US had no information about a single civilian being killed. He acknowledged that “sometimes you have to take life to save lives.”	117- 284+	Nil.

Adapted from Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2012).⁸¹⁴

⁸¹⁴ Ibid (HRW, 2012).

Relatedly, Ben Emmerson, UN Special Rapporteur, citing Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs data on drone strikes in his 2013 report, estimated that since the inception of drone strikes in Pakistan in 2004, about 330 strikes have resulted in more than 1200 deaths and cases of serious injuries.”⁸¹⁵ This figure is corroborated by other Pakistani-based media sources. For instance, in April 2009, *The News*, a local newspaper in Pakistan, published figures provided by Pakistani government officials stating that 687 civilians have been killed by drones. It further reported that “for every al-Qaeda terrorist targeted, 50 civilians are killed.”⁸¹⁶ Similarly, another Pakistani newspaper puts this figure higher as “140 innocent civilians killed occurring for every Taliban and al-Qaeda targeted.”⁸¹⁷ The chances of overestimation of deaths are likely in these media reports, due, in part, to what Beswick notes as “self-serving accounting, anonymously sourced and politically manipulated figures fed by the Pakistani Army.”⁸¹⁸ Furthermore, considering that the Pakistani public reads reports from their own local media than American studies, the disparities of civilian casualty reportage contribute to the local blowback on drones in Pakistan.

The impact of a civilian casualty in targeted states has necessitated legal reactions from Pakistani courts. In December 2013, for instance, the National Assembly of Pakistan unanimously approved a resolution to prevent further drone strikes in their territory, citing violations of international and humanitarian laws of war and the guiding UN charter. This marked the first time the Pakistani government ruled against the illegality of drones since the inception of targeted killings in their country in 2004. The court ordered the Pakistani government to make the following pleas to the UN Security Council:

- i. Constitute an independent war crimes tribunal to investigate US drone operations
- ii. Request that the UN General Assembly passed a resolution condemning drone strikes
- iii. Prohibit the further use of force that violates the territorial integrity and political independence of Pakistan

Though this did not stop further drone strikes in Pakistan, it, however, coincided with the period Obama changed the PPG in his counterterrorism playbook, which led to the de-escalation of

⁸¹⁵ Ibid (Emerson, 2013)

⁸¹⁶ The News cited in Yousaf, F. (2017). CIA drone strikes in Pakistan: History, perception and future. *CRSS (2017)*.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ Beswick, J. (2011). *The Drone Wars and Pakistan's Conflict Casualties, 2010*. Oxford Research Group Working Paper.

drone strikes and stricter rules to prevent unintended civilian death (see discussion in Chapter 6). Essentially, the new approach required that “prior to lethal use of force, it must target an individual or individuals who pose a continuous and imminent threat to the US.”⁸¹⁹

While civilian casualty is inevitable in war, as modern conflicts – such as the 1991 Sri Lankan War, 1999 Chechen War, and the 2006 and 2009 Israeli Wars with Hezbollah and Hamas, respectively – have all recorded civilian casualty figures in large numbers, the key concern for drone weaponry is that its continued use by the US has led to further civilian deaths in targeted states. According to the Global Terrorism Databases (GTD), one of the most comprehensive unclassified databases tracking terrorist attacks in the world reported that since 2012, “more than 60 countries experience terrorist attack each year.”⁸²⁰ Furthermore, based on the uncertainty that terrorism incidences will drop to their pre-9/11 levels in the near future, drones are more likely to be deployed as a de facto CT tool in targeted states. However, mounting civilian death cases under the Trump administration following the expansion in lethality and targeting of drone operations portend adverse effects for US strategic objectives in the long term if clear rules of engagement are not codified to regulate their use.

8.5.3 *Quagmire of Anti-Americanism*

A key question of US drone warfare in targeted states has revolved around its impact on spawning anti-Western and anti-American sentiments in its wake. Critics of the US drone campaign decry its dehumanization of war amid the point that the US needs to respect the democratic desires of the targeted states.⁸²¹ This burgeoning issue relates to the concern that US counterterrorism campaigns in Pakistan and Afghanistan seem to be diverting from their core objective and engendering negative feedback from targeted states.

In Pakistan, the issue of anti-Americanism and drones is split. According to Shah’s recent interview, most of the residents in the FATA support drone strike use and are more dreadful of the Pakistani military instead.⁸²² However, a 2012 Pew Research report indicates 82

⁸¹⁹ White House, Office of the Press Secretary (2015). Executive Order -- United States Policy on Pre- and Post-Strike Measures to Address Civilian Casualties in U.S. Operations Involving the Use of Force. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/01/executive-order-united-states-policy-pre-and-post-strike-measures>

⁸²⁰ Global Terrorism Database (2020) What is the GTD? <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

⁸²¹ Kennedy, G. (2013). Drones: legitimacy and anti-Americanism. *Parameters*, 42, 25-29.

⁸²² Ibid (Shah, 2018)

percent of Pakistanis find drones to be unjustified.⁸²³ Other Pakistani media sources back this claim. A study by Glyn and colleagues aver that Pakistani media tend to have an inherent anti-American bias and proclaim the pronouncements of the Taliban as facts. Thus, considering that these facts are not easily ascertainable by outsiders, drone attack reportage gives Pakistani journalists materials to incite public opinion locally against the US.⁸²⁴ Furthermore, anecdotal evidence of the killing of innocent children and women (although families that house terrorists are not entirely innocent in the broadest sense) in Pakistan have already caused significant outrage among the locals predisposed to anti-Americanism.

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani describes drone strikes as disastrous and counterproductive to efforts to isolate extremists and militants from the tribal population.⁸²⁵ In addition, he avers the strikes were generating anti-American sentiments and engendering local outrage and uproar among the people and further “driving a wedge between the government and the tribal people.”⁸²⁶ A former Pakistan foreign spokesman, Abdul Basit, further expressed a similar view. According to him, “we believe drone attacks are counterproductive; they involve collateral damage and are not helpful in our efforts to win the hearts and minds of the people.”⁸²⁷

In addition, Ashal Iqbal, a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan and Secretary-General of the Pakistani Muslim League, argues that “the aftermath of US drone strikes has spurred thousands of large protests across the country and most especially in Punjab, North West Frontier Province and Sindh.”⁸²⁸ Former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari also called for the end of drone strikes in Pakistan due to its impact on altering the political climate of the country.⁸²⁹ These views are similar to those shared by Nathaniel Fick of CNAS, highlighting the persistence of drone attacks in Pakistan as “offending the people’s deepest sensibilities, agitating instinctive hostility and alienating them from their government and

⁸²³ Pew Research Centre, “Pakistani Public Opinion,” Ever More Critical of U.S.,” Pew Research Center, June 27, 2012, 2 <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/06/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Pakistan-Report-FINAL-Wednesday-June-27-2012.pdf>

⁸²⁴ Brian Glyn Williams, Matthew Fricker, and Avery Plaw, “New Light on the Accuracy of the CIA’s Predator Drone Campaign in Pakistan,” *Terrorism Monitor* 8, no. 41, http://www.jamestown.org/uploads/media/TM_008_500185.pdf

⁸²⁵ Yousaf Raza Gilani cited in Fair, C. C., Kaltenthaler, K., & Miller, W. J. (2014). Pakistani opposition to American drone strikes. *Political Science Quarterly*, 129(1), 1-33.

⁸²⁶ Yousaf Gilani quoted in Thousands of Pakistanis Rally Against US Drone Strikes,” *The Guardian*, October 7 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/07/pakistanis-rally-against-us-drone-strikes>

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁸ Fair, C., & Hamza, A. (2016). From elite consumption to popular opinion: framing of the US drone program in Pakistani newspapers. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27(4), 578-607.

⁸²⁹ Shamshad, M., Khan, A. A., & Hassan, M. War on Terror: Repercussions for Pakistan.

contributing to a precarious security situation.”⁸³⁰

More so, drone strikes are a powerful political signal to the population of a targeted state as it engenders a perception that their government is powerless to stop drone attacks on its territory. More precisely, it reflects the failure of the state to uphold its statutory obligation in the social contract theory. According to social contract theorists such as Jean J. Rosseau and John Locke, when governments fail to secure the natural rights, guarantee the security and wellbeing of their citizenry, or satisfy the best interest of the society (general will), the citizens can withdraw their obligation to obey and withdraw the legitimacy conferred on their government.⁸³¹ The disapproval from Pakistani people over their government’s handling of drone strikes has reflected this characterization. According to a 2013 Pew Research report, 87 percent of all Pakistanis are dissatisfied with the direction of the country and with the overbearing powers of the Pakistani military.⁸³²

Figure 17: Pew Research on US opinion in Pakistan

Opinion of U.S. Worsens in Pakistan												
	1999/ 2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<i>Views of U.S.</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Favorable	23	10	13	21	23	27	15	19	16	17	12	12
Unfavorable	--	69	81	60	60	56	68	63	68	68	73	80
Don't know	--	20	6	18	18	17	16	17	16	16	16	9

1999/2000 survey trend provided by the U.S. Department of State.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q8a.

Source: Pew Research, 2012

A Pew Research (see figure 17 above) conducted in collaboration with the Pakistani government also reported that only 12 percent of Pakistanis surveyed in 2012 had a favourable view of US drone strikes.⁸³³ This represented a drop by 50% from 1999/2000 opinion on US perception in Pakistan. Though the same survey reported that about 55 percent of Pakistani’s reported they had heard little or nothing about drone attacks, of the 45 percent who acknowledged its operation, 97 percent considered it a bad thing.⁸³⁴ Thus, drones undermine Pakistan’s democratic government rather than help prop it up, which, in theory,

⁸³⁰ Ahmad, M. (2014). The United States Use of Drones in Pakistan: A Politico-Strategic Analysis. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 41(1), 21-29.

⁸³¹ Laskar, M. (2013). Summary of social contract theory by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. *Locke and Rousseau* (April 4, 2013).

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⁸³³ Pew Research Center (2012) Pakistani Public Opinion ever more critical of the US.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2012/06/27/chapter-1-views-of-the-u-s-and-american-foreign-policy-5/>

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

ought to have been done by America (as a bastion of liberal democracy). This is due to what has been described as the “appearance of powerlessness, incompetence and the legitimacy crisis drones engender for the Pakistani people towards their government.”⁸³⁵

Several studies have identified several ways in which US counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan undercut regional US support and inflame anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world:

- (i) the view that drone strikes drain the credibility of the Pakistani government and the perception they collude with the US in killing its own people;⁸³⁶
- (ii) the view that the ‘tacit consent’ of the Pakistani government for US COIN operations elicit the visceral opposition from militant groups against the deployment of the Pakistani Army in the tribal areas;⁸³⁷
- (iii) that the US has been willing to provide details of drone strikes but has refrained from providing advanced warning of an attack to the Pakistani government for fear that information might be leaked or compromised – hamstringing the Pakistani government from having much say in the finality of US drone operations;⁸³⁸
- (iv) the view that drone strikes circumscribe the Pakistani government from appearing as a credible competitor for the loyalties of the population in the tribal region. This is supported by a survey by the Brookings Institution, which determined that the FATA residents were favourably disposed to the presence of Afghan Taliban fighters (28%) than the US military (12%). Also, most of the residents (84%) opposed the US military presence in the region (see figure 18 below).

James Traub argues that the public outrage over drones has made it almost impossible for the US to achieve its goals of helping Pakistan become a stable civilian-run state capable of policing its territory.⁸³⁹ Thus, drones portend conflicting strategic objectives – disrupt terrorism through drone strikes but undermine the existence of a strong and legitimate government in

⁸³⁵ Fair, C. C., Kaltenthaler, K., & Miller, W. J. (2012). The drone war: Pakistani public opposition to American drone strikes in Pakistan. Available at SSRN 2193354.

⁸³⁶ Haqqani, H. (2013). *Magnificent delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an epic history of misunderstanding*. Public Affairs.

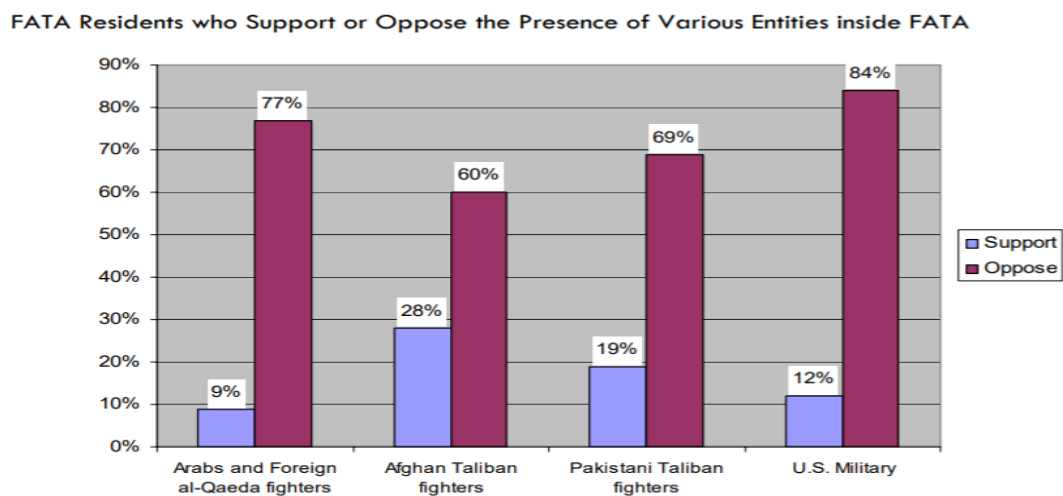
⁸³⁷ Williams, B. G. (2010). The CIA's covert Predator drone war in Pakistan, 2004–2010: the history of an assassination campaign. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33(10), 871-892.

⁸³⁸ Ibid (Fair et al, 2016).

⁸³⁹ Traub, J. (2008). *The freedom agenda: why America must spread democracy (just not the way George Bush did)*. Macmillan.

Pakistan by sidelining its government and treating them as accomplices to the brute exercise of American power. In a speech in September 2012, former Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar captured this dilemma, saying that, “this has to be our war. We are the ones who have to fight against them. As a drone flies over the territory of Pakistan, it becomes an American war again. And this whole logic of this being our fight, in our own interest is immediately putting it aside, and again it is a war which is imposed on us.”⁸⁴⁰

Figure 18: FATA Residents who support or oppose the presence of various entities inside FATA



Source: Brookings Institution, (2018).⁸⁴¹

However, there are contrary reports that drone strikes are accepted by Pakistani politicians. This was captured in a report by NAF researchers Bergen and Tiedemann. They aver:

“For Pakistani politicians, the drone program is a dream come true. They get to posture to their constituents about the perfidious Americans even as they reap the benefits from the U.S. strikes. They are well aware that neither the Pakistani Army’s ineffective military operations nor the various peace agreements with the militants have done anything to halt the steady Talibanization of their country, while the U.S. drones are the one sure-fire way to put significant pressure on the leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This is called getting to have your chapati and eat it too.”⁸⁴²

⁸⁴⁰ Ayaz Gyul, (2013) Pakistan Unhappy over Reports US Drone Strikes Will Continue. VOA News. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/pakistan-unhappy-over-reports-us-drone-strikes-will-continue>

⁸⁴¹ Ibid (Brookings, 2018).

⁸⁴² Ibid (Bergen and Tiedemann, 2013)

The above is analogous to a poll conducted in the FATA by Pakistani-based Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy in 2016. The result showed that those living in tribal areas where drone operations took place favoured its operations. The poll found that: (i) only 45 percent of the Pashtun respondents believed that drones brought fear and terror, (ii) 52 percent thought drones were accurate, (iii) 58 percent thought drones did not inflame anti-Americanism, and (iv) 60 percent thought drone strikes killed militants successfully.⁸⁴³ A more recent study by Shah (2018) shared similar views with the 2009 poll results. However, the findings of these polls did not consider:

- i. The impact of individual differences on the perception of drone strikes. A study reported this anomaly in findings. It indicated that anti-Americanism relating to drones in targeted states was more from areas outside where drone strikes occur than within.⁸⁴⁴ This was the case in Pakistan, where those outside the FATA were more opposed to drone strikes than the Pashtuns living in the region.⁸⁴⁵
- ii. The degree to which anti-drone sentiments, political opposition, and visceral antagonism in targeted states should constitute anti-Americanism.

As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, the mounting drone protests lend credence to the prevalence of anti-Americanism in targeted states.

Like Pakistan, Afghanistan has not been exempted from anti-Western sentiments (due to the protracted American occupation, allegations of prisoner abuse of Afghans at detention facilities, NATO aerial bombings, and mounting civilian deaths), particularly in provinces where drone strikes occur, such as in Nangarhar, Paktia, Paktika, Kunar, Nuristan, Khost, Farah, Helmand, and Logar. However, most of the drone operations have been conducted unilaterally by the American government without clear agreement with the Afghan political leadership – this was clearly absent in the bilateral security agreement between the two countries. The widespread concerns against drones in Afghanistan have elicited calls from current President Ashraf Ghani to end the extrajudicial killings of Afghans by “unmanned machines of our so-called strategic partner.”⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴³ Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy (2016).

⁸⁴⁴ Mir, A., & Moore, D. (2019). Drones, surveillance, and violence: Theory and evidence from a us drone program. *International Studies Quarterly*, 63(4), 846-862.

⁸⁴⁵ Johnston, P. B., & Sarbahi, A. K. (2016). The impact of US drone strikes on terrorism in Pakistan. *International Studies Quarterly*, 60(2), 203-219.

⁸⁴⁶ Drew, C. (2010). Drones are playing a growing role in Afghanistan. *The New York Times*, 19.

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai also protested the civilian casualty of drone strikes and opposed its continued use.⁸⁴⁷ The impact of drones in Afghanistan has been acknowledged by former American Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ann Wright, stating, “drones are jeopardizing US national security by creating a large number of people who despise it.”⁸⁴⁸ While there is a litany of cognitive effects motivating anti-Americanism in targeted states, the impact of drone strikes on the perception of America and its CT operations is irrefutable, based on the evidence examined above. The impact for future US strategic objectives is dire – as it increases susceptibilities and vulnerabilities in the international sphere that hamper the soft and hard power influence of the US (the national and global impact for US grand strategy is explored in the next chapter).

8.5.4 Drones and the Counterterrorism Paradox

Terrorism is a tactic deployed by terrorists to increase the vulnerability of people and to elicit government reaction with measures intended to restore social order. However, counterterrorism strategies that are meant to make citizens feel safer often create more insecurity and exacerbate the existing situation.⁸⁴⁹ One of the drawbacks of CT campaigns is the use of state machinery of violence against suspected terrorists and their abettors. This, however, as Piazza and Wilson argue, undermines the safety of individuals by causing “loss of their physical rights, extrajudicial killings, and fear of death.”⁸⁵⁰ This underscores the likelihood of CT actions to unintentionally cause dislocation, oppression, and repression in states where they occur. This effect has been evident in Afghanistan, where drones caused the deaths of civilians, generated blowback effects in Pakistan, and worsened the governance and military structures they purported to defend. Also, drone use for CT operations in targeted states has also perpetuated this dynamic. From another lens, CT operations often engender counterproductive impact in the long term beyond their short-term success.⁸⁵¹ According to Franke, “the institutional apparatus of drones rests on totalitarian, not democratic principles... lethal drones hovering above in the sky poses a threat to persons on the ground in the targeted zone with the arbitrary termination of their lives and as such represent a form of terrorism no less than the suicide

⁸⁴⁷ Hudson, L., Owens, C. S., & Flannes, M. (2011). Drone warfare: Blowback from the new American way of war. *Middle East Policy*, 18(3), 122-132.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Berman, E. (2012). The Paradox of Counterterrorism Sunset Provisions. *Fordham L. Rev.*, 81, 1777.

⁸⁵⁰ Wilson, M. C., & Piazza, J. A. (2013). Autocracies and terrorism: Conditioning effects of authoritarian regime type on terrorist attacks. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(4), 941-955.

⁸⁵¹ Field, A. (2017). The dynamics of terrorism and counterterrorism: understanding the domestic security dilemma. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40(6), 470-483.

bombers.”⁸⁵² As Peter Chalk warn, “counterterrorist responses run the very grave risk of posing even more of a danger to underlying liberal and democratic postulates and freedoms than does extremist political violence itself.”⁸⁵³

As Jeremy Shapiro and Daniel Byman argue, “from a policymaker's perspective, use of the word ‘war’ usefully mobilizes the public, but for a domestic issue, it conjures up images of civil strife and violations of civil liberties.”⁸⁵⁴ However, while securitization an issue can bolster public approval for CT measures, they also lead to greater insecurity in its aftermath. The securitization theory developed by the Copenhagen School of International Relations explains why some issues are securitized and while others are not. They construe securitization to mean “an act in which an issue is deemed as an existential threat to a referent object and requires emergency measures in response.”⁸⁵⁵ In this regard, it could be argued that portraying terrorism as a securitized issue establishes an immanent securitization framing of its purported threats. This is because securitization evokes fear and exigencies and beckons on key audiences and stakeholders with the caveat that “only a willingness to act can forestall grave catastrophic consequences.”⁸⁵⁶ The idea is, if people or the targeted audience are sufficiently touched by the urgency and cataclysmic framings of an issue, it will incentivize actions.⁸⁵⁷ Succinctly put, issues relating to grave security would always inflame strong emotions and prompt the need for extraordinary measures to curb them.

Related to the above is the question of whether drones are effective instruments for leadership decapitation in targeted states. Jenna Jordan’s article on leadership decapitation provides some important information to consider this question. Her study examined three factors: (i) terrorist organizational collapse, (ii) terrorist operational dissolution and terrorist group degradation, and (iii) the efficacy of leadership decapitation for terrorist collapse.⁸⁵⁸ Based upon the available data (298 decapitation cases from 1954-2004), her findings determined that: First, leadership decapitation is more likely to cause the cessation of religious terrorist groups

⁸⁵² Franke, U. (2013). On “Drones and US Strategy: Costs and Benefits”. *Parameters*, 43(2), 119-124.

⁸⁵³ Chalk, P. (1995). The liberal democratic response to terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 7(4), 10-44.

⁸⁵⁴ Shapiro, J., & Byman, D. (2006). Bridging the transatlantic counterterrorism gap. *Washington Quarterly*, 29(4), 33-50.

⁸⁵⁵ Buzan, B., Buzan, B. G., W'ver, O., Waever, O., & Buzan, O. W. B. (2003). *Regions and powers: the structure of international security* (No. 91). Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid (Buzan and Weaver, 2003).

⁸⁵⁷ Balzacq, T., Léonard, S., & Ruzicka, J. (2016). ‘Securitization’ revisited: Theory and cases. *International Relations*, 30(4), 494-531.

⁸⁵⁸ Jordan, J. (2009). When heads roll: Assessing the effectiveness of leadership decapitation. *Security Studies*, 18(4), 719-755.

compared to ideological terrorist groups. Second, decapitation is an effective strategy that results in terrorist organizational collapse. Third, the larger, older, religious, and the more separatist the terrorist group, the less likely decapitation will be effective in causing its demise.⁸⁵⁹

The above assessment shares parallel with drones and their efficacy for counterterrorism in targeted states. Analysing her findings with the legacy of US drone strikes, it can be seen that while drones have dismantled, disrupted, and in some cases decapitated HVTs, it has not led to the organizational collapse of terrorism formations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Revisiting Audrey Cronin’s criticism of drones here underscores this point. She argues that “drones are a strategic failure, in part, due to the misunderstanding of the nuanced difference between counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.”⁸⁶⁰

8.6 Illusion of US Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan

There are a number of factors when considered within the broader lens of US strategic objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan that underscore the shortcoming of US CT operations – that have also affected the efficacy of drone warfare. The impact of these considerations generates inimical outcomes that undermine the ability of the US to achieve its counterterrorism goals in targeted states.

First, the historical relationship between the US and Pakistan engenders what Husain Haqqani termed “an illusion of a strategy.”⁸⁶¹ The basis of his argument is predicated on the faulty historical legacy of US-Pakistani relations rooted in mismatched purposes – implying an interplay of inherent diametrically opposed objectives in the existing US-Pak relations.⁸⁶² As Haqqani posits, Pakistan relies on the superpower status of the US to balance out its geopolitical competition with India and the wider region, whereas Washington’s historical Cold War competition with the Soviets and the WOT informs the reason for its alliance with Pakistan. Hence, Pakistan’s *machinations* and the US past delusions serve as obstacles to a successful outcome for its strategic objectives.⁸⁶³ Qadir contends that US-Pak interests were most aligned during the Soviet-Afghan war (though fraught with imperfections) but misaligned

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid (Cronin, A.K, 2014).

⁸⁶¹ Haqqani, H. (2013). *Magnificent delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an epic history of misunderstanding*. PublicAffairs.

⁸⁶² Ibid.

⁸⁶³ Butt, U., & Schofield, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Pakistan: The US, geopolitics and grand strategies*. Pluto Press.

after 9/11 – when the US sought Pakistan’s help in defeating the Taliban insurgents.⁸⁶⁴ The effect of this, as Carlotta Gall argues, has spurred a ‘mistaken rhetoric and wrong strategy.’⁸⁶⁵

Second, the Pakistani army and its Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) had long patronized numerous Deobandi militant groups such as the Afghan Taliban, Jaish-e-Mohammad (Army of Mohammad), Harkat-ul-Jihadi-Islami (Movement of Islamic Jihad), as partners in pursuing Pakistan’s objectives in Afghanistan and India. The Pakistani state is, however, engulfed by the same violent Islamist groups it created. The TTP, for instance, has launched sustained attacks on Pakistan’s military, police, intelligence, and civilian officials and infrastructure, in addition to ongoing offensives against Shia, Ahmediyas, and increasingly Barelvis—a sect of which a majority of Pakistanis are believed to be members of.⁸⁶⁶ Likewise, despite the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, militant groups have continued to weaken government structures and create a chaotic space for Afghanistan’s fledgling democracy. A disproportionate amount of this terrorism, however, links back to Pakistan. This is further explained by Christine Fair’s analysis of the strategic culture of the Pakistani army and its intersection with Islamic terrorist sponsorship.⁸⁶⁷ The central assertion is that the Pakistani army is imbued with an obligation to defend Islam and employ Islamist militants to further Pakistan’s policy and interests towards the goal of revising its regional status quo in South Asia.

Analogous to the above, Kapur contends that Pakistan had used Jihad as a grand strategy to cultivate, export, and employ Islamic militants for the pursuit of its internal and external security policy in South Asia based on two strategies.⁸⁶⁸ According to Usman and Schofield, “externally, Pakistan had relied on Islamic militants to pursue its policy of revising the status quo by confronting India and asserting its influence over Afghanistan and internally, Islamic militants were used to promote domestic cohesion and give meaning to compensate for the tumult and weak political foundations related to the partition.”⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid (Qadir, 2014).

⁸⁶⁵ Gall, C. (2014). *The wrong enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*. HMH.

⁸⁶⁶ Blanchard, C. M., & Humud, C. E. (2017). *The Islamic State and US Policy*. Congressional Research Service Washington United States.

⁸⁶⁷ Fair, C. C., Crane, K., Chivvis, C. S., Puri, S., & Spirtas, M. (2010). *Pakistan: can the United States secure an insecure state?* RAND Corporation.

⁸⁶⁸ Kapur, S. (2019). The intellectual roots of Sunni sectarianism in Pakistan: a reply to Fuchs. *Global Discourse: An interdisciplinary journal of current affairs*, 9(4), 717-719.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid (Usama and Schofield, 2012)

The above further underscores the weak governance structure and capacity of the Pakistani government to assert control in the FATA region or the militant groups operating within it, highlighting the inherent imbalance of the US-Pak alliance – one which Gall Cassidy termed “the imbalance of strategy.”⁸⁷⁰ This explains the cost of US continued military assistance to dismantle terrorism in the region, putting Pakistan in a difficult position of renegeing on its debts and historical alliance with fellow jihadists and denying operational basis to militant groups that had hitherto helped it fight India.⁸⁷¹ The effect of this was apparent in Pakistan’s unwillingness to launch a military operation into North Waziristan to dislodge the Afghan Taliban in the FATA, despite years of intense U.S. pressure under Bush. And when the Pakistani military finally went into North Waziristan in 2014, the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani’s escaped into Afghanistan.

8.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter assessed the impact of drone strikes on US strategic objectives from the lens of targeted states. It determined that inherent dynamics within targeted states generate the conditions that hinder US grand strategy. This assertion was analysed based on four factors: anti-Americanism, civilian deaths, counterterrorism paradox, and the blowback effect of drones. The blowback hypothesis was examined, and though there was contrasting evidence in the literature that refuted its validity, it was determined that in the absence of any threshold to effectively determine what constitutes a blowback, there is no sufficient empirical basis to refute its credibility. Also, on the question of whether civilian casualty impacted US drone operations in targeted states, it was determined that the countervailing impact of civilian deaths engendered opposition at the political and public level against the continued use of drones. This relates to the next issue on the quagmire of anti-Americanism and its impact on the perception of US drone warfare. It was determined that while cognitive effects of anti-Americanism and the individual perception of what constitutes it cannot be clearly determined, anecdotal evidence based on the impact of drone strikes in targeted states demonstrated the nexus between anti-American and suicide bombings, retaliatory attacks, and propaganda tools for terrorist mobilization and recruitment. This also links to the CT paradox of drones – which established actions intended to enhance security often cause greater insecurity – as US drone precedents show in targeted states.

⁸⁷⁰ Cassidy, R. M. (2012). *War, Will, and Warlords*. Government Printing Office.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER NINE

The Implications of Drone Proliferation for US Grand Strategy

“Drones cause the epochal transformation in international security due to the detachment of brutality from humanity in future warfare.”⁸⁷²

9.0 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, this thesis examined drone use by successive US administrations and their impact in targeted states, another critical facet of their impact is proliferation. As previously highlighted, the negative precedent set by US drones in CT operations has created incentives for other states to adopt them. The fact that the US has continued to drive the armed drone market and is selling drone technology to other states creates a security dilemma that causes more paradoxes and deficiencies for the US grand strategy. While this chapter does not delve into the academic debates about arms trade and transfers, the issue of proliferation is important for these reasons. This chapter seeks to build another layer in understanding how drones undermine US strategic objectives and highlights the perils and adverse effects of the proliferation of drones' vis-a-vis grand strategy.

This chapter argues that the continued proliferation of drones among state and non-state actors in the post 9/11 security environment engenders countervailing effects for US grand strategy at two levels: national and global. At the global level, unchecked diffusion of drone technology risks re-ordering the balance of power and great power competition in a way that hampers US strategic objectives. At the national level, as the 'race' to acquire and operate drones continue unhindered, it foreshadows a security dilemma that heightens uncertainties and vulnerabilities for US national security. To this end, this chapter makes three interrelated arguments: The first is that unrestrained drone diffusion among US rival competitors creates a blowback effect for US strategic objectives at the global level. The second is that the advanced proliferation of drones, mainly as it occurs alongside the weaponization of AI, engender damaging consequences for US grand strategy by potentially exacerbating existing threats in international affairs. The third is that the proliferation of drones among non-state actors such as Hezbollah and regional powers such as Iran introduces new dynamics to strategic balance and warfare that hinder US CT operations.

In fleshing out these arguments, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first part examines the current dynamics of drone diffusion. Next, the US drone policy is examined. In

⁸⁷² Gusterson, H. (2016). *Drone: Remote control warfare*. MIT Press.

the third part, the debate on drone proliferation is revisited, and the inexorable linkages with the US grand strategy are explored. The fourth part undertakes an assessment of the impact of drone proliferation for the US grand strategy at the global and national security level.

9.1 Drone Proliferation

Since the 2001 terrorist attacks, successive US administrations have used drones in the quiver of US CT weaponry in targeted states. This has, in effect, created what John Nagl, former US counterinsurgency advisor termed, “an almost industrial-scale counterterrorism killing machine.”⁸⁷³ The surge in global demand for drones has been reflected in UAV sales. From 2005 to 2009, global UAV sales were up at 1.5 percent and further increased to 2.6 percent by 2010-2014. This figure more than doubled by the end of 2019, climbing to 5.5 percent⁸⁷⁴, and it is expected to hit a double-digit percentage increase by 2024.⁸⁷⁵

Available data published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a database that catalogues arms sales globally, show that more than 90 countries possess drones (armed and unarmed) – of this figure, only 22 countries (including Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Israel, Nigeria, United Kingdom, India, China, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, South Korea, Turkmenistan and Ukraine, United States, Switzerland, and Australia) have armed drone capabilities, with 20 more countries currently developing this capability.⁸⁷⁶ (see table 16 below). The Teal Group, an aerospace research firm, predicts in its 2019/2020 market study that worldwide production of UAVs will increase from \$7.3 billion annually in 2019 to \$10.2 billion in 2029 and is expected to reach \$98.9 billion in the next ten years. It also projected that military UAV research spending would rise exponentially to \$61 billion by 2030.⁸⁷⁷

Table 16: States operating armed drones

S/N	Continent	Countries
1	North America	The United States and Canada.
2	Africa	South Africa, Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria.

⁸⁷³ Nagl, J. (2016). United States of Jihad: Investigating America's Homegrown Terrorists. In *Proceedings* (Vol. 142, pp. 72-73).

⁸⁷⁴ Gettinger D (2019) The drone databook. The Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College. <https://dronecenter.bard.edu/files/2019/10/CSD-Drone-Databook-Web.pdf>

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁶ Horowitz, M. C., Schwartz, J. A., & Fuhrmann, M. (2019). Who's Prone to Drone? A Global Time-Series Analysis of Armed Uninhabited Aerial Vehicle Proliferation.

⁸⁷⁷ Teal Group, (2019) Teal Group Predicts Worldwide military production of drones of over \$99billion in the next decade <https://www.tealgroup.com/index.php/pages/press-releases/64-teal-group-predicts-worldwide-military-uav-production-of-almost-99-billion-over-the-next-decade-in-its-2019-2020-uav-market-profile-and-forecast>

3	Asia	Israel, China, Iran, United Arab Emirates, North Korea, Pakistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, India, Turkey, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, Georgia (Caucasus), Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan.
4	Antarctica	None yet
5	South America	None yet
6	Europe	Italy, Spain, Greece, France, Poland, Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, and Belarus.
7	Australia	Australia

Source: Author's adaptation from Centre for New America Security.⁸⁷⁸

Over the last decade, the US and Israel have enjoyed a monopoly of armed drone technology. This is, however, fast-changing, with more countries increasingly acquiring, advancing, and operating drones, including non-state actors. The spur behind global drone diffusion is not unconnected to the perception of their use internationally as an effective instrument of power projection. This has been demonstrated by America's use of drones post 9/11 – which inadvertently demonstrated the potential transformative utility and military significance of their weaponry for modern warfare.⁸⁷⁹

A recent study by Horowitz and colleagues⁸⁸⁰ analysed the evolutionary phases/period of drone proliferation and the factors that account for the changes in global demand and supply of drone technology. Their key findings were:

- i. Period 1 (1994 – 2010) was when the US and Israel held sway as the leading suppliers of drones globally, with Israel alone supplied 41 percent of the global stock. Both countries supplied drones without consideration for the regime type. However, America only supplied to the UK, and drone sales were constrained by the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) guidelines which prohibit sales of Category 1 (weapons that can travel for more than 300km and have a payload of more than 500kg) systems such a drone from exports.
- ii. Period 2 (2011-2019) was an era that ushered China's dominance in the development and export of armed drone weaponry globally, particularly with the CH-3, CH-4, CH-5 models. The surge in demand for China's drones resulted from its non-membership to the MTCR, which exempted it from Category 1 restrictions.

⁸⁷⁸ Saylor, K. (2015). A world of proliferated drones: a technology primer. Centre for a New American Security.

⁸⁷⁹ Horowitz MC (2020) Do Emerging Military Technologies Matter for International Politics? *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 385–400.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid (Horowitz et al, 2019)

The absence of any constraint gave China an asymmetric advantage of drone technology, especially for non-democracies. As of 2019, China supplied 181 armed drones to 13 of the 22 countries that currently possess armed UAVs. This included sales to US allies such as NATO member countries, Australia, South Korea, and Japan.⁸⁸¹ Though the US is still a global leader in the instrumentation and export of drone technology (supplying 55 percent of global UAVs), this position is increasingly threatened by China's ascendancy (currently supplying 37 percent of global UAVs).

In the 'race' for global drone proliferation, China has the edge over the US. This is due to Beijing's approach to the sale of armed drone technology as one requiring "no questions asked"⁸⁸² in accordance with the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs of foreign countries regardless of the regime type.⁸⁸³ Furthermore, China imposes a minimal end-user restriction on their drones, meaning it is less concerned about how states deploy or use their drones once purchased. This has made it more attractive to non-democracies.⁸⁸⁴ On the other hand, US drone sales impose a constrain on which countries can buy drone technology and puts in place rules on how recipient states deploy them. This has caused its drone export policy to be marred by slow, bureaucratic, and vague guidance with competing priorities.⁸⁸⁵ For instance, US drone policy requires recipients of its drone technology to "use them in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and prohibits the use of drones for conducting unlawful surveillance or unlawful use against domestic populations."⁸⁸⁶ (President Trump, however, adjusted this policy as explained later in the chapter). Ironically, the legacy of US 9/11 drone warfare has not conformed to these rules but requires recipient states to comply with them when they purchase US drone technology.

⁸⁸¹ Nacouzi G., Williams, J.D., Dolan, B., Stickells, A., Luckey, D., Ludwig, C., Xu, J., Shokh, Y., Gerstein, D.M and Decker MH (2018) Assessment of the proliferation of certain remotely piloted aircraft systems. RAND Corporation.

⁸⁸² Li L and Matthews R (2017) Made in China: An emerging brand in the global arms market. *Defense & Security Analysis* 33 (2): 1–16

⁸⁸³ Ibid. (Nacouzi G., et al, 2018).

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid (Li and Matthews, 2017)

⁸⁸⁵ Gettinger, D., (2019). The Drone Database. New York, NY: Center for the Study of the Drone, Barnard College Press

⁸⁸⁶ Department of Defense (2018) Assessment on U.S. defense implications of China's expanding global access. Available from: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/14/2002079292/-1/-1/1/Expandingglobal-Access-Report-Final.Pdf>

China's UAV export policy is lax and embraces a laissez-faire approach to its drones sales by selling to authoritarian regimes, conflict hotspots such as Nigeria (Rainbow CH-4 drones sold in 2012), and Iraq (Wing Loong II) (the implications are discussed later in this chapter). In 2017, Saudi Arabia struck a deal with Beijing to set up the first Chinese drone factory in the Middle East and domestically manufactured around 300 Wing Loong-IIs and CH-4 drones.⁸⁸⁷ Currently, five countries in the Middle East (Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq) possess Chinese drones. The most famous types being the medium-altitude, long-endurance (MALE) drone families: Wing Loong manufactured by the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group (CAIG), and Cai Hong "Rainbow" built by the Chinese Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC).⁸⁸⁸ The 2019 report of the US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) acknowledges China's niche in armed drone pre-eminence, particularly in the Middle East, to emanate from its non-membership to international export control body, which makes it face little or no competition.⁸⁸⁹

The danger of China's UAV sales to non-democracies (and their 'affordability' compared to the US) is that it risks making the technology widespread, ubiquitous and increases the possibility of states engaging in extraterritorial drone strikes based on the precedent set by US CT missions in targeted states.⁸⁹⁰ It may also lead to new uses of drones in theatres of war/conflicts, such as swarming – which refers to interconnected or cooperative drones that can work together to overwhelm potential adversaries.⁸⁹¹ For instance, Turkey has used Chinese drones domestically against Kurdistan Workers' Party members, Nigeria has used CH-4 against Boko Haram, Iraq has used the Wing-Loong II against the Islamic State, Saudi Arabia and UAE have carried out deadly attacks in Libya and Yemen using Chinese CH-4 and CH-5 drones. Azerbaijan also used Chinese drones in great effect in the war against Armenia, especially against tanks and artillery.⁸⁹²

This is besides the risk that non-state actors and other non-democratic actors can use drones in ways that stymie America's competitiveness and innovation, making it difficult for the US to

⁸⁸⁷ Li L and Matthews R (2017) Made in China: An emerging brand in the global arms market. *Defense & Security Analysis* 33 (2): 1–16.

⁸⁸⁸ Johnson, J. (2019). Artificial intelligence & future warfare: implications for international security. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 35(2), 147-169.

⁸⁸⁹ Department of Defense (2018) Assessment on U.S. defense implications of China's expanding global access. Available from: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/14/2002079292/-1/-1/1/ExpandingGlobal-Access-Report-Final.Pdf>.

⁸⁹⁰ Bunker, R. J. (2015). *Terrorist and Insurgent Unmanned Aerial Vehicles: use, potentials, and military implications*. Army War College Carlisle Barracks PA Strategic Studies Institute.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

⁸⁹² Boyle, M. J. (2015). The race for drones. *Orbis*, 59(1), 76-94.

maintain its technological edge in the rapidly changing global security arena. This will likely increase the propensity for states to deploy drones for ‘grey zones’ operations – to test an adversaries deterrence posture or resolve, but without tipping the threshold into warfare with a more powerful opponent.⁸⁹³ Lin Greenberg termed this “Game of Drones” to explain the effect of remote warfighting technology on conflict escalation in international affairs⁸⁹⁴ due to the potential unintended effect of eroding US military predominance and its post-Cold War unique power preeminence.

More so, the unchecked proliferation of drones portends inimical consequences for US grand strategy that are difficult to dispel. This is mainly on two levels: national and global. At the global level, the diffusion of drones among near-peer competitors (Russia and China), regional US competitors (Iran), among non-state actors, and to regions where conflicts are endemic (Pakistan, Turkey, Nigeria) fosters new dynamics that re-orders the balance of power and strategic competition in a way that hampers US strategic objectives (this is explored in the latter part of this chapter).

9.2 US Drone Policy on Proliferation

Further global proliferation and advancement of drones seem inevitable, and while the US can limit the export of sensitive military components linked to drone technology such as stealth, protected communications, advanced autonomy, and other military features, the basic drone technology is already too diffused to be halted.⁸⁹⁵

The Obama administration crafted several unilateral and multilateral policies as a countermeasure to reduce unchecked drone diffusion and to influence the way they are used by recipient states to protect US strategic interests. These policies: (i) the February 2015 *Export Policy for Military Unmanned Aerial Systems* – that required recipients of US drones to adhere to the principles of their proper use, and (ii) the October 2016 *Joint Declaration for the Export and Subsequent Use of Armed or Strike-Enabled UAVs* – which laid out the main principles that govern US export and the use of armed drones, as anchored on five core objectives⁸⁹⁶:

⁸⁹³ Zoli, C. (2017). The Changing Role of Law in Security Governance: Post-9/11 Gray Zones and Strategic Impacts. *Syracuse L. Rev.*, 67, 613.

⁸⁹⁴ Lin-Greenberg E (2019) Game of drones: The effect of remote warfighting technology on conflict escalation. *Stanford University Journal*

⁸⁹⁵ Johnson, James., (2020). Artificial Intelligence, Drone Swarming and Escalation Risks in Future Warfare. *The RUSI Journal*, pp.1-11.

⁸⁹⁶ Johnson, J. (2019). The end of military-techno Pax Americana? Washington’s strategic responses to Chinese AI-enabled military technology. *The Pacific Review*, 1-28.

- (i) Preserving legal and political freedom of action for US drone use
- (ii) Maintaining US military technology advantage over potential competitors
- (iii) Improving the military capabilities of key partners and allies
- (iv) Preventing the diffusion of harm drone technology
- (v) Shaping the behaviour of how others use drones.

However, as Horowitz and colleagues posit, these policies did not “reflect the realities of a world where many actors have access to and use drones.”⁸⁹⁷ This led to the failure of these policies to either stem the tide of further drone proliferation globally or stymied their use, manufacture, and export by allies. As Zenko argues, Obama's drone policy “prioritized immediate military action over long-term strategic consideration, thereby making his approach appear less restrained, transparent, or accountable.”⁸⁹⁸ Hence, until the US puts in place appropriate regulatory and export control mechanisms to roll back unchecked drone diffusion in order to ensure their responsible and transparent use globally, Horowitz and colleagues assert that questions relating to the propriety, legality, transparency, and accountability of drones will continue to come to the forefront of the debate due to the negative antecedents of US drone programme.⁸⁹⁹ For instance, America may be constrained to criticize China if it sends armed drones into Kazakhstan or uses it against minority Uighur Muslims – that it classifies as terrorists. Likewise, Russia may deploy armed drones in the Caucasus against militants, and India may use drones against the Pakistani state in Kashmir.

The Trump administration has, however, made a number of policy changes that remove the constraint of the MTCR requirement for US drone sales to countries around the world. The new policy revised what the MTCR categorized as Category I weapons. It considered drones that travelled under 800km/per hour (instead of 300km/per hour as required by MTCR guidelines) to be classified as Category I and anything higher as Category II.⁹⁰⁰ The impact of this change to the MTCR guidelines allowed the following: First, it allowed drones to be sold directly by the US State Department's Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) program, meaning the industry can negotiate contracts with recipients (states) without interference from the US government. Second, it removed the special scrutiny required for laser designators so that US-made strike-enabled drones can be mass-produced and widespread. Lastly, it reduced oversight

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid (Horowitz et al, 2017).

⁸⁹⁸ Zenko, M. (2013). *Reforming US drone strike policies* (No. 65). Council on Foreign Relations.

⁸⁹⁹ Horowitz MC, Kreps S.E., and Fuhrmann, M., (2016) Separating fact from fiction in the debate over drone proliferation. *International Security* 41(2): 7–42.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

on the use of US drone sales.⁹⁰¹ This meant that drone exports will be treated the same as most other defense articles and will no longer require special export conditions – which required drones to comply with an *obligatory* enhanced end-use monitoring.⁹⁰² The term ‘obligatory’ under the new policy was replaced with ‘possible’ – meaning fewer restrictions on who can buy US drone technology thus, increasing US competitiveness in the global drone market.⁹⁰³ In defence of this new policy change, Clarke Cooper, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, remarked, “...this reform is necessary in order to respond to a rapidly changing technological environment with the proliferation of drones, particularly by China, coupled with growing demand for UAVs...adjusting US policies is imperative in addressing US national security concerns.”⁹⁰⁴ However, while these policies put America in the cockpit of drone proliferation, it has failed to address the impact associated with US drone warfare and the broader strategic implication of unchecked drone proliferation among non-democracies in spheres of conflict and war.⁹⁰⁵

Next, the contra-arguments on drone proliferation and its impact on US strategic objectives are examined.

9.3 Drone Proliferation and US Grand Strategy: A Self-Inflicted Wound

The debate about the possible impact of drone proliferation on global security architecture has brought about two dominant schools of thought. The first group, comprised of the sceptics, believe that the consequences of drone proliferation are likely to exacerbate conflicts with dire consequences for domestic and international security.⁹⁰⁶ This view is premised on the notion that the post 9/11 legacy of US drone operations in targeted states have set a far-reaching and dangerous precedent that other countries are likely to emulate in conducting drone strikes on their own. The ripple effect they envisage is more prone to deepen the already fractured stability in East Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East – where US CT operations have occurred in the last two decades.⁹⁰⁷ On the contrary, another school of thought shares the view that the purported threats associated with drone proliferation are exaggerated. This is because states are

⁹⁰¹ Kimball, D. G. (2020). US Aims to Expand Drone Sales. *Arms Control Today*, 50(6), 44-45.

⁹⁰² Castelino, T. (2018). An Action Plan on US Drone Policy: Recommendations for the Trump Administration. *Arms Control Today*, 48(6), 37-37.

⁹⁰³ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁴ Cited in Horowitz et al, 2019

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid. Horowitz et al, 2019

⁹⁰⁷ Fuhrmann, M., & Horowitz, M. C. (2017). Droning on: Explaining the proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles. *International Organization*, 397-418.

rational actors, and decision-making on the use of force is mostly predicated on strategic ends.⁹⁰⁸

These competing perspectives were examined in a recent article published in *International Security* by Horowitz and colleagues. Their assessment which was based on six different contexts that reflect the utility of drone weaponry in broader statecraft, namely – interstate conflict, CT, deterrence, coercive diplomacy, domestic control/repression, and use by non-state actors – examined whether drone proliferation altered military outcomes or cause changes to balance of power at the international realm.⁹⁰⁹ Their study determined that drones are likely to have a significant impact on armed conflicts due to their tactical and operational capabilities that makes them well-suited for such purposes.⁹¹⁰

However, on the contrary, they debunk the claim that drones are likely to have transformative impacts as a game-changing technology to the ways wars or conflicts are fought.⁹¹¹ The premise for their argument is anchored on the susceptibilities of current-generation drones to the hostile airspace at the global level – as it can be easily shot down with anti-drone missile systems. Thus, except in targeted states where drones have thrived so far, the expectation that further drone proliferation will create complexities in the global security environment is overstated.⁹¹² As Horowitz argues, “there is the tendency by analysts to conflate the drones of today with those of tomorrow under the same umbrella.”⁹¹³ Thus, since there is no way to empirically determine how future drones may thrive in a conflict situation, any anticipatory effects of their likely impact cannot be easily conjectured.

Currently, militaries around the world are investing in different forms of UAVs, including unmanned amphibious and submarine systems. These advancements are likely to bring about three changes in the military application of drone technology with broader implications for war planning and operations.⁹¹⁴ The first is swarming technologies – that introduce an era of drone miniaturization and their greater coordination in taking down enemy defense systems. The

⁹⁰⁸ Boyle, M. J., Horowitz, M. C., Kreps, S. E., & Fuhrmann, M. (2018). Debating drone proliferation. *International Security*, 42(3), 178-182.

⁹⁰⁹ Horowitz, M. C., Kreps, S. E., & Fuhrmann, M. (2016). Separating fact from fiction in the debate over drone proliferation. *International Security*, 41(2), 7-42.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹¹ Zenko, M., & Kreps, S. E. (2014). *Limiting armed drone proliferation*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations

⁹¹² Ibid (Horowitz et al, 2019).

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ Saylor, K. (2015). A world of proliferated drones. *Center for a New American Security*.

second is stealth drones – that are capable of operating without radar detection and surviving enemy air defences such as anti-access systems. The third is the introduction of drones with greater speed, range, and manoeuvrability from enemy firepower – all of which are likely to change the dynamics of interstate conflict and competition.⁹¹⁵ The pace at which these technological changes to drone weaponry occurs is, however, not cast in stone. Yet, resurgent powers such as China are intent on pushing the envelope and speeding up the development of these new systems.⁹¹⁶ There is, however, no telling on how these developments are likely to change the balance of power or trigger a security dilemma. Horowitz and colleagues share the view that these advancements create possibilities for the use of drones as deterrence against threats⁹¹⁷ due to ‘mutually assured strikes’ that possessing these new generation drones confer states.

The admission that technology has always been a defining element in warfare is well established in the literature. From bows, arrows, gun powders to nuclear weapons, all had a profound and transformative impact on warfare. The lethal weaponization of drones following 9/11 placed the US at an advantage as being the “first movers” of drone technology instrumentation. However, as history shows, this may have a boomerang effect. For instance, during WWII, the UK introduced aircraft carriers, but the Japanese figured it out before the UK did and used them in facilitating strategic bombing operations against them. The import of this is that, currently, the global drone market is growing significantly without the agency of the US government, and there are strong indications that other states are going to outpace the US in the advancement of drone weaponry. Hence, unless the US continues to develop this technology or devise an offset strategy that outwits other competitors from taking the lion share of the global market, unregulated control of the drone market may put the US at the mercy of the forces of demand and supply. From a security standpoint, this upends the strategic advantage of drone weaponry for the US and undermines its broader security objectives at the global level.⁹¹⁸

This raises the question of whether the US should be more assertive in the way it regulates, exports, sells, and/or manufacture drones. Also, what agreements or protocols need to be

⁹¹⁵ Ibid (Johnson, J., 2020).

⁹¹⁶ Wu, X. (2020). Technology, power, and uncontrolled great power strategic competition between China and the United States. *China International Strategy Review*, 2(1), 99-119.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid (Horowitz et al, 2019).

⁹¹⁸ Rao, B., Harrison, A. J., & Mulloth, B. (2020). *Defense Technological Innovation: Issues and Challenges in an Era of Converging Technologies*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

jettisoned to ensure it maintains its post-Cold War technological advantage and superiority in the emerging great power competition foreshadowed by drone proliferation among resurgent powers. This emerging scenario creates a dilemma – of two complementary yet problematic ideas. On the one hand, the US can enter into negotiations with current world powers to stop further drone diffusion. This would bring about a win-win situation that prevents rival competitors from seeking to outmatch US technological advantage. However, as history shows, great power hardly abides by the letters of an agreement; rather they often, ignore or circumvent them. For instance, China has neglected the treaty requirements of the Convention on the Law of Seas because it proved deleterious for its strategic interests. Likewise, President Putin ignored the Intermediate-Range Forces Treaty – which was meant to limit arms control between Russia and China.⁹¹⁹ On the other hand, in the unlikely event, rival competitors agree to enforce greater transparency and responsibility of the sales, export, and use of their drone technology, there is no certainty that it will address the risks surrounding the propriety of drones for targeted killing operations.

In addition, when non-authoritarian allies such as NATO countries buy Chinese drones instead of American drones, the US potentially loses the strategic opportunity to deepen its defense relationships and interoperability. This also saps US defense companies, the competitiveness and innovation it needs to dominate the drone making – the cumulative effect of which makes it harder for the US to maintain its technological edge and its post-Cold War unique power position.⁹²⁰ Analysing the dynamics of US drone sales in the wider greater power competition, Horowitz asserts that,

“The US mostly sells its drones to NATO allies, increasing the interoperability and common supply chains within the alliance. US sales to India are an attempt at supplanting Russia’s influence – part of the larger US focus on Asia, including countering China. Also, Israeli provision of drones to India is part of larger defense cooperation between the two, while their exports to Azerbaijan provide a presence just north of the largest regional rival, Iran.”⁹²¹

⁹¹⁹ Ibid.

⁹²⁰ Tripp, B. (2020). Deterrence and Drones: Are Militaries Becoming Addicted and What Is the Prognosis? In *Deterrence* (pp. 115-127). Springer, Cham.

⁹²¹ Chávez, K., & Swed, O. (2020). Off the Shelf: The Violent Nonstate Actor Drone Threat. *Air & Space Power Journal*, 29.

Furthermore, even if the US can manage to stay ahead technologically in the many spheres of military-technological competition (as it has done since WWII), the trajectory of economic growth suggests China will overtake the US later in this decade (these projections have been brought forward as a result of the economic implications of the Coronavirus, that will likely hurt the US economy for a longer duration than China), and with that one can speculate that the relative advantage in key areas of military technology could switch from the US to China. For instance, according to the UAV guideline published by the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), the ministry plans to establish and revise more than 200 rules covering research, production, application, and safety regulation of civilian drones. China also projects its UAV industry to take off to \$27 billion in total output by 2025.⁹²²

In sum, while technological development can potentially bring out a transformative impact of drones for interstate competition, the debates surrounding their use demonstrate that beyond the tactical and strategic efficacy, their real impact is likely to be seen in the mid-to-long term rather than in the short-term.

9.4 The Implications of Drone Proliferation for US Grand Strategy

While the sale of drone hardware to US allies in Europe and North Asia, such as Japan and South Korea, may, in fact, strengthen Americas' grand strategy vis-à-vis Russia and China, unchecked drone proliferation potentially impacts US strategic objectives at two levels: global and national. As this chapter argues, this can manifest in three ways: (i) the likelihood that near-peer or regional competitors may use drones outside declared theatres of war based on the negative precedent of US 9/11 CT operations, (ii) enemy states and non-state actors deploying drones in conducting reprisal attacks, or to perpetrate terrorist acts, or weaponize it for biological attacks, (iii) a security dilemma arising from unrestricted proliferation among world powers.⁹²³ At the national security level, drone proliferation fosters changes to a military power that is likely to heighten uncertainties, inflame tensions and create vulnerabilities among states – particularly as states deploy drones to advances their national and strategic interests.

9.4.1 Global Security Level

9.4.1.1 Near-Peer Competitors

⁹²² Carafano J.J. (2020) Technology and Great Power competition: 5 top challenges for the next decade. <https://www.heritage.org/technology/commentary/technology-and-great-power-competition-5-top-challenges-the-next-decade>

⁹²³ Wong, Y. H., Yurchak, J. M., Button, R. W., Frank, A., Laird, B., Osoba, O. A. & Bae, S. J. (2020). *Deterrence in the Age of Thinking Machines*. RAND Corporation Santa Monica.

As drones continue to proliferate among near-peer competitors with more nations developing active drone programmes globally, analysts believe it will further exacerbate US military vulnerabilities and foster strategic imbalance in the global security landscape.⁹²⁴ This is because, in contrast to human-operated automation systems, drones complicate the ability of states to anticipate and attribute attacks.⁹²⁵ This portends an adverse consequence for US grand strategy from the standpoint of international engagement. This is due to the possibility that drones potentially impact well-understood state behaviours, distort sovereignty norms, and engender a crisis of stability in the global security landscape.⁹²⁶

This also includes the risk that drone proliferation creates the possibility of an unbridled arms race among revisionist and revanchist powers such as China and Russia to counter the technology edge and the asymmetric military advantage of the US drone programme. For instance, anti-drones defense systems and stealth drones, which hitherto were exclusively owned by the US, are now in the Chinese and Russian military fleet. In 2016, for example, Russia deployed remotely piloted tanks – Uran-9 and Vekha for reconnaissance missions, and China has used drones to a guided missile via satellite technology.⁹²⁷

Furthermore, Russia's growing UAV system further underscores this. According to a recent estimation by Russia's Ministry of Defense, the former Soviet power has more than 2,100 UAVs.⁹²⁸ This means that besides the US that currently has more than 10,000 types of unmanned systems, only Russia and China come close to boasting of this number.⁹²⁹ The 2019 Defense Procurement Plan stated Russia's intentions to acquire on an annual basis 300 short-range UAVs. The growth of the Russian UAV programme underscores the burgeoning utility of drone weaponry as a military asset. While Russia, compared to China, Israel, and many NATO states, arrived late to the scene in the race to acquire drones, the type of drones in its fleet indicates how Russia has further advanced this technology.⁹³⁰ One of these drones – the Orlan-10 – functions like the US MQ-9 and Predator drones. It has also been regarded as the

⁹²⁴ Bendett, S. (2018). In AI, Russia is hustling to catch up. *Defense One*, 4; Johnson, J. (2020). Artificial Intelligence, Drone Swarming and Escalation Risks in Future Warfare. *The RUSI Journal*, 1-11.

⁹²⁵ Ibid (Johnson J, 2020).

⁹²⁶ Wong, Y. H., Yurchak, J. M., Button, R. W., Frank, A., Laird, B., Osoba, O. A., ... & Bae, S. J. (2020). *Deterrence in the Age of Thinking Machines*. RAND Corporation Santa Monica.

⁹²⁷ Barhat, V. (2018). China is determined to steal AI crown from US and nothing, not even a trade war, will stop it. Accessed on April 5, 2019 from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/04/china-aims-to-steal-us-ai-crown-and-not-even-trade-war-will-stop-it.html>.

⁹²⁸ Bendett, S. (2019). The rise of Russia's hi-tech military. *Fletcher Security Review*, 6(1), 5-14.

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

⁹³⁰ Ibid.

workhorse of Russia's UAV fleet due to its aerial and long endurance capabilities.⁹³¹ However, the main utility of Russia's UAV has been for ISR missions and for targeting operations. There is the likelihood that this will change in the coming years due to the unpredictability of the international sphere.

Likewise, China's military assertiveness and posturing have grown in recent years. Beijing has deployed more military assets to the SCS and currently operates a military facility in Djibouti to conduct naval patrols in the Indian Ocean.⁹³² Furthermore, China's UAV advancement, despite starting decades after the US, poses one of the greatest threats to US procurement plans. According to Weizman and his colleagues, "China's rapid modernization is increasingly forcing the Pentagon to face the challenges in its own procurement pipeline arising from shifting program goals, endemic cost overruns, and delays."⁹³³ Compared to Russian drones, China possesses fast, long-range, and supersonic drones – such as the DR-8 and the Sharp Sword stealth. According to Horowitz, "The People's Liberation Army is playing a massive game of catchup with the US, and it although it does not expect to reach parity with the US military until 2050, China's military budget is growing – officially at \$177.61 billion, more than 60 percent increase from its budget ten years ago (\$105.64 billion)."⁹³⁴ China's economic growth also suggests it might pose a broader economic challenge to the US in driving technological innovation agenda capable of counterbalancing US military might and advantage.

The above has also been reflected in the race to develop AI, with China fast becoming a true peer competitor in this domain with the likelihood of overtaking the US. According to a RAND 2018 report, the US, China, and Russia are currently working on weapons with advanced capabilities enabled by AI. China and the US have both experimented with AI methods that enable drones to hunt together in packs (swarms) and select targets for attack based on recognisable, unique characteristics.⁹³⁵ As James Johnson notes, "the rapid proliferation, diffusion, and synthesis of AI, together with the opacity and dual-use features associated with the nascent technology, could generate a destabilizing and potentially intractable AI arms

⁹³¹ Ibid.

⁹³² Barhat, V. (2018). China is determined to steal AI crown from US and nothing, not even a trade war, will stop it. Accessed on April 5, 2019 from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/04/china-aims-to-steal-us-ai-crown-and-not-even-trade-war-will-stop-it.html>.

⁹³³ Wezman PD, Fluerant A, Kuimova A, Tian N and Wezeman ST (2019) Trends in international arms transfers, 2018. SIPRI, March. Available from: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/fs_1903_at_2018.pdf

⁹³⁴ Horowitz et al, (2020) China Has Made Drone Warfare Global: The United States Must Join the Market or Be Left Behind. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-11-20/china-has-made-drone-warfare-global>

⁹³⁵ Ibid (RAND, 2019).

race.⁹³⁶ As with drones, the race to innovate with AI creates uncertainties in the international sphere with potentially destabilizing ramifications for strategic balance and global security. Johnson posits that the current trend in drone proliferation among US near-peer competitors potentially affect international security in three interconnected ways: (i) amplifying the uncertainties and risks posed by existing threats, (ii) transforming the nature and characteristics of these threats and, (iii) introducing new threats to the security landscape.⁹³⁷ This is due to the risk that drones can be deployed in swarms to carry out pre-emptive attacks, bomb a nuclear site, or be used to launch nuclear-powered ballistic missiles.⁹³⁸

9.4.1.2 Vulnerabilities and Susceptibilities

As earlier conceptualized in this thesis, grand strategy deals with an international system that is characterized by competition and dynamic interaction. This means states must contend, with living, thinking rivals that seek to control events their way, as well as allies and other actors that are focused on pursuing interests all their own.⁹³⁹ Hence, grand strategy both influences and is influenced by the behaviour of others. As Gaddis argues, any effective grand strategy will try to shape the country's interaction in the most advantageous way possible, but the choice of cohering around or implementing a single grand strategy will unavoidably be affected by the fact that adversaries, as well as allies, are trying the same thing.⁹⁴⁰ Posen argues that one of the main threats of US grand strategy today is the presence of powerful and autocratic states that can threaten the global liberal order.⁹⁴¹

Current drone proliferation among world powers reflects this and points to an emerging security dilemma. Revisiting Tang's analysis is useful here. Tang explains the security dilemma theory as a fulcrum of defensive realism. Hitherto, the US has championed the use of drones post-9/11 as a light footprint approach to warfare and as an effective CT tool and in facilitating its broader statecraft. The tactical and strategic efficacy of drones based on their secretive targeting criteria and precision and remote capabilities is, however, contributing to a security spiral process among world powers in a 'race' to outdo the US in the development and

⁹³⁶ Johnson, J. (2020). Artificial Intelligence, Drone Swarming and Escalation Risks in Future Warfare. *The RUSI Journal*, 1-11.

⁹³⁷ Ibid.

⁹³⁸ Zegart A (2020) Cheap fights, credible threats: The future of armed drones and coercion. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43(1): 6-46.

⁹³⁹ Art, R. J. (2013). *A grand strategy for America*. Cornell University Press.

⁹⁴⁰ Gaddis, J. L. (2019). *On grand strategy*. Penguin Books.

⁹⁴¹ Posen, B. R. (2018). The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony: Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy. *Foreign Affairs*, 97, 20.

proliferation of armed drone technology. This is manifest in the stockpile of drone weaponry and increases in the defense budget and research investment for the advancement of drones and AI-related technologies in China and Russia (see preceding paragraph highlight).

Thus, though the US did not intentionally set out to spur a drone arms race from its counterterrorism missions using armed drones, other states, particularly revanchist and resurgent powers, have interpreted this as an asymmetric imbalance in the military-technological edge in US favour. This, as Tang's security dilemma purports, manifested in a situation where an increase in the proliferation of drones in military systems has caused other states to respond with similar measures to re-establish the balance and prevent the arming state from upsetting the balance in the first place.⁹⁴² For instance, in China, the website of the People's Liberation Army linked a US plan to sell drones in Southeast Asia as a threat to contain China's claim to the South China sea (Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam dispute this). Though China does not disclose details of its drone deployments, it indicated that it sees drones as crucial hardware in the maritime dispute. The 70th celebration of the founding of the People's Republic of China was one characterized by the display of new military hardware. One of these were two large HSU-001 unmanned underwater vehicles – which are long-range autonomous robot spy submarines designed to patrol the depth of the ocean without human direction, faster, deeper, and quieter than a submarine.⁹⁴³ This made them a potential threat to US naval ships patrolling the SCS – by making the US vulnerable to Chinese naval warfare and to these weapons.

In response to China's assertiveness, the Pentagon sold 34 ScanEagle drones to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam in 2019. This also included the sale of the MQ-9B Sea Guardian – a maritime surveillance variant of the Reaper drones to Taiwan as part of a weapons package worth about \$4.5 billion.⁹⁴⁴ US defense experts justified this drone sale as a strategy to deter the invasion or counter a blockade by China. Taiwanese military experts posit that these drones, once armed, can target Chinese naval ships on their way to Taiwan and may embolden Chinese retaliation.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴² Tang, S. (2010). The security dilemma: A conceptual analysis. In *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time* (pp. 33-71). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

⁹⁴³ Horowitz MC (2020) Do emerging military technologies matter for international politics? *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 385–400.

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Likewise, the Russian military has been jamming US drones operating over Eastern Syria using Silok drones in a bid to protect Moscow's installations in the country. This is not entirely new, as Russia had jammed US drones in Ukraine in 2014. Interestingly, Kremlin has also developed its first ground-based unit specializing in defeating enemy drones. The proliferation of these jammers and Russia's increasing drone capabilities threaten the US military expanding UAV fleet and strategic balance. For instance, in 2011, Iran used a Russian-made Avtobaza jammer to force down a US RQ-170 stealth drone along the Afghanistan-Iran border.⁹⁴⁶ The Pentagon, aware of this risk, together with the Defense Advanced Research Project's Agency (DARPA), developed "signal detection and reasoning technology that allows radios to recognize interference and jamming and adapt to maintain communications — even in the presence of severe and/or adaptive jamming."⁹⁴⁷

Susceptibilities

The nations of Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan share one common trait – they have all had or continue to experience some levels of conflict; ironically, they all possess armed drone capabilities. The 2019 Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) assessment of which of these countries are like to remain war-related hotspots identified four wars that are likely to endure: (i) the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq/Syria between the US-led coalition and insurgents (ii) the war between Yemen and Saudi Arabia; and that (iii) the Kashmir crisis between the Indian and Pakistan nations, and (iv) Turkey and Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Interestingly, most of these countries currently possess some armed drones mostly supplied from either Turkey or China.

Additionally, drone aerial imagery may inflame crisis situations if it is deployed for propaganda purposes by encouraging retaliatory actions. For example, after India conducted a series of "surgical strikes" on militants in Kashmir on 26 September 2016, they released the drone surveillance video to the public to show how effective the strikes were. However, then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif condemned the strikes as an "unprovoked and naked aggression,"⁹⁴⁸ and on November 20, Pakistan retaliated by shooting down an Indian drone along the Line of Control in Kashmir.⁹⁴⁹

⁹⁴⁶ Mir A and Moore D (2019) Drones, surveillance, and violence: Theory and evidence from a US drone program, *International Studies Quarterly* 63(4): 846–862.

⁹⁴⁷ DAFRA 2018

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid (Horowitz et al, 2020).

This raises the concern on the dynamics of drone proliferation for conflict escalation or as an instrument of deterrence in de-escalating tensions. Zenko avers that “the diffusion of armed drones increases the prospects for conflict exacerbation and the prospects for the US to maintain lasting peace in the Middle East.”⁹⁵⁰ For instance, since 2015, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have used Chinese and American drones extensively for tactical airstrikes and targeted assassinations in Yemen.⁹⁵¹ The UAE has also used drones to eliminate a Houthi leader, Saleh Ali al-Sammad.⁹⁵² In Libya, Chinese-made drones have been deployed to support the Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar against the internationally recognized government (GNA) in Tripoli. The aftermath of the strikes, apart from civilian casualties and a breakdown of government structures, escalated existing tensions with GNA, which equally deployed Turkish-made drones in reprisal attacks.⁹⁵³ Thus, unless the US promulgates a new drone policy that manages the challenges posed by drone proliferation, near-peer competitors may take the lead in establishing a normative framework (that advances their national and regional interests) that may be harmful to US national security interests.

9.4.1.3 Non-State Actors

Scholarship on the proliferation of drones mainly focuses on states’ use, sidestepping the consequential proliferation of drone technology by violent non-state actors. The source of the gap is that existing proliferation models overlook civilian drone technologies (home-made drones that are being deployed by local militia or terrorist groups).⁹⁵⁴ Although non-state actors often do not possess military-grade drones, they mostly reconfigure or retrofit commercial drones with explosives to serve this purpose. This, in effect, demonstrates that non-state actors have the resources, capacity, and interest to effectively incorporate drone programs in advancing their objectives by shifting from cost-prohibitive, inaccessible, and technically complex military technologies to cheap, simple civilian platforms.⁹⁵⁵

Studies have shown that drones psychologically boost the status of the non-state actors and their capacity to cause harm and terror.⁹⁵⁶ Wong and colleagues predict that as drone

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid. (Zenko, 2017).

⁹⁵¹ Council on Foreign Relations Report 2019.

⁹⁵² Iqbal, K. (2015). Yemen Crisis and Pakistan: A Holistic Overview. *Policy Perspectives: The Journal of the Institute of Policy Studies*, 12(2), 61-80.

⁹⁵³ Boussios, E. (2017). Drones in War: The Controversies Surrounding the United States' Expanded Use of Drones. *Contemporary Voices: St Andrews Journal of International Relations*, 8(4).

⁹⁵⁴ Chávez, K., & Swed, O. (2020). Off the Shelf: The Violent Nonstate Actor Drone Threat. *Air & Space Power Journal*, 29.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid

⁹⁵⁶ Hoenig, M. (2014). Hezbollah and the Use of Drones as a Weapon of Terrorism. *Public Interest Report*, 67(2).

technology matures, payloads will increase, prices will decrease, and attacks involving drones based on their current trajectory would likely become more common weapons of war.⁹⁵⁷ Furthermore, as export laws loosen internationally and drone technology proliferates, nations mired in internal conflict (i.e., insurgent and terrorist threats) may also choose to strike within their own borders at higher rates, which may inflame more conflict situations.⁹⁵⁸ For example, the September 2019 bombing of Saudi-owned Aramco oil processing facilities by Iranian drones inflamed tensions between the two countries.

The sale of Chinese drones to non-democracies risks adversely impacting the US CT mission in the next decade. This is because non-state actors can buy, hijack, or steal drones in carrying out coordinated air attacks in gray zone conflicts. In recent years, non-state groups like Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Houthi Rebels in Yemen, and ISIS have used drone-like quadcopters and semi-military grade drones to carry out tactical assaults in their respective countries.⁹⁵⁹ This is based on the notion that. “UAV capabilities hold substantial destructive potential that terrorist organizations and other disruptive actors are likely to exploit.” This approximates with what Yochi Dreazen describes as “the next evolution of warfare-by-remote-control when weaponized robotic planes give terrorist groups de facto air forces.”⁹⁶⁰

As a result of the proliferation of drone technology in the last decade, non-state armed actors are increasingly able to create a threat from above (see table 17 below), a threat that remained until recently the exclusive domain of states against non-state actors.⁹⁶¹ Hezbollah, for example, the oldest non-state or semi-state actor to use drones in the region, has a fleet of more than 200 drones.⁹⁶² Some of them were used against Israel between 2004 - 2016 and against Syrian rebels in 2014 and 2015.⁹⁶³ In the future, non-state armed groups equipped with military-grade drones provided by state sponsors – such as those supplied to Hezbollah and to the Houthis by Iran – are likely to pose a far greater threat from above due to airstrike capability and support from modified UAV use.⁹⁶⁴

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid (Wong et al, 2020)

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid (Hoenig, 2014)

⁹⁵⁹ De Soysa I and Midford P (2012) Enter the dragon! An empirical analysis of Chinese versus US arms transfers to autocrats and violators of human rights, 1989–2006. *International Studies Quarterly* 56(4): 843–856.

⁹⁶⁰ Dreazen, Yochi. "The Next Arab-Israeli War Will Be Fought with Drones." *New Republic* 245, no. 6 (2014): 28-34.

⁹⁶¹ Rossiter, A. (2018). Drone usage by militant groups: exploring variation in adoption. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 34(2), 113-126.

⁹⁶² Ibid.

⁹⁶³ Ibid.

⁹⁶⁴ Chávez, K., & Swed, O. (2020). The proliferation of drones to violent nonstate actors. *Defence Studies*, 1-24.

Table 17: Non-state actors with drone capabilities

S/N	Non-state actors	Type of group	Country	Year	Drone Type
1.	Palestinian Islamic Jihad	Militant	Palestine	2019	Re-configured hobbyist drones
2.	Venezuela military defectors	Militant	Venezuela	2018	Re-configured hobbyist drones
3.	Boko Haram	Terrorist	Nigeria	2018	Hobbyist drones for surveillance purposes.
4.	Harakat Tahrir al-Sham	Militant	Syria	2018	Swarm-like drone attack
5.	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê	Militant	Turkey	2017	Re-configured hobbyist drones
6.	Libyan National Army	Opposition	Libya	2017	Medium range and long-range military drones
7.	Maute Group	Opposition	Philippines		Re-configured hobbyist drones
8	Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG)	Militant	Mexico	2017	Re-configured hobbyist drones
9	Houthi Rebels	Rebel	Saudi Arabia	2017	Re-configured hobbyist drones
10	Islamic State (ISIS)	Terrorist	Syria and Iraq	2016	Medium range military drones
11	Faylaq al-Sham	Rebel	Syria	2016	Re-configured hobbyist drones
12	Taliban	Terrorist	Pakistan	2016	Hobbyist drones for surveillance purposes.
13	Donetsk People's Republic (DPR)	Separatist	Ukraine	2016	Hobbyist drones for surveillance purposes.
14	Saraya al-Khorasani	Opposition	Syria	2015	Hobbyist drones for surveillance purposes.
15	Suqour al-Sham Brigades	Opposition	Syria	2015	Hobbyist drones for surveillance purposes.
16	Al-Qaeda	Terrorist	Afghanistan	2015	Hobbyist drones for surveillance purposes.

Source: Author's adaptation from New America Foundation.

The 2019 Defense Intelligence Agency report determined that Iran, a US rival competitor, has rapidly developed its air capabilities.⁹⁶⁵ An assessment of Iran's drone capabilities revealed it is the leading supplier of armed drones to non-state actors in the Middle East.⁹⁶⁶ It has been determined Houthi militia operating in Yemen, Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, and

⁹⁶⁵ Defence Intelligence Agency 2019 report.

⁹⁶⁶ Yadlin, A., & Golov, A. (2013). If Attacked, How Would Iran Respond? *INSS Strategic Assessment*, 16(3), 7-21.

Shiite in Iraq, have all sourced lethal drone technology from Iran.⁹⁶⁷ A recent attack on a Saudi oil installation in September 2019 was conducted using Iranian drones. Like Iran, Turkey is also another key player in drone proliferation in the Middle East. Presently, it exports its drone technology to Qatar, Ukraine, and Libya.⁹⁶⁸ The consequence for US strategic objectives to wit grand strategy is dire. First, it engenders a precarious situation for US CT operations. Second, it increases the risk that some of these drones will potentially be used by non-state actors in reprisal attacks. Third, it underscores the CT paradox – which establishes how the use of drones to increase US security inadvertently causes a boomerang effect that undermines it. More importantly, it further underlines how current drone proliferation creates susceptibilities at the global level that are likely to spur transnational terrorism that moves beyond suicide bombing to the deployment of machines (drones) against US installations, its strategic interests, and for disrupting the efficacy of US drone campaign. Also, this does not preclude the risk that drones will be deployed more strategically by states joining forces with non-state actors to escalate ongoing conflict. For instance, the geopolitical tension between Syria and Iraq can escalate when the former acquires Russian drones and the latter, Turkish UAVs. This can further exacerbate existing skirmishes and the already fragile situation in these states.

9.4.2 At National Security Level

From the preceding analysis, the nexus between drone proliferation and their ramification for US grand strategy at the global level has been examined. Another key consideration, however, concerns how drones hamper US strategic objectives at the national security level. This stems from the concern that drone diffusion fosters changes to a military power that is likely to heighten uncertainties, inflame tensions and create vulnerabilities among states – mainly as states deploy drones to advances their national and strategic interests. These changes emanate from the advancements in the weaponization of artificial intelligence and the miniaturization of automated robotic technologies⁹⁶⁹, which are likely to broaden the latitude of how other nation-states fight their wars and what targeted decisions are based on for retaliatory or preemptive attacks. Related to this is the objectionable concern that drones foster the notion of dehumanization and desensitization of warfare – and based on the precedent set by the institutionalization of targeted killings by the US CT operations, other states are likely to use

⁹⁶⁷ Czulda, R. (2020). Defence industry in Iran—between needs and real capabilities. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 36(2), 201-217.

⁹⁶⁸ Kasapoğlu, C., & Kırdemir, B. (2018). *Rising Drone Power: Turkey on The Eve of Its Military Breakthrough*. Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies.

⁹⁶⁹ Chávez, K., & Swed, O. (2020). The proliferation of drones to violent nonstate actors. *Defence Studies*, 1-24.

drones in eliminating HVTs instead of resorting to policing mechanisms. The implication for the US grand strategy is the burden it puts on policymakers in thinking ‘grand’ about the long-term implications of how military instruments are used beyond the short-term success they accomplish. Further miniaturization of drone technology and the likelihood of being buoyed by Beijing’s laissez-faire approach increases the propensity for new dynamics in crisis escalation in new theatres of war. For the US, this has the unintended consequence of stretching its defence spending and pursuing a grand strategy predicated on muscular internationalism globally.⁹⁷⁰

Horowitz and colleagues argue that “as drones shrink in size and spread commercially, they can more readily be used by governments as a deterrence and compellence for rivals.”⁹⁷¹ However, as Tang’s security dilemma theory suggests, this necessitates reciprocal action on the part of the ‘rival’ states to acquire drone technology as counterbalancing instrument. For instance, since 2014, North Korea has conducted surveillance and reconnaissance missions on South Korea’s defense. This resulted in the shooting down of a North Korean flying over the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) by South Korean forces in January 2016. However, as North Korea develops more drone capabilities, the dynamics of their use over the DMZ may cause changes to South Korea’s deterrence – for a more defensive posture.

The increasing use of drones forces other countries to engage in sophisticated deception techniques to hide their military capabilities. South Korea, for instance, intended to procure America's Global Hawks, which cost US\$250 million, as a strategy to “keep an eye” on North Korea.⁹⁷² It is foreseeable what North Korea’s response would have led to drone procurement from Russia or developing its drone technology as a counter-response to South Korea’s surveillance. Apart from the fact that selling Global Hawks to South Korea was prohibited by the MTCR, its arrival in South Korea's arsenal would be unlikely to be welcomed by China – thus exacerbating the vicious security spiral.⁹⁷³ So, instead of greater military transparency, drones risk promoting more deception, thereby increasing the risk of countries stumbling into conflicts.

⁹⁷⁰ Okpaleke, F. (2021). The Implications of Unchecked Armed Drone Proliferation for Global Security. *African Strategic Review*, 4(1).

⁹⁷¹ Ibid, (Horowitz, Kreps, Fuhrmann, 2020).

⁹⁷² Gettinger, D., (2019). The Drone Database. New York, NY: *Center for the Study of the Drone*, Barnard College Press

⁹⁷³ Cummings, (2018).

9.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has examined the implications of drone proliferation for US grand strategy at the global and national levels. One of the key arguments made in this chapter is that left unchecked, the continued spread of drones, particularly among world powers and non-state actors, triggers potential adverse implications for US strategic objectives. This argument was examined based on the current nature and dynamics of drone proliferation globally and its intersection with the security dilemma theory. The second argument unpacked the impact of drone diffusion for US grand strategy at the national security level. It also assessed the implications of the advancement and weaponization of AI in exacerbating existing security risks and in engendering an unbridled great power competition.

In the final analysis, the chapter demonstrated that the current pattern of drone proliferation portend harmful consequences for US grand strategy based on the precedent it has set by how it uses this technology and the risk that rogue states and non-democratic regimes may use drones in ways that alter the strategic balance and increase tension. While it is argued that drones may, in fact, benefit the US when it supplies it technology to allies and partners to carry out US security objectives at the international sphere, a grey area remains the restrictions imposed on the sale of US drone technology, which China is exploiting in selling drones based on its laissez-faire approach to non-democratic regimes. As more countries possess armed drones, particularly countries in conflict zones or rogue states willing to use this weaponry outside the confines of international war, the emerging dynamic poses new concerns for US grand strategy and technological advancement in an international system constantly in flux.

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

10.0 Introduction

This thesis has investigated the role of drones in US grand strategy from their use as a CT tool and instrument of statecraft in targeted states. It examined this based on how successive US administrations post 9/11 utilized drones for achieving US strategic objectives. The analysis was based on a critical exploration of the different typologies of US grand strategies, including neo-isolationism, primacy, selective engagement, cooperative security, and restraint, its basic assumptions, core elements, and how it intersects with drone use. This informed the research questions, which investigated drones' political and strategic utility for US grand strategy and whether drones undermine or support US grand strategy based on their use in targeted states as a counterterrorism tool by successive US administrations post 9/11.

Based on this, a research hypothesis was formulated, which stated that *continued use of drones by the US as a counterterrorism tactic and an offensive war strategy in targeted states undermines US grand strategy. It does so by creating contradictory outcomes: on the one hand, it eliminates terrorists, but on the other, it causes anti-Americanism, the death of non-combatants, and generates unintended blowback.* To explore this, the thesis set out to do the following: (i) analyse the evolutionary development of drones from WWI to the Clinton era, within the gamut of successive US grand strategy within this period, to determine whether drones historically supported US grand strategy, (ii) assessed the use of drones by successive US administration post 9/11 from George W. Bush to Donald J. Trump, to ascertain based on available anecdotal and empirical evidence of reported drone strikes, the impact on the different grand strategic objectives pursued by these administrations, (iii) conducted a case study analysis of drone strikes in two targeted states – Afghanistan and Pakistan – and the impact on US strategic objectives in these countries and lastly, (iv) the implication of drone proliferation among near-peer and regional competitors, and non-state actors for US grand strategy at the national and global level.

The research hypothesis was weighed and assessed based on rigorous analysis of exploratory data through four themes: civilian quandary of drones, blowback from anti-Americanism, counterterrorism paradox, and security dilemma of drone proliferation. The research findings are elaborated on below.

10.1 Research Findings

The role of drones in US grand strategy

This thesis explored the ramifications of drone use as an instrument of statecraft and how it has supported US grand strategy before and after 9/11. This was analysed based on the historical assessment of drones before 9/11, precisely from WWI to the Kosovo War. The analysis reveals that though the precision capabilities of drones were still rudimentary in its development, the ISR capabilities of drones during this period proved useful as an instrument of warcraft. The analysis determined that although drones had a limited role in facilitating US grand strategy before the inception of the Cold War, in the wake of the Korean and Vietnam War, the tactical utility of its weaponry became important for military operations and for advancing the offensive aspects of US grand strategy. The precedent set using drones post-Cold War laid the groundwork for the development and consequently the lethal weaponization of drones for targeted killing operations under Bush following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. During the Bush administration, particularly in the last term, drones were effective instruments for personality strikes towards eliminating HVTs. They were also valuable for supporting the offensive liberal strategy of the Bush administration in targeted states. This was evident in their military utility for targeted strikes, leadership decapitation, disrupting terrorist formations, and avoiding the blowback from ground warfare (following Iraq). Thus, it allowed the US to remain active in combat zones without risking the political and social costs of protracted military engagement.

Under Obama's hybrid grand strategy, drone use became strategically entrenched as a double-edged strategy that served the defensive objectives of restraint and exceptionalism on the one hand and as an offensive war tactic on the other. This was evident in their use as a political tool for compellence and deterrence in targeted states, facilitating surgical legitimacy at the domestic level, and enabling and entrenching the concept of remote warfare in US CT operations. Likewise, during the Trump administration, US drone warfare continued in the trajectory established by the previous US administration as an instrument of statecraft and CT weapon in targeted states. As our analysis showed, drones were instrumental in supporting the grand strategy of Trump's administration, which espoused a nativist, protectionist, and nationalist-isolationist vision for the US – by expressing the fungibility of American power. This has been evident in the deregulation of drone strikes on the battlefield, reversion to covert

strikes, and the signing of executive orders that deepens the operationality and entrenchment of drones as a new element of American warfare.

However, despite the acknowledged role of drones in the respective US administrations aforementioned, this thesis determined that their continued use in targeted states engendered unfavorable outcomes that work contra to the fulfilment of the political, strategic, and tactical ends of US grand strategy post 9/11. This is due to the countervailing effects engendered by drone strikes such as unintended civilian deaths, anti-Americanism, militant retaliation, unchecked drone proliferation, and counterterrorism paradox.

Drones, Civilian Casualty and US grand strategy

The argument that mounting civilian casualties resulting from the continued use of drones in targeted states undermine US grand strategy was examined. While the view that civilian casualty and collateral damages are inevitable in warfare, this thesis argued that the precision capabilities of drones compared to other manned aircraft's challenge this notion. In addition, drone strikes before final authorization are reviewed by military commanders and legal officials in real-time before a kill order is made, thus, making each drone strike a component of "intended action." This argument was prosecuted by assessing the civilian casualty figures in the aftermath of drone strikes in targeted states such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya based on available evidence published since 9/11.

The findings determined that civilian casualty figures have increased rather than decreased in successive US administrations since 9/11. During the Bush administration, the figure was estimated to be about 333-350. This surged during President Obama following the sustained escalation of drone strikes, which resulted in 1540-2650 civilian casualties. This figure further exacerbated under Trump to 1450-1650 (in his first term alone) with the outsourcing and deregulation of drone warfare operations outside declared theatres of war. As the evidence showed, the consequence of increasing civilian deaths in targeted states resulted in local anti-drone protests, militant retaliation, political opposition, and terrorist violence, which, as this thesis argued, generated adverse consequences that were antithetical to US strategic objectives in these states.

For the Bush strategic doctrine that espoused the goals of offensive liberalism (though not aspects of it were liberal), these outcomes were at cross purposes to his administration's stated goals for spreading democracy and, in effect, laid a dangerous precedent for the utility of drones in counterterrorism. Thus, drones represented a "carrot and stick" strategy, where the US

promoted democratic ideals but killed civilians in targeted states. Furthermore, instead of dealing with terrorists as a CT problem, an international policing effort that involved a multilateralism instead of the Bush-era “coalition of the willing” approach could have changed the precedent of US CT engagement for successive US administrations. This is akin to Cronin’s assertion that “terrorists should be handled as a counterinsurgency problem and not a counterterrorism problem.”⁹⁷⁴ The difference between the two concepts is that one tackles individual recruitment, the primary source of terrorism, while the latter focuses on eliminating senior terrorist leaders. Jordan’s analysis on decapitation has shown that this has been largely ineffective. Similarly, Wolfendale’s contribution to this re-affirms how CT often engenders countervailing effects that catalyze rather than weaken terrorist groups.

The intensification of drone strikes in the last years of the Bush-era culminated in the escalation and reliance on drones under Obama for counterterrorism missions in targeted states. As the evidence showed, this also resulted in mounting civilian casualty figures with some anticipatory effects such as retaliatory suicide attacks, rise in insurgent retaliation, and revived opposition to US drones in targeted states. Furthermore, the controversial policy of signature killing and double strikes in Obama's counterterrorism playbook and the covert CIA drone operations were antithetical to Obama’s strategic doctrine that promoted America’s exceptionalism in a rules-based international order. Civilian deaths and secretive drone warfare operated outside declared theatres of war and violated territorial and sovereignty norms of targeted states that are contra to international laws of war.

Additionally, Obama’s drone war more assertively expressed the fungibility of America’s power than curtail it. Rather than reversing his predecessor's erroneous hard power stance in counterterrorism operations, it expanded and institutionalized it. For his grand strategy that expressed an avowal to restraint, drones represented the opposite, as evident in the OCO spending and defence budget for drones in targeted states (35 percent increase compared to his predecessor in his first term). While the second term of the Obama administration saw the introduction of PPG rules and changes in US drone policy, it did not alter the negative legacy of the impact of drones in targeted states – which has served as the propaganda machinery for terrorist mobilization and the deepening of anti-American sentiments among terrorist groups. More so, it did little to reduce anti-government protests in targeted states or alter the perception of America’s “imperial overstretch” which violated the territorial and sovereignty rights of

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid (Cronin, 2013)

targeted states in contravention to the Geneva Convention and the statutory laws of war. Thus, for Obama's hybrid grand strategy that championed America's exemplarism, the use of drones, while tactical useful as a CT weapon, undermined the tenets of Obama's strategic objectives based on its negative aftermath in targeted states.

Civilian casualties also continued under Trump following the reversal to secretive drone warfare and deregulation of targeted killing operations. For Trump's grand strategy that espoused a Jacksonian neo-isolationist vision of American, his drone warfare established a *dronification* logic consistent with "America First" – that projects an image of unabashed nationalism and a muscular military strategy for combating radical Islamic terrorism. Like his predecessor, however, controversies surrounding the lack of transparency and the clandestine nature of Trump's drone warfare led to the increase in civilian casualty figures, particularly in Afghanistan (516-1622), Yemen (172-225), and in undeclared battlefields (such as Somalia with about 74 deaths). These deaths are reflective of the pattern of anti-American drone sentiments that besieged the previous administration. Under Trump, the continuity of these deaths raised moral, ethical, and legal concerns for US drone warfare, which dented its soft power projection capabilities and the liberal aspects of its grand strategy.

At the domestic level, drones against American citizens negatively affected public opinion of targeted killing operations and queried the surgical legitimacy of CIA covert strike operations. At the international level, civilian deaths arising from signature strikes, double kills, accidental deaths have created a negative precedent for US counterterrorism operations – which establishes a dangerous perception of how the US wages remote warfare. More so, while drones have been seen by policymakers and analysts within US policy circles as a 'lighter footprint' to warfare with the capacity to minimize public scrutiny and congressional oversight of its targeted killing operations, the aftermath of drone strikes since 9/11 has so far engendered a paradox of casualty aversion – with the increasing cases of civilian deaths.

Drones, Anti-Americanism, and US grand strategy

The impact of drones and anti-Americanism was explored in this thesis, and the nexus with the US grand strategy was assessed. The investigation was predicated on the three types of blowback drones engender – local, national, and international – and its debate. In the context of their use in targeted states based on the precedent set by successive US administrations, the association between drones and anti-Americanism was established. However, while there are contra views in literature refuting the credibility of the blowback hypothesis, this thesis argued

that in the absence of an international or national threshold to construe what is blowback, every opposition, whether at the local, national, and international level, against drone use, underscores an inherent anti-American perception to US CT operations.

The tactical use of drones is meant to dismantle terrorist organizations and facilitate leadership decapitation of HVTs. However, drone warfare in targeted states has shown that their aftermath fans the embers of militant recruitment due to anti-American sentiments. In Afghanistan and Pakistan and furtherance of the *Pashtunwali* code, drone strikes have inspired recruits and mobilized insurgents to retaliate for innocent killed by drones.

The drawback of anti-Americanism was most evident in the Obama era, as drones spawned militant retaliation, local protests, legitimacy crisis against their use, leading to calls by the government of targeted states to reverse existing pacts and agreements with the US that authorized drone use over their territories. This impasse was most reflected in Pakistan, where pollsters found that 82 percent of FATA residents found drones unjustified. This is besides the opposition from former Prime Ministers, the Pakistani court, and top government officials to continued drone strike operations, particularly under Obama.

Though contrary reports disputed the credibility of drones and anti-Americanism in targeted states, most of these studies did not consider the factors that affected the perception of drone strikes, the cognitive impact of these strikes, and the degree to which local factors spurred anti-American sentiments. The impact for US grand strategy lay in the impact for increasing susceptibilities and vulnerabilities in the international sphere, particularly in the Muslim world, which serves as the *casus belli* for exacerbating local tensions and fueling antagonism that the US may be unable to dispel.

Drones and the Counterterrorism paradox

The inherent paradox in the use of drones as an instrument of CT operations was analysed within the gamut of US grand strategy. First, it was established that while drones are effective CT tools, it enhances public perception of insecurity in targeted states and conjures images of civil liberty violations which are counterproductive in the long run for the US in winning the hearts and minds of people. Second, drones engender a form of domestic militarization which ignores the standard policing rules or sovereignty norms in targeted states – that de-territorializes the local populations and fosters a predatory state of fear (in which case is fear from above) for surgical drone strikes. Third, it creates a perception that the institutional apparatus of drone warfare rests on non-democratic principles based on its targeting criteria

and procedures for CT operations. This is based on the acknowledgement that most US drone strikes have operated mainly based on private authorizations and predominantly outside the scope of government approval, as seen in Pakistan, Yemen, and Afghanistan. For US grand strategy that has consistently championed the tenets of liberal hegemony, its drone warfare mimics an ‘absolutist’ mentality and mirrors the concept of imperial overstretching. This is fundamentally due to the unrestricted scope of warfare US drone strikes have fostered, particularly in non-declared battlefields. Fourth, while drones have been strategically and tactically useful in disrupting terrorist organizations, its aftermath has emboldened terrorists in two ways: (i) its force projection capabilities which give credibility to terrorist organizations that their activities pose a significant threat to US, thereby validating their threat and cause, (ii) fueling the antipathy that has resulted in retaliatory attacks. The impact of which hampers the long-term strategic deployment of drones as CT tools and the credibility of US CT operations.

Security dilemma of drone proliferation

This thesis has established that the diffusion of drones since 9/11 has spawned a security dilemma at the nation-state and international level due to other states acquiring armed drones as a strategic military asset to match their technological advantages in warfare, as their use by the US for CT has demonstrated. This is evident in targeted states, where non-state actors have US-modified drones to attack US installations and allies. This has manifested in a paradox of security in targeted states – which holds that continued drone strikes spur retaliatory effects among insurgents and terrorist groups against their use.

At the national level, drones risk reordering strategic calculus and heightening the uncertainty that arises due to the accretion of its weaponry as a symbol of military power. This potentially introduces dynamics for a new way of war, which, as our analysis shows, would have a deterministic impact on strategic competition. For the US, the diffusion of these weapons, particularly among non-democratic regimes, necessitates that it pursues a muscular hard power strategy with the likelihood to perpetuate neoconservative squander of America’s resources – which, according to retrench proponents weaken America’s global power. With advanced weaponization of AI underway, the transformative potentials of drones as a critical component of national security portends an emerging security dilemma that heightens uncertainties and introduces new changes to the use of military power – due to the potentially transformative impact of drones for great power rivalry, military balance, and weapon systems development. This has the unintended consequence of altering the balance of power in the international realm

and for state actors to increase their asymmetric technological advantage in drone advancement in a way that outpaces or matches the US.

At the international realm, the diffusion of drone weaponry among revisionist and revanchist powers has further accentuated warfare's dronification. As this thesis determined, the post 9/11 legacy of drone strikes has established an "arms race" among world powers due to the "need to react" to US drone advancement and deployment. A critical vulnerability remains the difficulty for other actors to distinguish between the offensive versus the defensive nature of US drone warfare – which, as this thesis has demonstrated, is the trigger for the security dilemma associated with drone proliferation.

This thesis revealed that the US had shown near-peer competitors how it utilizes its technology through the advancement and proliferation of drones. However, rather than this further advancing its technological post-Cold War advantage and strengthening its self-help capacity in the post 9/11 security environment, it has fostered a counter-weapons development among regional and peer competitors. Against the backdrop of globalization, the current constraints of the MTCR, and the increasing proliferation of Chinese-made armed drones (backed by its laissez-faire export policy), US post 9/11 drone legacy has created a more significant vacuum that America must thrive to close, or risk being edged out.

10.2 Drones and the Future of US Grand Strategy

Grand strategy is not a static frame. Thus, individual perception of the security environment can significantly influence the overarching grand strategy America pursues or adopts. However, in an international security environment that is constantly in flux, cognizance of the security dilemma and the inherent CT paradox of drone warfare raise critical concerns that are difficult to dispel for the future of US grand strategy. Three issues are likely to emerge in this context. The first is new threats arising from more nations increasing developing drone technology, especially authoritarian regimes, non-state actors, regional competitors, and rival competitors that may seek to use the capabilities of drone technology for domestic or regional targeted killings. This includes the likelihood of China using drones against Uighur Muslims and Nigeria using drones against Biafra secessionists. Besides the threat that drones can be weaponized as a trigger for nuclear weapons and the risk that jamming of drones may cause retaliatory actions from states. Considering that more than 90 countries have drones, it may not take long before Rickil and Krieg's dronification of state violence will be a reality, especially with AI advancement.

Second is the possibility that drones will continue to foster a grand strategy that emphasises the use of America's hard power at the expense of its soft power capabilities, especially in the Muslim world. This also creates the likelihood of the DoD developing a Fourth Offset Strategy that will not only seek to outmanoeuvre the advantages made by near-peer competitors but will seek to rise above them and re-position America to take leadership in the development of these technologies. Absent this, post 9/11 US grand strategies will continue to share a characteristic that emphasizes drones for CT operations. Cognizant that the current pattern of drone use is engendering a negative antecedent for the integrity of US CT operations, future US grand strategy ought to consider formulating rules of engagement to moderate the diffusion, use, and export of drone technology. Likewise, there are opportunities for a multilateral approach for CT operations. Allies of the US possessing armed drone technology can deploy their weaponry based on a set of established norms to prosecute the WOT.

Third, US grand strategy needs to embody long-term strategic thinking on the use of drone weaponry. This is given the changing nature of the international realm and the unpredictability that characterizes it. Therefore, this means changing how CT operations are prosecuted, or the way drones are used. Considering that more non-state actors will likely acquire and weaponize light drones and that China will continue to exploit the loophole as a non-member of the MTCR, an *anticipatory* grand strategy would mean taking action that regulates the weaponization manufacture and export of drones. A more dynamic approach would mean responding to threats as they arise by cohering to a clear strategic goal around that threat. For instance, since 9/11, the WOT has been fought by successive US administrations, and while these have not led to the demise of terrorist groups, drones have continued to feature prominently in the quiver of US stand-off weaponry for CT operations. Based on the argument of this thesis, this undermines US grand strategy as it neglects other aspects of its power capabilities that could have a resultant effect in diminishing terrorist activities.

10.3 Avenues for Further Research

This research logically opens areas of further research that warrant further investigation.

The first avenue concerns understanding the organizational, political, and cultural explanations that prevent the US political system and bureaucracy from seeing the folly in the long-term use of drones in targeted states – based on its negative antecedents in these states and the broader impact on US security objectives at the international level. While the covert use of drones offers

some explanations, delving deeper into the political machinery that blights this strategic thinking is an area worthy of future investigation.

Second, it relates to why states have not agreed to regulate drone proliferation despite the security dilemma it engenders at the international level. This points to the current architecture of international conventions of war and weaponry in warfare, including the MTCR regulations and domestic policies that are primarily unaddressed in the current drone debate. Third, future research can consider how and the extent to which Joe Biden's CT operations and grand strategy follow the pattern of successive US administrations and the utility of drones in it. While it is too early to decipher what form or shapes President Biden's administration grand strategy will take, there are strong indications that it will be rooted in the Washington consensus of liberal hegemony.

Fourth, future research can explore the implications of the weaponization of AI for US grand strategy while considering how technological drone advancement impacts great power competition, regional balance, and moderating conflicts in war zones. Fifth, future research can examine the impact of Covid-19 on terrorist activities and operations and how it shapes America's CT response. Relatedly, this investigation should consider exploring, from the perspective of the residents in targeted states, the impact of drones on their perception of America and its policies and influence in their countries. Sixth, statistical methods can be used by future researchers to examine with empirical data how drones undermine US grand strategy by examining data on drone strikes against stated policy using inferential tools. This will allow for a degree of measurability of its determinative effects. Seventh is an investigation into why US presidents continue to escalate their use in targeted states despite the negative antecedents of drone warfare. Lastly, future data can measure the impact of drones and 'outrage from below' in targeted states and how this has affected the notion of the non-combatant in the battlefield and non-battlefield settings.

In concluding, having considered the claim that drones are manifestly destabilizing for US grand strategy and international security, the findings of this study suggest that changes are necessary to ensure US policy does not lead to more dangerous global security situations. Furthermore, as the trend in drone proliferation underscores, hard power still holds currency in international affairs, and states will at times use their advantages for short-term gains, even at the expense of long-term stability. Thus, as new technologies are integrated into warfighting,

there needs to be a much more robust assessment of their long-term strategic implications – especially with the weaponization of AI underway in many countries.

Lastly, consistent use of drones as military instruments from 9/11 onwards suggests that neo-realist principles are likely to continue to sway relative to liberal ones. This has been underscored by the balancing and counterbalancing of drone technology proliferation, highlighting the continued salience of neo-realist understanding of the balancing dynamics in a unipolar system.

On balance, while drones are useful counterterrorism military instruments for facilitating leadership decapitation and disrupting terrorist organisations, the aftermath of lethal drone strikes in targeted states, as the evidence in this thesis shows, undermines US grand strategy more than it supports it.

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