



# The Spectrum Mandate

## Navigating FCC DA 26-314 and the 2027 Exemption Cliff

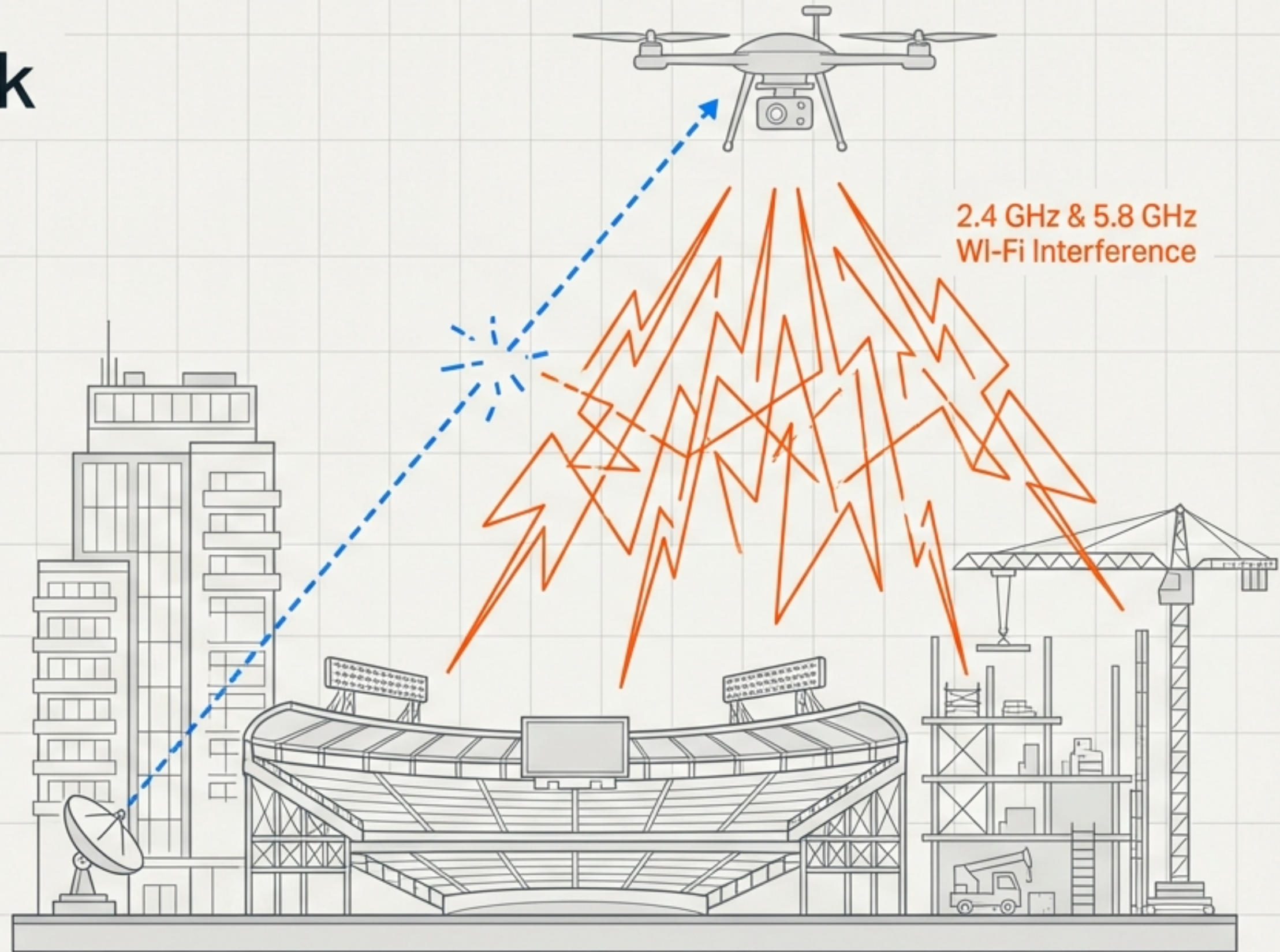
<b>Release Date:</b>	April 1, 2026
<b>Proceeding:</b>	Unleashing American Drone Dominance
<b>Target Audience:</b>	Fleet Operators, C-UAS Practitioners, Aviation Counsel

# The Unlicensed Spectrum Bottleneck

The vast majority of U.S. drones operate on unlicensed 2.4 GHz and 5.8 GHz bands—the same shared spectrum as smartphones and construction site Wi-Fi routers.

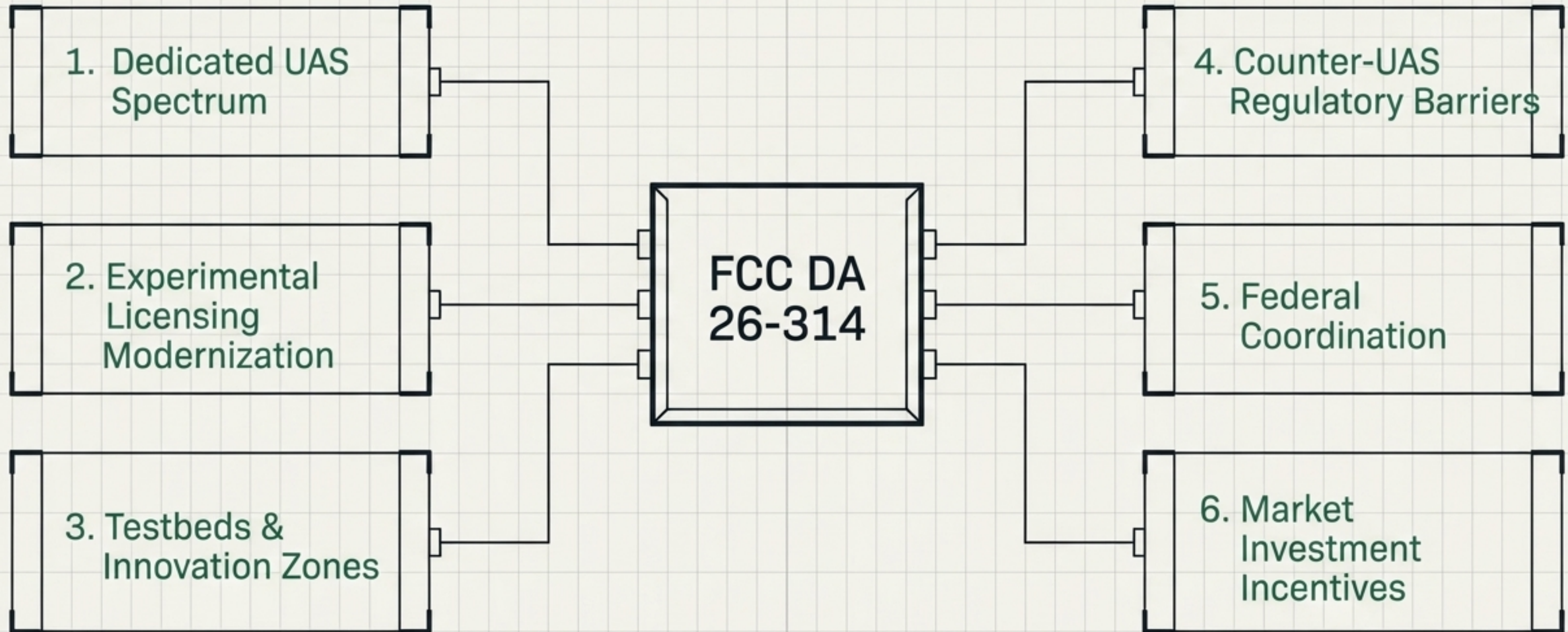
## The Operational Reality

Unlicensed bands offer **zero interference protection**. For scalable BVLOS operations relying on detect-and-avoid systems under the FAA's Part 108 rule, low-latency telemetry is a safety-critical requirement. A shared, unprotected frequency guarantees eventual command-and-control degradation.



# Decoding Public Notice DA 26-314

Released April 1, 2026, DA 26-314 executes on the “Unleashing American Drone Dominance” Executive Order and represents the most consequential FCC drone proceeding to date.



# Three Pillars of Regulatory Transformation

## Pillar 1: Spectrum & Economics

Allocating protected bands and fundamentally shifting operational capital expenditure.



## Pillar 2: Accelerated Innovation

Removing friction from the experimental licensing process to accelerate domestic R&D.



## Pillar 3: The Counter-UAS Gray Zone

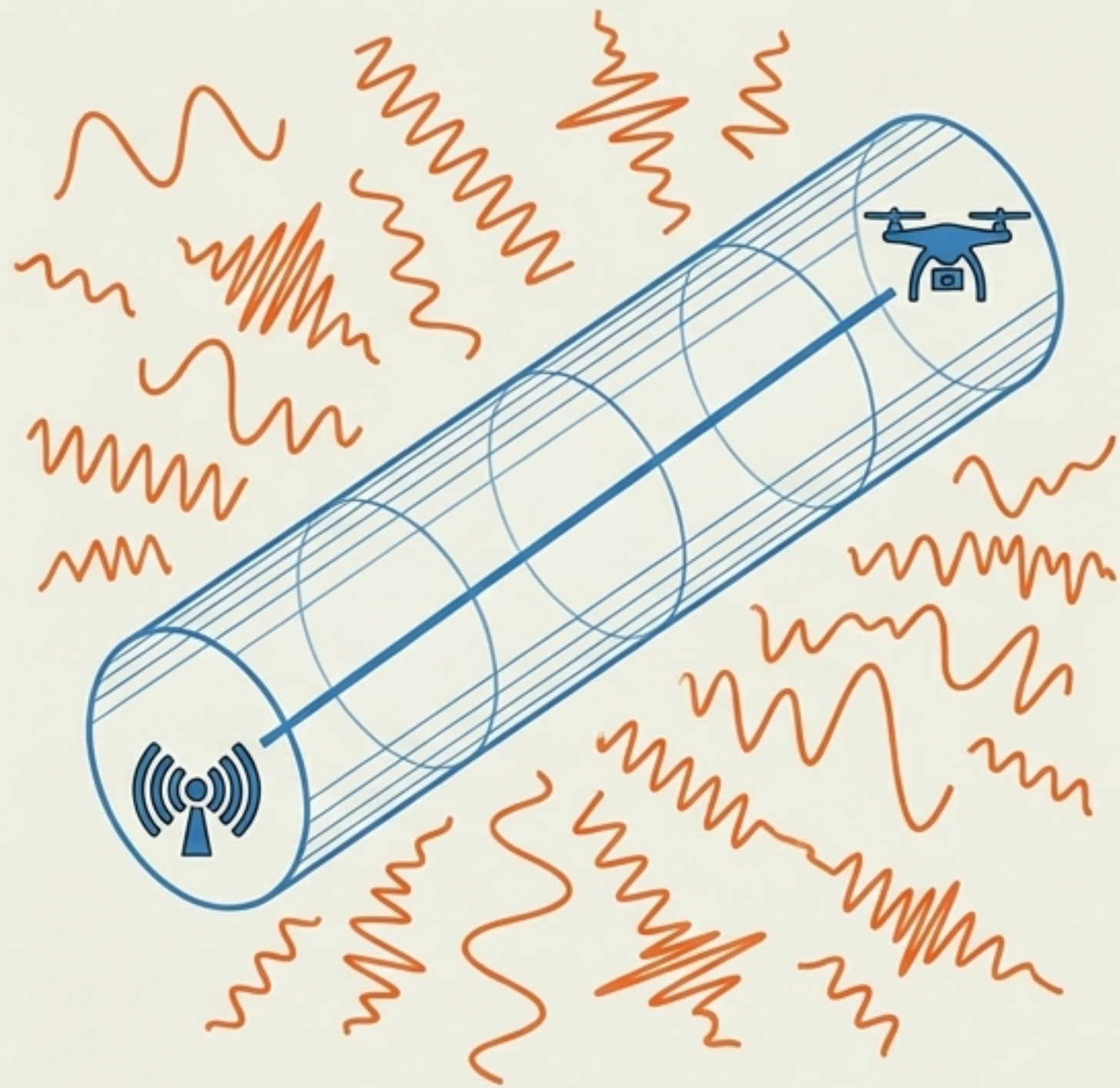
Reconciling 1934 telecommunications laws with 2026 drone interdiction mandates.



# Evaluating the Spectrum Candidates

Frequency Band	Current Status	Proposed Action	Operational Impact
5030–5091 MHz	10 MHz block allocated 2024, never implemented	Issue implementing rules	Unlocks dedicated, protected BVLOS operations
800 MHz Cellular	Restricted airborne use	Lift airborne restrictions	Shifts fleet economics via existing infrastructure
960–1164 MHz	Previously rejected for UAS	Renewed review	Aligns with 2007 ITU recommendations
1.4, 2.3, 3.7 GHz	Prohibits aeronautical mobile	Reviewing prohibitions	Expands available commercial bandwidth
Aeronautical VHF (117-137 MHz)	Traditional manned aviation only	Permit drone pilot licenses	Enables direct UAS-to-ATC communication

# Activating the 5030 MHz Corridor



Ten megahertz of dedicated, licensed spectrum is modest on paper, but transformative in practice.

## Key Attributes

- ✓ - **Interference Protection:** Legal safeguards against signal disruption.
- ✓ - **Geographic Licensing:** Dedicated operational corridors.
- ✓ - **Certified Avionics:** Enables manufacturers to build stable, certified hardware around a fixed frequency.

## The Mandate

The FCC allocated the **5040–5050 MHz** block in 2024, but implementing rules stalled. **DA 26-314** is the mechanism to finally activate this dormant corridor.

# The Cellular BVLOS Economic Shift

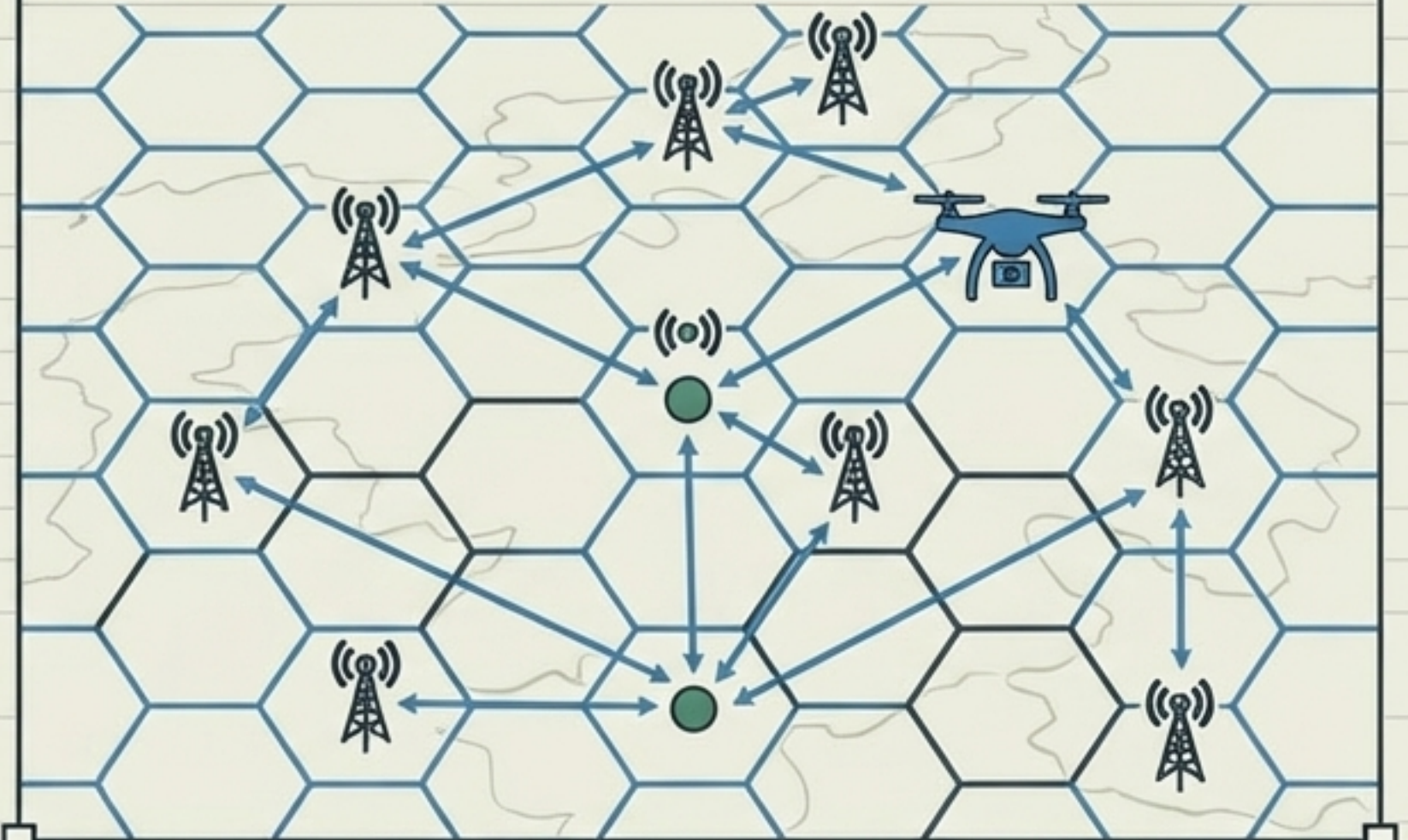
Lifting airborne restrictions on the 800 MHz band alters the fundamental economics of capital expenditure.

## Traditional Architecture



Constrained by the physical range of localized, proprietary ground stations.

## Cellular Architecture



Utilizing existing LTE/5G infrastructure for command-and-control eliminates ground station capital expenditure. The drone operates anywhere a cellular signal exists.

# Direct NAS Integration via VHF



## The Core Concept

DA 26-314 proposes permitting drone pilots to obtain licenses in the aeronautical VHF band for direct voice and data communication with **Air Traffic Control**.

## The Operational Impact

Represents a fundamental paradigm shift in how commercial UAS integrate with the National Airspace System, moving from **indirect coordination** to **real-time, pilot-in-command radio protocols**.

# Modernizing Experimental Licensing

DA 26-314 replaces a system built for fixed research with one designed for dynamic BVLOS iteration.

## High Friction Framework

Case-by-case applications

OET review delays

Strict geographic limits

Single frequency caps

Fails the multi-band needs of modern developers.

## High-Speed Innovation

Blanket Experimental Authorization

Pre-cleared geographic test corridors requiring zero individual spectrum approvals per test.

# The Velocity of FCC Approvals

DA 26-314 is the crest of an administrative wave accelerating since the June 2025 executive orders.

**227**

UAS experimental approvals issued since January 2025.

**+68%**

Increase in experimental approvals compared to the entire 2021–2024 period combined.

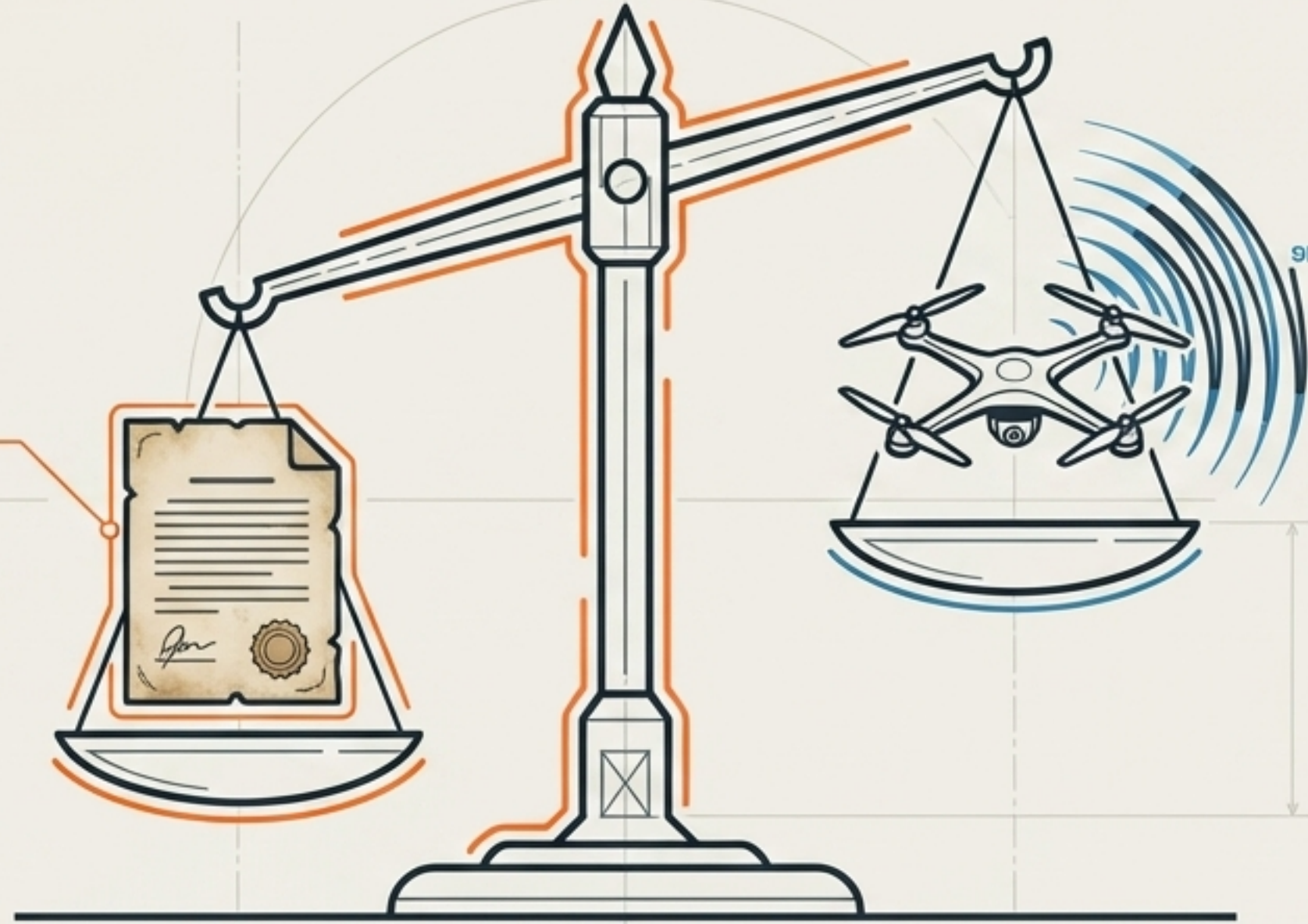
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First-ever Counter-UAS experimental licenses issued (primarily to the DoD).

# The Counter-UAS Legal Gray Zone

## Section 333, Communications Act of 1934

Prohibits willful interference with radio communications. Predates drones by 80 years.



## 2026 Public Safety Mandates

Operational necessity to interdict hostile UAS threats via RF disruption.

## The Gray Area

Every public safety agency or law enforcement entity utilizing RF jamming for drone interdiction currently operates in an unresolved legal gray area with no concept of UAS command-and-control links in the statute.

## The Gray Area

# Modernizing Section 333 for Active Interdiction

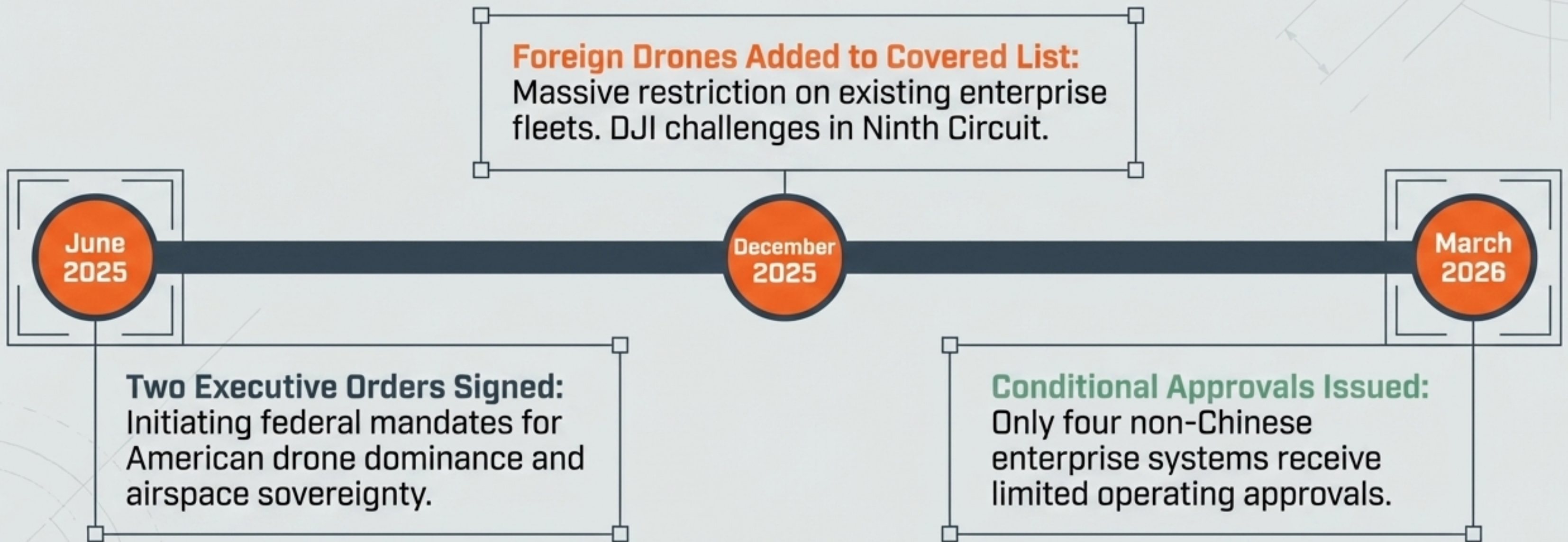


## The Practitioner Mandate

The FCC cannot rewrite the 1934 statute, but it can issue interpretive guidance. Law enforcement and security operators must submit detailed comments describing actual operational scenarios to ensure the rules reflect field reality.

# The Geopolitical Supply Chain Squeeze

The supply chain pressure is intentional and ongoing. The administration is aggressively restricting what fleets can legally fly, creating an urgent dependency on domestic alternatives.



# The Ecosystem Collision

## Supply Chain Restrictions

Dec 2025 Covered List limits & foreign fleet groundings.

## Infrastructure Buildout

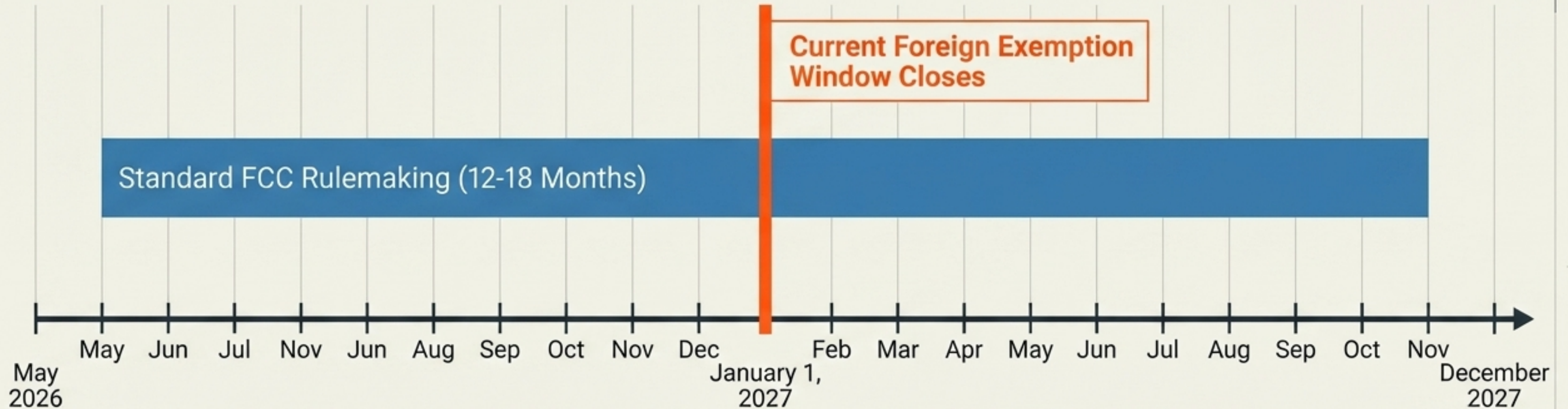
DA 26-314 spectrum unlocks & accelerated domestic licensing.



**January 1, 2027:  
The Exemption Cliff**

DA 26-314 is the infrastructure half of a two-part geopolitical strategy. The U.S. is squeezing foreign tech out while racing to build the spectrum foundation for domestic tech. If spectrum rules aren't finalized before the 2027 cliff, operators face a massive operational vacuum.

# The Regulatory Sequencing Problem



**The Disruption:** From Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to a final rule typically takes 12 to 18 months. This timeline guarantees a gap where legally permissible UAS fleet options are significantly narrower than the operational spectrum available, unless the FCC actively extends current exemptions.

# Navigating Fleet Transition Risk

Options for enterprise operators facing the impending January 2027 deadline.

## 1. Transition Early

**Strategy:** Procure conditionally approved non-Chinese enterprise systems now.

**Risk:** High immediate capital expenditure, limited hardware availability, and unproven scaled performance.

## 2. Wait for Extensions

**Strategy:** Lobby FCC to bridge the gap between Jan 2027 and final DA 26-314 rules.

**Risk:** Complete dependency on administrative leniency; potential delays in operational rollouts.

## 3. Grounding Risk

**Strategy:** Take no proactive action and maintain current fleet.

**Risk:** Non-compliant foreign fleets face hard grounding on January 1, 2027, halting commercial operations entirely.

# THE MAY COMMENT IMPERATIVE

If **practitioners** do not file detailed, technically grounded comments, the rules will be written by lawyers who do not fly and manufacturers prioritizing narrow equipment interests.

**May 1, 2026:**  
Initial Comments Due

**May 18, 2026:**  
Reply Comments Due

## OPERATOR DIRECTIVES

1. Review DA 26-314 scope with aviation legal counsel immediately.
2. Identify specific spectrum and licensing questions affecting your physical operational footprint.
3. Submit substantive, data-driven operational realities to the official FCC record.