

DRONE WARFARE AND THE STRATEGIC RECONFIGURATION OF MODERN CONFLICT

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The rapid development of unmanned aerial vehicle technology has become one of the most influential drivers of transformation in modern warfare. Originally designed primarily for reconnaissance and surveillance, UAVs have evolved into multifunctional military systems capable of precision strike, persistent intelligence collection, real-time battlefield monitoring, and support for operational decision-making. This article examines how the tactical and strategic transformation of UAV technology is reshaping the character of contemporary armed conflict. The study focuses on the growing role of UAVs in reducing direct force exposure, increasing operational flexibility, improving strike accuracy, and accelerating the tempo of combat actions.

The analysis shows that UAVs have fundamentally altered battlefield tactics by enabling remote engagement, continuous observation, and high-precision targeting with reduced risk to personnel. Their ability to provide real-time intelligence and conduct surgical strikes has increased the effectiveness of operations in both conventional and asymmetric conflict environments. The experience of recent conflicts, particularly the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, as well as operations in Syria and Ukraine, demonstrates that UAVs can significantly influence combat outcomes by enhancing situational awareness, supporting rapid command decisions, and weakening enemy defensive positions. As a result, the role of traditional direct engagement is increasingly complemented, and in some cases partially replaced, by remotely executed and technology-intensive combat methods.

At the strategic level, UAV technology changes the balance between military capability, cost, and force projection. States with more limited conventional resources can use drones to generate operational effects previously associated with larger and more expensive airpower systems. This tendency increases the accessibility of advanced military capabilities and modifies the logic of deterrence, escalation, and battlefield superiority. At the same time, the integration of artificial intelligence into UAV systems is expanding their autonomy, speed of reaction, and target-processing capacity. AI-assisted UAVs are expected to play a growing role not only in reconnaissance and strike missions, but also in adaptive decision support and dynamic battlefield management.

Particular attention is also given to the emergence of drone swarms as a new stage in military innovation. Coordinated groups of UAVs can distribute tasks, strike multiple targets, overload enemy defenses, and create new offensive and defensive challenges. However, these developments also generate ethical, legal, and humanitarian concerns, especially regarding civilian protection, autonomous

decision-making, and compliance with international humanitarian law. The study concludes that UAVs are no longer auxiliary tools of warfare but central components of modern military strategy whose further evolution will shape the structure, speed, and logic of future conflicts.

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