

# INDIA'S DRONES: ASSESSING THE RATIONALE FOR UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLE ACQUISITION

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## ABSTRACT

The United States' increasing dependence on Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), more commonly referred to as drones, to carry out targeted killings has captured the attention of several countries across the globe seeking to amplify their military capabilities. While most of the current literature focuses on the strategic value of UAVs as a tool for combating terrorism, scholars have largely overlooked the use of drones as a key to maintaining security between states. This project, in contrast, investigates the implications of drones for security dilemmas between countries. It examines the case of India due to its long-standing rivalry with Pakistan, its border dispute with China, and the prevalence of terrorism in the region. It anticipates that India's leaders view the possession of drones by their rivals as a threat to their own national security, and thus aim to acquire similar technology to maintain the power balance. A content analysis of newspaper articles related to India's drone acquisition indicates that drones are perceived by India's leaders to be almost equally useful in fighting terrorism and balancing a state rival, which demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, drones do carry significance in interstate conflict.

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## INTRODUCTION

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), or drones, are a modern technological innovation that provide a state with the capability to accurately strike a target without directly risking the lives of its own military personnel. As a fairly new technology, drones have become a strategic weapon of the United States and a possession of several other states. The acquisition of drones is a costly, but an arguably useful state investment. Nevertheless, only 28 states are known to actually possess armed UAVs, with the remainder either pursuing drone programs or refraining from acquisition.<sup>2</sup> Scholarly literature regarding drones most commonly focuses on studying the value, considerations, and consequences of employing armed UAVs as a tool for combating terrorism.<sup>3</sup> Despite their noted strategic value, they are often perceived to be a non-revolutionary weapon in the context of warfare. While the majority of the current literature concentrates on the deployment of drones against non-state actors, scholars have paid little attention to the use of drones as a key to maintaining or shifting the balance of power between states. This paper, in contrast, seeks to explore whether considerations in obtaining drones are limited to a method of containing and extinguishing terrorism, or if their desired use extends to the balancing of interstate rivals.

This paper thus aims to contribute to the literature regarding drones on an interstate level through an examination of the logic of state leaders who are engaged in an interstate rivalry, with India serving as a case study due to the two-fold insecurity it faces from interstate rivals Pakistan and China, as well as from domestic and international terrorist organizations. Despite the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> “World of Drones – Who Has What: Countries with Armed Drones,” *New America*, accessed February 22, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/world-of-drones/3-who-has-what-countries-armed-drones/>.

<sup>3</sup> For a variety of academic work discussing the strategic utility of drones for combatting terrorism, see: Daniel Byman, “Why Drones Work: The Case for Washington’s Weapon of Choice,” *Foreign Affairs* (2013): 32-43; Patrick B. Johnston and Anoop K. Sarbahi, “The Impact of US Drone Strikes on Terrorism in Pakistan,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2016): 203-219; David A. Jaeger and M. Daniele Passerman, “The Shape of Things to Come? On the Dynamics of Suicide Attacks and Targeted Killings,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 4 (2009): 315-342; Leila Hudson, Colin S. Owens, and Matt Flannes, “Drone Warfare: Blowback from the New American Way of War,” *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 3 (2011): 122-132; Brian Williams, “The CIA’s Covert Predator Drone War in Pakistan: 2004-2010: The History of an Assassination Campaign,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 10 (2010): 871-892.

India's dispute with Pakistan is most widely noted, the complexity added by a recently aggravated conflict with China makes India an interesting case study for implications of interstate rivalries. This paper argues that state leaders undertake a cost-benefit analysis in deciding whether or not drones are essential to the balance of power and to their state's security. Thus, when a state is engaged in one or more regional rivalries, state leaders are likely to value drones for purposes beyond terrorism, and to view the possession of drones by their rivals as a threat to their own national security, leading them to acquire similar technology to maintain the balance of power. An extensive content analysis of newspaper articles related to India's drone acquisition was chosen as the method, as it is expected that the media – serving as the bridge between the government and the public – would report on important developments pertaining to India's military strength, particularly on the topical matter of drone acquisition. The content analysis reveals initial evidence to support the theory that drones are perceived to be useful for balancing an interstate rival, in addition to combating terrorism.

This paper will first review the current literature regarding modern drone technology. Second, it proposes the theory that with their own nation's security in mind, states will perceive drone acquisition by their rivals as a threat and will thus aim to acquire similar technology to maintain the interstate power balance. The third section describes the case of India, and the fourth and fifth sections discuss the methodology and research design employed to carry out the study, and the corollary findings, respectively. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research and with a few recommendations for further research.

## UAVS AND COMBATING TERRORISM

Given the United States' increased deployment of drones, especially during the Obama presidency, a significant level of academic attention has been granted to the utility, significance, and repercussions of obtaining and deploying such technology. Some scholars emphasize the sheer uniqueness that drones present to the global arena as a potential “disruptive technology” that extends beyond the current war and international humanitarian legal framework and which signifies a shift in policy makers' incentive structures away from traditional methods of capturing enemies and toward one that seeks to kill them.<sup>4</sup> Some add to this idea

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Sonnenberg, “Why Drones are Different,” in *Preventive Force: Drones, Targeted Killing, And The Transformation Of Contemporary Warfare*, eds. Kerstin Fisk and Jennifer M. Ramos (New

that drones signify a “shift in the nature of warfare,” but believe that it is not drones that are revolutionary, but rather the essence of their role in a new world of data-driven warfare.<sup>5</sup> Others, however, urge that any claims that imply that drones are “revolutionary” should be uttered with caution, and hold that despite the Predator drone’s instrumental value to transforming the “war on terror,” drones do not drastically alter the “conduct of warfare,” in the same way that nuclear weapons have in the past.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the deployment of drones to combat terrorism, many scholars posit that, if utilized responsibly, the use of drones against terrorist targets is indeed a viable solution because such strikes are low-cost and low-risk.<sup>7</sup> These claims are, for instance, supported by a study that drone strikes have lessened lethal terrorist attacks in Pakistan, implying that U.S. counterterror efforts have largely been successful.<sup>8</sup> Despite this success, others emphasize that the lacking accuracy of strikes is due to potentially unreliable intelligence, pointing to the fact that the vast majority of those targeted by U.S. strikes were low-level operatives that posed little, if any, threat to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Other scholars have focused on the murky legal justifications and implications of drone deployment, especially in terms of the Just War theory criterion of *jus ad bellum* (just cause, right authority, right intention, last resort, proportionality, and probability of success) and *jus in bello*, (distinction and proportionality).<sup>10</sup> They often posit that more attention should be granted

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York University Press, 2016), 115-141.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Rothenberg, “Drones and the Emergence of Data-Driven Warfare,” in *Drone Wars: Transforming Conflict, Law, And Policy*, eds. Peter L. Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 441-462.

<sup>6</sup> Megan Brawn, “Predator Effect: A Phenomenon Unique to the War on Terror,” in *Drone Wars: Transforming Conflict, Law, And Policy*, eds. Peter L. Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 253-284.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Taw, “Preventive Force: The Logic of Costs and Benefits,” in *Preventive Force: Drones, Targeted Killing, And The Transformation Of Contemporary Warfare*, eds. Kerstin Fisk and Jennifer M. Ramos (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 33-57.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick B. Johnston and Anoop K. Sarbahi, “The Impact of US Drone Strikes on Terrorism in Pakistan,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2016): 203-219.

<sup>9</sup> NYU/Stanford, “Living Under Drones: Death, Injury, and Trauma to Civilians From US Drone Practices in Pakistan,” International Human Rights And Conflict Resolution Clinic, Stanford Law School And Global Justice Clinic, NYU School Of Law (2012): 125-131.

<sup>10</sup> Avery Plaw, Matthew S. Fricker and Carlos R. Colon, *The Drone Debate: A Primer On The U.S. Use Of Unmanned Aircraft Outside Conventional Battlefields* (Lanham: Rowman &

toward the lacking legal framework in place to address the emergence of drone technology.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, some have concluded that regardless of whether drone usage abides by Just War theory principles, the technology represents a “moral hazard” and should spark a new debate about our acceptance of death and destruction under the Just War theory.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars also discuss the potential for global proliferation of drones to both state and non-state actors, including hostile states and terrorist groups.<sup>13</sup> While some express concern that the United States’ increasing reliance on drone strikes will lead other states to employ a similar strategy of preventive force and risk escalation,<sup>14</sup> others point out that while the drone industry is growing, there are significant limitations to acquiring drones and arming unarmed drones.<sup>15</sup> Although the “drone debate” in the literature only began to take on a meaningful form during the Obama presidency, there is a plethora of research granted to the utility of drones for counterterrorism operations.

#### UAVS AND INTERSTATE CONFLICT

Relative to the extensive literature on the impact of drones on counterterrorism, there is barely any discussion of the impact of drones on interstate relations. Those who have written on this topic tend to argue that UAVs carry little significance on an interstate level, as they are unlikely to spark major conflict, and may even enhance security due to the greater monitoring capabilities drones provide.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, this group of scholars argues that the strategic

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Littlefield, 2016): 167-224.

<sup>11</sup> Rosa Brooks, “Drones and Cognitive Dissonance,” in *Drone Wars: Transforming Conflict, Law, And Policy*, eds. Peter L. Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 230-252.

<sup>12</sup> David True, “Disciplining Drone Strikes: Just War in the Context of Counterterrorism,” in *Drone Wars: Transforming Conflict, Law, And Policy*, eds. Peter L. Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 285-289.

<sup>13</sup> Plaw, Fricker and Colon, *The Drone Debate*, 281-326.

<sup>14</sup> Sonnenberg, “Why Drones are Different,” 115-141; Kerstin Fisk & Jennifer M. Ramos, “Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Preventive Self-Defense as a Cascading Norm,” *International Studies Perspectives* 15, no. 2 (2014): 163–185.

<sup>15</sup> Peter L. Bergen and Jennifer Rowland, “World of Drones: The Global Proliferation of Drone Technology,” in *Drone Wars: Transforming Conflict, Law, And Policy*, eds. Peter L. Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 300-344.

<sup>16</sup> Michael C. Horowitz, Sarah E. Kreps and Matthew Fuhrmann, “Separating Fact from Fiction in the Debate over Drone Proliferation,” *International Security* 41, no. 9 (2016): 7-42.

value of UAVs is weakened because they are vulnerable to destruction by defense systems. Other scholars, on the other hand, claim that states are more likely to employ drones in regional rivalries than in the counterterror context of U.S. deployment, and that despite short-term interstate tension reduction is due to the information provided by drones, the risk of drone accidents could easily give rise to the escalation of interstate conflicts.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, because drones have extensive surveillance capabilities, states that feel they are being watched may become more secretive in their activities (such as concealing nuclear weapons development) and consider deploying counter-UAV operations that could result in a conflict spiral.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, states may use drones as a low-risk vehicle to test or “probe” antagonistic relationships, which could lead to unpredictable reactions.<sup>19</sup> Lastly, some state that while the current generation of drones is “mildly destabilizing,” a second generation of stealthier, more powerful Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs) could prove to be significant destabilizers if used to impair a rival’s infrastructure or destroy an adversary’s air defenses.<sup>20</sup> These ideas, however, focus primarily on theories regarding the deployment of drones and not on the states’ original motives for acquiring them. Thus, this article seeks to further develop the discussion and add to the current literature by exploring drones’ significance on an interstate level at the acquisition stage of national drone programs.

The idea of the balance of power holds that the anarchic nature of global politics leads to a situation in which “great powers monitor the material power possessed by all other states in the international system and endeavor to manipulate the resulting distribution of power in their own favor as a means of enhancing their chances of survival.”<sup>21</sup> However, once this balance of power is threatened, it can lead to a security dilemma in which a state’s real or perceived threat to their own security causes them to enhance their own security by

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<sup>17</sup> Michael J. Boyle, “The Race for Drones,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (2015): 76–94.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Michael Mayer, “The New Killer Drones: Understanding the Strategic Implications of Next-generation Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 4 (2015): 765–780.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Little, *The Balance Of Power In International Relations: Metaphors, Myths And Models* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.

whatever means necessary.<sup>22</sup> The balance of power is not permanent, and instead is constantly evolving with factors such as military strength.<sup>23</sup> Shifts in power balance can be seen clearly in the transformation of the world order from the 20th century to the 21st century, the former observing a multipolar system of reigning European powers, and the latter a unipolar system with the U.S. as the main power emerging from the second World War and the Cold War.<sup>24</sup>

With the new technological development of nuclear weapons, the balance of power transformed to one maintained by the doctrine of deterrence.<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Waltz argued when states engage in successful foreign policy other states “will emulate them or fall by the wayside.”<sup>26</sup> If Waltz’s philosophy applies today, aspiring powers may try to emulate the United States and its arguably “successful” foreign policy with respect to the use of drones. The United States has profusely used drone strikes in states like Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen,<sup>27</sup> and some worry this has resulted in a global norm that such use of preventive force is acceptable and therefore more likely to be employed by other countries.<sup>28</sup> The appeal of drones is hardly debatable – the idea of such technology has been described as “seductive” for leaders<sup>29</sup> and “low-cost, low-risk tools with disproportionately large benefits,”<sup>30</sup> making drones a highly useful technology, especially for deployment against terrorist targets.

Nevertheless, these benefits are often quickly met with arguments concerning debates over the legal, ethical, and moral implications of drone deployment. Despite widespread American support for the United States’ use of drones abroad, polls reveal massive disapproval in many other countries of the world.<sup>31</sup> Much of this disapproval originates from the fact that drones, as former

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<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Sheehan, *The Balance Of Power: History And Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1-23.

<sup>23</sup> Sheehan, *The Balance Of Power*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Little, *The Balance Of Power In International Relations*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Sheehan, *The Balance of Power*, 170-172.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>27</sup> Sonnenberg, “Why Drones are Different,” 115.

<sup>28</sup> Kerstin Fisk and Jennifer M. Ramos, “The Preventive Force Continuum,” in *Preventive Force: Drones, Targeted Killing, And The Transformation Of Contemporary Warfare*, eds. Kerstin Fisk and Jennifer M. Ramos (New York University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Sonnenberg, “Why Drones are Different,” 124.

<sup>30</sup> Fisk and Ramos, “The Preventive Force Continuum” 2.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg, *Drone Wars: Transforming Conflict, Law, And Policy*, eds. Peter L. Bergen and Daniel Rothenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1.

Secretary of State Robert Gates claimed, allow leaders to perceive war as “bloodless, painless, and odorless.”<sup>32</sup> Regardless of these concerns, a handful of state (and non-state) actors still seek to follow in Washington’s footsteps in acquiring or developing drone technology -- armed and unarmed -- to provide intelligence via surveillance of terrorist activity, air support, and precision-strike capabilities.<sup>33</sup> As states aim to catch up to the United States’ military might in the drone realm, states also strive to check their competitors in these military advancements, creating a sort of modern-day “arms race.” Michael J. Boyle compares this scramble for modern technology to the pursuit of game-changing military aviation programs in the early and mid-1900s, as states, witnessing drone proliferation, are beginning to realize the strategic value that drone technology has for their own national security interests.<sup>34</sup>

Although nearly 100 countries are reported to possess some type of military drones, the majority of these states do not own armed UAVs.<sup>35</sup> As of 2018, twenty-eight countries are known to have armed drones, nine of which (United Kingdom, United States, Israel, Pakistan, Nigeria, Iran, Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Turkey) are known to have deployed drones in combat.<sup>36</sup> As this technology continues to proliferate to states worldwide, countries begin to fear for their national security. If or when one state deploys UAVs, another state may then feel uncertain about whether the drone-deploying state has offensive or defensive motives, which could then lead to forceful reciprocation.<sup>37</sup> This paper builds on this theory and argues that when one state gains possession of UAVs, a regional rival state will fear for their insecurity and endeavor to maintain a balance of power by acquiring similar technology in return.

### **INDIA, CONFLICT, AND UAVS**

Dubbed an “emerging superpower” by many, India’s vast economic growth in recent years and its growing influence in the world has led key officials

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<sup>32</sup> Horowitz, Kreps and Fuhrmann, “Separating Fact from Fiction in the Debate over Drone Proliferation,” 23.

<sup>33</sup> Brawn, “Predator Effect: A Phenomenon Unique to the War on Terror,” 260.

<sup>34</sup> Boyle, “The Race for Drones,” 78.

<sup>35</sup> Horowitz, Kreps and Fuhrmann, “Separating Fact from Fiction,” 11.

<sup>36</sup> “World of Drones – Who Has What: Countries with Armed Drones,” and “World of Drones – Who Has What: Countries with Drones Used in Combat,” *New America*.

<sup>37</sup> Horowitz, Kreps and Fuhrmann, “Separating Fact from Fiction,” 28.

and scholars alike to acknowledge India's changing role in global politics.<sup>38</sup> India's rise is mirrored by other powers, such as China, which some U.S. leaders fear will soon eclipse the United States' role as the global hegemon. Recognizing this role, India has sought to bolster its economy and industry, with Prime Minister Modi launching the "Make in India" initiative in 2014, which set out a vision for India as a manufacturing center for both domestic and transnational companies. The initiative, among other sectors, emphasizes the realm of technology, even making advancements in partnerships on drone developments.<sup>39</sup> Seeking to pave its path to power, India aims not only to bolster its economy but also its security, putting it in a unique position to balance growth, contain terrorist threats, and monitor interstate competitors. This section will address these varying challenges faced by India by providing a brief background on India's interstate rivalries, its battle against terrorism, and its pursuit of drone technology.

### ***INTERSTATE RIVALRIES***

India's extensive shared border with nuclear Pakistan and China and its exposed coastline make the state geographically insecure in many ways.<sup>40</sup> The interstate rivalry between India and Pakistan originated years ago due to territorial disputes over the Kashmir region, which resulted in a number of wars and a weak and frequently violated ceasefire in 2003 on the Line of Control.<sup>41</sup> Constant shooting takes place across the India-Pakistan border, killing both citizens and soldiers. In one week in January 2018 alone, shelling across the Line of Control reportedly killed thirteen civilians and nine soldiers, wounded dozens, and forced tens of thousands to flee from their homes.<sup>42</sup> These tensions have manifested in various hostile actions between the two states, including the expulsion of diplomats, the

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<sup>38</sup> Sumit Ganguly, "Think Again: India's Rise," *Foreign Policy*, July 5, 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/07/05/think-again-indias-rise/>.

<sup>39</sup> "Make in India: The Vision, New Processes, Sectors, Infrastructure and Mindset," *Make in India*, accessed January 31, 2018, <http://www.makeinindia.com/article/-/v/make-in-india-reason-vision-for-the-initiative>.

<sup>40</sup> Aditi Malhotra & Rammohan Viswesh, "Taking to the skies – China and India's quest for UAVs," *Journal Of The Indian Ocean Region* 10, no. 2 (2014): 174.

<sup>41</sup> "Conflict Between India and Pakistan," *Council On Foreign Relations*, accessed February 22, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/conflict/conflict-between-india-and-pakistan>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

mobilization of troops along the border, and the exercise of combat operations.<sup>43</sup> More recently, India has expressed a desire to pull further away from its neighbor by signaling that it could turn away from regional cooperation groups involving Pakistan and shift toward other potential partners, such as Afghanistan, whilst simultaneously strengthening relations with Islamabad's enemy, the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Although India's dispute with Pakistan is perhaps more widely acknowledged, its long-running and recently agitated conflict with China makes India an ideal prototype for analyzing contentious interstate relationships. Just recently in mid-2017, the two states were able to ease tensions in the contested territory of the Doklam plateau, but satellite imagery released in early 2018 revealed a consistent military build-up by both sides since the agreement.<sup>45</sup> While India competes with China as a fellow "rising power," India must also monitor China's support of Pakistan, especially in relation to potential missile support from Beijing to Islamabad.<sup>46</sup> Although the three states are known to possess nuclear weapons, India's quarrels with Pakistan and China have not yet led to escalation on this front. However, Kashmir, administered by the three states, is noted to be the "largest and most militarized territorial dispute" in the world, and it remains a major point of contention between the three powers.<sup>47</sup>

### ***TERRORIST THREATS***

Ranked by the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Terrorism Index as the sixth most terrorism-impacted country in 2015 and eighth in 2016, India is also impacted more by terrorist activity than many observers might

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<sup>43</sup> Richard M. Rossow, "India-Pakistan Tensions: India's Expanded Toolkit," *Center For Strategic & International Studies*, accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/india-pakistan-tensions-expanded-toolkit>.

<sup>44</sup> Richard M. Rossow, "India-Pakistan Tensions: India's Expanded Toolkit," *Center For Strategic & International Studies*, accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/india-pakistan-tensions-expanded-toolkit>.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Marcus, "China-India border tension: Satellite imagery shows Doklam plateau build-up," *BBC News*, January 26, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-42834609>.

<sup>46</sup> "The World Factbook: India," *Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

suspect.<sup>48</sup> The region's stretches of dense foliage, its mountainous terrain, and its porous borders allow terrorist groups to operate successfully in and around India.<sup>49</sup> Intertwined with India's conflict with Pakistan are the Indian accusations that Islamabad sponsors terrorists on Pakistani soil, which oftentimes muddies the waters of what is meant by military capabilities build-up by India. This question of whether military advancements are meant to combat regional terrorism or build military might in the face of a neighboring state obscures an already antagonistic relationship. In addition to Pakistan-sponsored terror, India faces challenges from internal non-state groups, such as the left-wing Maoist insurgents, and is the target of threats from ISIS and AQIS terror groups.<sup>50</sup> In response to heightened terror activity and threats in India, the state has stepped up cooperation with the U.S. in combating terrorism during the Obama presidency, and in June 2017, Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed this shared effort by issuing a joint statement on the matter with President Trump.<sup>51</sup>

### ***DRONE ACQUISITION***

Unarmed drones have been in the possession of Pakistan and India for years now, assisting in surveillance and reconnaissance missions within the region. Given the constraints of their defense industry, India turned outwards to other nations for competing technologies. The Indian Army began to acquire UAVs from Israel in the 1990s, the Navy and Air Force following closely behind it.<sup>52</sup> Most recently, the U.S. approved the sale of unarmed Guardian reconnaissance drones to India, although New Delhi still seeks General Atomics' Avenger Predator

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<sup>48</sup> "Global Terrorism Index 2015," *Institute For Economics And Peace* (2015), <http://economicsandpeace.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.Pdf>;

"Global Terrorism Index 2016," *Institute For Economics And Peace* (2016), <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Monika Chansoria, "A Perspective on India," *Center For A New American Security*, accessed February 23, 2018, <http://drones.cnas.org/reports/a-perspective-on-india/>.

<sup>50</sup> "Chapter 2. Country Reports: South and Central Asia," *U.S. Department Of State*, accessed February 16, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272233.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*; "India, U.S. call on Pakistan to stop terror attacks launched from its soil," *Times Of India*, June 27, 2017, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-us-call-on-pakistan-to-stop-terror-attacks-launched-from-its-soil/articleshow/59330104.cms>.

<sup>52</sup> Chansoria, "A Perspective on India."

armed drones as well.<sup>53</sup> However, the United States no longer has a monopoly on UAV technology as Israel and China have expanded their drone market in recent years.<sup>54</sup> In light of this, India has relied heavily on Israel, obtaining their unarmed Harpy UAV and, recently, the Heron TP-armed drones.<sup>55</sup> Despite initial struggles, India was able to become the 35th nation to join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2016, providing it with greater access to surveillance drones and potential armed drones on the foreign market.<sup>56</sup> India is now recognized as one of the largest importers of drones worldwide.<sup>57</sup> India has also advanced its indigenous UAV program, led largely by India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), which has partnered with private national companies and technical universities to develop new technology.<sup>58</sup> A year after Pakistan unveiled its homemade Burraq UAV in 2015, India managed to develop its own Rustom II MALE (Medium-Altitude, Long-Endurance) combat drone, checking its neighbor's progress.<sup>59</sup> Reports indicated that India's interest in using drones is for surveillance in areas such as Kashmir, regions impacted by Maoist insurgency, and its coastline.<sup>60</sup> India has indeed operated UAVs on its borders, into Pakistan airspace,<sup>61</sup> near the Line of Actual Control (LOAC) between India and China, and domestically for disaster response<sup>62</sup> and terrorist activity monitoring.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Nyshka Chandran, "New Delhi wants to buy US drones to monitor China in the Indian Ocean," *CNBC*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/27/india-news-modi-wants-naval-drones-to-watch-china-in-indian-ocean.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Horowitz, Kreps & Fuhrmann, "Separating Fact from Fiction," 41.

<sup>55</sup> Manu Pabbly, "India all set to get missile armed drones from Israel," *The Economic Times India*, last modified July 14, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-all-set-to-get-missile-armed-drones-from-israel/articleshow/57980098.cms>.

<sup>56</sup> Ashna Mishra, "India joins MTCR: 7 things the country stands to gain," *The Economic Times India*, last modified July 12, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-joins-mtcr-7-things-the-country-stands-to-gain/articleshow/52934056.cms>.

<sup>57</sup> "World of Drones – Introduction: How We Became a World of Drones," *New America*.

<sup>58</sup> Malhotra and Viswesh, "Taking to the Skies," 172.

<sup>59</sup> "World of Drones – Introduction," *New America*.

<sup>60</sup> Boyle, "The Race for Drones," 86.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 86-90.

<sup>62</sup> Chansoria, "A Perspective on India."

<sup>63</sup> "Strategic UAV base shifted to Maoist hotspot in Bastar," *The Economic Times India*, October 8, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/strategic-uav-base-shifted-to-maoist-hotspot-in-bastar/articleshow/60992553.cms>.

### WHY DID INDIA ACQUIRE UAVs?

To test the theory that drones are significant to the balancing of interstate rivals, I conducted a content analysis of a number of reputable news sources that discuss India's acquisition of drones. I chose this methodology expecting to find that journalists, assuming their role as the channel of information between government undertakings and public awareness, would report on news of the Indian government's desire or progress in acquiring such military technology. The resulting value of the content analysis is that it allows for the study of rhetoric used to describe drone acquisition, which serves as a measure of India's motives for possessing Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. Articles were found through the LexisNexis Academic Database by using the advanced Boolean search string "India AND drone AND acquisition OR armed drone OR produce OR develop OR seek OR acquire OR buy." The results were then limited to sources dating up until June 20, 2017, reduced to "Newspapers," and filtered for "Duplicate Option: On – High Similarity." The results were sorted by "Relevance." Of approximately 500 articles that were coded from the article search, 100 articles were "Relevant" to the study and became the sample. Articles were first coded for "Relevance" – namely, if the article made some reference to India's desire to acquire drones or India's process of obtaining or developing this technology. A range of drone types were included in the sample pool, such as armed drones, reconnaissance or surveillance drones, "mini" drones, and Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles.

Articles were ruled "Irrelevant" if the content did not include India's desire or action to gain drone capabilities, if the author expressed a clear opinion or bias in the writing, if the content was a clear repeat of a previously coded article, or if the drones mentioned were intended solely for commercial purposes. Articles were then coded for references to "Terrorism" or "Interstate Rivalry." Articles were coded for "Terrorism" if they directly referred to terrorist activity in relation to the acquisition and future use of drones or alluded to the use of drones against terror groups with language such as "cross-border strikes" and "porous borders" that is contextually related to counterterrorism tactics in the region. Articles were coded for "Interstate Rivalry" if the content directly referenced an interstate competitor or contentious region, such as Pakistan or China, in the context of drone acquisition. The remaining articles were coded "Ambiguous" if they were "Relevant" but solely mentioned India's drone acquisition and did not specifically refer to interstate rivals or terrorism in this context.

**QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS**

The majority of the “Relevant” articles only vaguely referenced India’s desire to acquire the technology, as might be expected due to the fact that state leaders may be hesitant to publicize their rationales for pursuing weapons technology. Even so, this set of articles is informative in helping us understand the motives of India’s drone acquisition. “Relevant” articles dated back as early as January 2003 and continued through May 2017, and the plurality of the sources are from India’s *Economic Times* and *The Times of India*. Of the 100 articles selected for relevancy, there were 24 references to drone acquisition for terrorism and 26 references to drone acquisition to compete with an interstate rival, and 11 articles coded for both terrorism and interstate references. When separated according to *References to Both Interstate Rivalries and Terrorism (B)*, *References to Terrorism (T)*, *Reference to Interstate Rivalries (I)*, and *Ambiguous References (A)*, the results were:  $B=11\%$ ,  $T=13\%$ ,  $I=15\%$ , and  $A=61\%$ . However, when taking a closer look at only the articles with direct references and excluding the ambiguous reference articles, we get  $B=28.2\%$ ,  $T=33.3\%$ , and  $I=38.5\%$ . Therefore, one category (*Terrorism or Interstate*) did not significantly outweigh the other, although references to *Interstate Rivalries (I)* did slightly surpass those to *Terrorism (T)*.<sup>64</sup>

**QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

The references to interstate rivals narrowly surpassed those to terrorism, indicating that leaders in India may perceive drones to be equally useful in combating terror threats and balancing a state rival. Of the articles that alluded to terrorism or interstate tensions, many did not use direct quotes from military or state officials and instead were statements made by the author or journalist, possibly indicating that motives to acquire drones as recorded by this study may be just as much of a reflection of the media’s perception of acquisition rationale as the government’s true intentions. However, it would be surprising if officials were to openly discuss acquisition of UAVs with the media, as this publicity of military technological gains could in fact incite more unintended tension or

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<sup>64</sup> It should be noted that given the relatively small number of direct references (39 out of 100), these results should only be taken as a preliminary study into the subject matter. See “Conclusion & Implications” section for avenues of further research

conflict with neighboring rivals Pakistan and China. Although this study revealed a noticeable lack of media attention and official statements made on behalf of the Indian government regarding drone acquisition, some sources did prove to be quite telling to the nature of the study. Listed below are a few representative excerpts from the coded articles revealing India's potential motives in acquiring drone technology:

'It's risky, but armed UAVs can be used for counter insurgency operations internally as well across the borders; sneak attacks on terrorist hideouts in mountainous terrain, perhaps.' – An army officer in the defense planning staff<sup>65</sup>

'There is no advantage in them (Pakistan) having drones capable of striking deep inside our country and our not having defence...even from the perspective of deterrence, it is useful for us to have drones...It is something that will be used in a tactical sense or either for hot pursuit or other missions like that. In certain scenarios, it might end up being used in escalation. It is something that the commandos will have to talk about. I think they are primarily going to be used for surveillance and deterrence and it is a good option to have.' – Jayadeva Ranade, Additional Secretary (retired), Cabinet Secretariat<sup>66</sup>

'These systems have a great deterrent value, whether there is war or not. Pakistan must not be allowed to think India is a weak nation.' – Military analyst Lt. General Shankar Prasad<sup>67</sup>

Former IAF vice chief air marshal R K Sharma says the development will be the most ideal as these UAVs that identify targets will also have the capability to strike. The armed drones will be able to destroy terrorist

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<sup>65</sup> "India turns to Israel for armed drones on Pakistan, China build fleets," *The Northlines India* (2015), LexisNexis Academic.

<sup>66</sup> Kanishka Singh, "India advances combat mechanism with drones," *The Sunday Guardian*, April 2, 2016, <http://www.sundayguardianlive.com/investigation/4006-india-advances-combat-mechanism-drones>.

<sup>67</sup> Shiv Aroor, "India to induct smart 'suicide bomber' drone," *Mail Today* (2010), LexisNexis Academic.

launch pads from the height of 30,000 feet, he said; pointing out that these unmanned vehicles can fly over the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) for some time to gather accurate intelligence and then mount attack causing greater damage than what the Army troops can do.<sup>68</sup>

Interestingly, a number of the articles mentioned the mere possession of drones as a “deterrent,” a word reminiscent of the nuclear balance of power politics of the Cold War era. Others outlined the sheer value of drones for monitoring terrorist activity in otherwise difficult to reach terrain, mirroring the United States’ logic for drone possession and deployment. Such statements bolster the quantitative findings of this paper by demonstrating the dual-motive of combating terrorism and balancing interstate rivals in the process of drone acquisition.

## CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

India’s position as a rising global power, a victim of terrorism, and an adversary in regional rivalries made it a perfect case for studying domestic and interstate motives of drone acquisition. This study factored these considerations into a quantitative analysis of the rationale of India’s leaders for obtaining or developing drone technology. As mentioned, the results of this study provide evidence in support of the theory that drones are significant in interstate considerations. These findings ultimately reveal that the desire to acquire drones to counter an interstate rival is often underplayed by scholars of these technological developments. According to the results from this study, interstate rivalries are given just as much weight, if not more, as terrorist threats in the consideration of acquiring drone technology. However, given the relatively small number of references in this study, we can infer that the discussion surrounding the acquisition of drone technology is not that large, and may be overshadowed by the dialogue concerning actual use and deployment of such technologies, which is a different subject matter. There may be some reasons for the apparent lack of discussion and narrow results. First, the sources used in this study were English-speaking news sources, and the majority of the top Indian news sources are published solely in other languages popular to the country, such as Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, and Bengali. Therefore, it

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<sup>68</sup> FPJ Bureau, “India to put missiles on drones,” *Free Press Journal India* (2016), LexisNexis Academic.

is very possible that relevant information that would otherwise be published by non-English speaking sources is unaccounted for in this study. Additionally, it is possible that the timing of this study was simply too soon, as defense cooperation on drones, particularly between the U.S. and India, expanded after June 2017, the end date through which articles were coded.

Future research in this area of study could include additional qualitative analysis of official correspondences between India and states with desirable drone markets, state or military officials' memoirs, or unclassified military or policy briefs, which would be conducive to a comprehensive understanding of the alleged motives of leading officials for obtaining military drones. Another recommendation might be to focus solely on the state's acquisition of armed drones or to include the analysis of actual deployment of such technology. This study focused on a wide variety of UAVs due to the relevancy of the material available; however, as India's weapons programs expand, more information should become available in the coming years. Another avenue for further research would be to repeat the design on cases that are similar in nature to the rivalry between India and Pakistan. Possible cases to consider are the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the persistent rivalry between North and South Korea.

Considering the rapid proliferation of drones in the modern day, the discussion surrounding UAV acquisition should extend beyond the realm of counterterrorism efforts and into other, seemingly disregarded areas of international security, such as interstate competition. We no longer live in a world in which conventional war and nuclear weapons are the only major threats to international security; the meaning of the word "warfare" has transformed to suit modern-day realities, and technology has transformed with it. It is therefore integral that rigorous academic research be dedicated to this area of study to better inform state leaders and policymakers of the potential benefits, repercussions, and perceptions that arise from their decision to acquire drones in today's foreign policy arena.



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