

Proxy Warfare, by Andrew Mumford, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013,
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Proxy war, over the centuries, has become a significant attribute in shaping the desired strategic outcome of a conflict through indirect engagement. History is strewn with numerous conflicts where proxy war has been used by states to achieve their strategic goals without committing their own troops, resources and finances. Although large research material is available on contemporary warfare, international relations and related security studies, there is, however, a void existing in analysing proxy warfare and its tenets. This book by Andrew Mumford is a serious effort to bridge this gap. The book has been carefully crafted into five chapters based on extensive research and in-depth analysis.

At the onset of the book, Mumford lays down the reasons for studying proxy warfare from a historical as well as current perspective. A lucid and concise definition sets the course of the book. As an alternate to conventional war, states, more often than not, have preferred to adopt proxy warfare strategy due to its alluring dividends in achieving strategic goals. The nuclear era also brought in the associated risks, thereby forcing the nations to explore other means in furthering their aims and interests. Proxy war thus emerged as most preferred means of engagement by superpower states in an attempt to exert their influence while, at the same time, reducing their own vulnerability and risk of escalation of conflict. Proxy war has not only attracted superpowers but also non-state actors,

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terrorist groups and private military companies (PMCs). The book is able to provide a full analysis of proxy warfare sponsors and the proxies themselves.

Chapter one of the book essentially deals with the parameters of proxy war by elaborating on what it is not. The author has cited an article by Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, in which nine key questions have been posed to characterize war by proxy. Each question is then examined by the author in detail in order to gain a true picture of what proxy war is all about. The dynamics of proxy war have been elaborated by citing examples in which opportunities have been seized by a country on request rather than based on an offer to achieve mutual strategic aim. One of the most important dynamics of proxy war is its capacity to escalate from local conflicts to larger war beyond the original borders, resulting into drawing in the other major power(s). However, historically, it is seen that localized wars, even those featuring superpower proxy interference, did not ever escalate into full-blown war due to reasons encompassing foreign policy objectives, threat of a nuclear conflict, domestic political compulsions, among others.

Another dynamic which the author has dealt with in this chapter is its fluid nature. The aspect of fluid nature of proxy war also revolves around the relationship between the benefactor and the proxy as well as the size and scope of intervention. It was observed during the Vietnam War that the size and scope of a small-scale proxy war developed into a large-scale proxy war and later into a full-blown war due to changed dynamics. It is also important to understand how proxy war differs from direct intervention and covert action. An understanding to differentiate between proxy intervention from direct intervention has been explained analysing the Angolan Civil War of 1975 on the one hand, and the use of remotely piloted drones by the United States (US) for making strikes in Afghanistan on the other, as direct interference. The use of drones may fall into the ambit of proxy war if they are used covertly on behalf of another state.

In the second chapter of the book, Mumford has very subtly dealt with theoretical aspects of proxy war. The appealing nature of proxy war and the motives behind it have been analysed through different schools of thoughts. Though realist approach rests on self-interest where maximum gains are sought through minimum inputs; however, this approach is inadequate. The ideological motives and interest are two key factors that play an important role in proxy war's appeal. The author analyses this in context with the US proxy war strategies during and after the Cold War.

Avoidance of nuclear war is seen as emergence of proxy war strategies. Instead of using direct intervention, states started selling weapons to their allies in order to protect their own interests terming it as 'arm's-length arms dealing'. This shows how states with the help of military hardware can intervene indirectly in foreign conflicts. Over the decades, traditional war has been on the decline, but it has been replaced by proxy war which comes at a very little price and risk.

In chapter three, 'Who Engages in Proxy War?', Mumford has analysed four different types of relations that have influenced proxy war and are still relevant. The culmination of the Cold War saw strong nations engaging themselves in proxy wars to achieve their strategic goals in different parts of the world. The superpowers considered themselves ideologically obliged to influence the internal affairs of other states in order to protect them from the influence of rival powers, which, over a period of time, got converted into a doctrine. The author has analysed the use of surrogate forces by superpowers through two case studies: the first is the case study of the Angolan Civil War in the 1970s that saw the use of Cuban surrogate forces by the erstwhile Soviet Union. In the second case study, the author has highlighted the proxy war strategy adopted by Iran in fighting a proxy war in Iraq, thereby avoiding a direct intervention and associated risks. At times, non-state actors also play a crucial role when state actors co-opt non-state actors to avoid direct intervention. In West Asia, Hizbullah is considered to be one of the most critical non-state proxy actors, as is Hamas. Another case study cited by the author is that of the East African Wars, wherein Sudan and Uganda used non-state proxies to fight undeclared wars in each other's territories.

How proxy wars are fought is deconstructed in the fourth chapter. Although there are no laid down strategies, the historical perspective given in this chapter explores main components of proxy war strategy in terms of provisioning of manpower, delivery of material, financial assistance and non-military means. Manpower plays an important role as it may seriously affect the outcome of proxy war. A benefactor can provide manpower through surrogate force or as military advisors. Cuban troops were employed by Soviet Union during various proxy wars across Africa in the late 1970s. A large number of non-combatants were also employed by Soviet Union as military advisors in various war zones. These were primarily used to protect allied regimes from coup threats or to give counter coup threats. Fighting cannot be done with manpower alone. Weapons, ammunition and other military aid provided by the benefactor

is the prime way to keep the proxy fighting for them. Sometimes, financial aid is also seen as proxy intervention if the aid is given to further a war aim. Of late, a large number of insurgent groups have emerged which receive financial aid not only from benefactors but also from dispersed ethnic communities. One such example is emergence of al-Qaida, which has altered the way in which proxy wars have been fought and financed.

In chapter five, the author has argued that declining trend in joining defence forces by ordinary citizens and increased cost of owning and maintaining modern weapon systems has made proxy war a favoured choice amongst nations as potential strategy while, at the same time, not losing the sight of strategic aim in a particular conflict or region. The end of the Cold War saw PMCs emerging as key player in circumventing high political risk of deploying own troops in foreign countries. The increasing use of PMCs is more profound in case of the US which has spent over 6–10 billion dollars on contracts with PMCs from 2003 to 2007 for security-related works in Iraq. Western states are now employing more and more PMCs than ever before. Non-state actors are also employing PMCs to assist them in proxy wars. The author has put forth that, in future, PMCs will emerge as the major source of providing manpower even for United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions.

With greater reliance on computer networks for day-to-day activities, the day is not far when cyber warfare will override 'boots on ground notion', considered as a necessity in proxy war. Tracing the origin of a cyber attack is very difficult and, therefore, it becomes more appealing as an indirect proxy war strategy. Cyber warfare can damage critical infrastructure, cripple the economy and hack sensitive data without any traceability to its originator. The author has thus argued that the twenty-first century will witness more proxy wars fought by proxy servers than by proxy forces.

China's rise as a global superpower has raised concerns in the US as well as other nations. The rise of China is likely to have far-reaching effects on the US economy and military spending. China's use of the 'soft power' mechanism has given it access to natural resources of many African countries through trade agreements, which has become integral to China's growth strategy. It is argued by the author that China may have to increase the scope of its proxy war engagement in African countries, contrary to its own foreign policy, in order to protect its interest in this region given the fact that China has deployed over 4,500 military personnel in Nigeria for security of oil infrastructure and Chinese-origin workforce.

This preceding example, together with posting of 14 defence attachés in embassies spread all over Africa, should be viewed as how China is coping up with new challenges and opportunities at world stage.

The author has successfully captured the essence of proxy warfare and has been able to put forth explanations for its causes, conduct and consequences through number of case studies. He has tried to explain the paradox associated with proxy warfare with enough logical inferences to suggest that proxy warfare will certainly become an important facet of conflicts in future. Due to its low cost, low risk and plausible deniability, proxy war will always appeal to states to achieve strategic goals. However, the associated risks, as the author has emphasized, may get pronounced due to higher casualties resulting due to externally supplied troops, funds and lethal weapons. This book will serve well for scholars, military commanders and policymakers alike, in order to gain conceptual understanding of proxy warfare and its possible manifestation in future conflicts.

