

ORION FORUM

# Kerry Chavez: Drones, Non-State Actors, and the Changing Nature of Warfare

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In this episode of *Orion Talks*, hosted by Suat Cubukcu, we are joined by Dr. Kerry Chávez to explore how drones are reshaping modern warfare and homeland security. As commercial drone technology becomes more accessible, the barriers to air power are rapidly eroding, enabling non-state actors and even lone individuals to challenge traditional military dominance. Dr. Chávez examines this shift through the lens of “precise mass,” where relatively low-cost systems can generate strategic effects at scale. The conversation also explores the broader implications of drone proliferation for global security, technological innovation, and the future character of conflict.

[Kerry Chávez](#) is a political scientist and assistant professor in the Department of Military and Strategic Studies at the U.S. Air Force Academy, whose work focuses on international security, modern warfare, and emerging technologies. Her research examines how states and nonstate actors adopt and use innovations such as drones, artificial intelligence, and autonomous systems in conflict, combining rigorous empirical analysis with policy-relevant insights. She has developed influential datasets on U.S. military operations and nonstate actor drone adoption, and has collaborated with institutions including NATO, the United Nations, and U.S. defense agencies. Chávez has held research fellowships with the Modern War Institute at West Point and the Institute for Global Affairs, and her work spans academic publications, policy engagement, and practitioner-oriented analysis.