Proxy War: An Attempt to Put a Retrospective and Ambiguous Concept into a Specific Framework

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Abstract

There are two dominant perspectives in the literature regarding the concept of proxy war, which was forgotten in the post-Cold War era but is now regaining popularity. The group led by Karl Deutsch defines proxy war as the intervention of other states in a civil war in a country, and the situation where the civil war in question gains an interstate conflict nature. The other group argues that proxy war was a common form of warfare even before 1945. This study problematizes two perspectives. Accordingly, a new conceptual framework of proxy wars is constructed, aiming to eliminate the conceptual ambiguity caused by these two perspectives.

Keywords

Proxy War, Indirect Intervention, Civil War.

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Vekalet Savaşı:
Retrospektif ve Belirsiz Bir Kavramı
Belli Bir Çerçeveye Koyma Denemesi

Özet

Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde unutulan ama günümüzde tekrar rağbet gören vekalet savaşı kavramına ilişkin literatürde iki hâkim bakış açısının olduğu söylenebilir. Karl Deutsch'un başını çektiği grup, bir ülkedeki iç savaşa diğer devletlerin müdahale etmesini ve sözkonusu ülkedeki iç savaşın devletler arası bir çatışma niteliği kazandığı durumları vekalet savaşı olarak nitelendirmiştir. Diğer grup ise, vekalet savaşının 1945 öncesinde de yaygın görülen bir savaş biçimi olduğunu savunmuştur. Bu çalışmada söz konusu iki bakış açısı sorunsallaştırılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada, yeni bir vekalet savaşı kavramsal çerçevesi inşa edilerek sözkonusu iki bakış açısının yol açtığı kavramsal belirsizlik giderilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Vekalet Savaşı, Dolaylı Müdahale, İç Savaş.

Introduction

The Arab Spring public protests, which started in Libya in 2011 and spread to other North African and Middle Eastern countries, turned into civil war in Libya, Syria and Yemen. Local conflicts that lead to civil war in these countries have become increasingly complicated with the interventions of global and regional powers. Analyzing these civil wars with the concept of proxy war has led to the concept becoming popular again in international relations (Rauta, 2021: 16-17). The concept of proxy war, which emerged in the Cold War, is frequently used in international politics and security studies during this period. In the power struggle between the USA and the USSR in the Cold War, showdowns were made through proxies (Karabulut and Oğuz, 2018: 78-79; Stambøl, 2016: 316). In the relevant literature, the Cold War period is full of examples of proxy warfare (Brown, 2016: 244-5).

The factor that makes proxy war important today is that, after the end of the Cold War, while inter-state conflicts decreased, civil wars increased and foreign intervention became an important element in many civil wars. Because in proxy wars, states can achieve their own economic, political and strategic goals by supporting the government or local elements of the conflicting parties in the countries where the war takes place (Hughes, 2014: 14; Pfaff, 2017). However,

perhaps the main reason why the concept of proxy war in security studies and international relations became popular again in the 2010s is related to the fact that the USA abandoned its strategy of solving international issues with costly direct military interventions in this period. After the Gulf War in 1991, the United States fought in various countries with relatively large forces. In particular, the military and economic costs of the Afghanistan intervention in 2001 and the Iraq invasion in 2003 were heavy for the USA. On the other hand, the US public has gradually decreased its support for these direct military interventions. With the Obama administration, American presidents had to significantly reduce their military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, considering the public weariness caused by their direct military interventions (Ekşi, 2017: 111-112). The perception that the USA has overextended itself in the context of direct military intervention and that China, in particular, has become a serious rival to the USA's global hegemony in many areas, including international trade, has led the USA to review its direct military intervention strategy, both politically and financially. It can be said that this situation has a significant impact on the background of the concept of proxy war, one of the popular phenomena of the Cold War, coming to the fore again in security studies and international relations in the 2010s. It can be said that the cost of direct military intervention for a state, briefly expressed in the example of the USA, is also valid for major powers and regional powers that intervene directly. However, the costs and legitimacy issues in question do not prevent states from intervening in other states. States are now trying to achieve their interests and objectives through indirect intervention methods, which they previously sought to achieve through direct military intervention. Proxy war can be described as the most well-known and widespread method of this strategy.

Today, the increasing prevalence of indirect intervention methods has led to the revival of the literature on proxy war after the Cold War period. However, it can be argued that two common perspectives in the literature in question obscure the concept of proxy war. A group of researchers influenced by Karl W. Deutch interpreted the concept of proxy war so broadly that the concept of proxy war has become almost synonymous with the concept of civil war and even war. According to this group's point of view, we can define it as a proxy war when other states support one of the parties to the civil war in a country where a civil war is taking place and become involved in the civil war in that country. In other words, if a civil war involving third parties turns into an interstate conflict in the country where the civil war takes place, this situation is described as a proxy war. It can be said that the group in question's understanding of proxy war ignored an important social reality that led to the emergence of the concept. The method of proxy warfare is a phenomenon that emerged as a result of states' attempts to somehow overcome the principles of non-interference in

each other's internal affairs and the prohibition of the use of force in the foreign policies of states on which the United Nations system is based. However, states continued to interfere in the internal affairs of other states through indirect intervention methods and tried to influence civil wars in other countries in line with their own interests. The concept of proxy war can be described as a concept that emerged to address this new situation. However, the group led by Deutsch ignored this situation and treated the proxy war as a war between states taking place in a third country, making the concept quite vague.

Researchers in the second group, who have made the concept ambiguous in the proxy war literature, have not limited the concept to the UN system, but have also addressed various wars and civil wars in the pre-1945 period with the concept of proxy war. The perspective of this group was also influenced by Deutsch's understanding of proxy war, stated above. While they emphasize that the proxy war method was implemented as a result of the strategy of states with nuclear weapons not to fight each other directly in the Cold War, they tried to show by giving various examples that this method of warfare was also seen before 1945. In these studies, the intervention of other states in the sectarian wars in the Holy Roman Empire, the involvement of other states, especially France, in the American War of Independence and the Spanish Civil War were cited as examples of proxy wars. In this study, the perspectives of these two groups that dominate the proxy war literature are problematized. It has been argued that the phenomenon of proxy war emerged from the practices of states trying to somehow circumvent the UN system's prohibition on the use of force and the prohibition on interference in the internal affairs of other states. Therefore, it has been argued that the concept cannot be applied to the period before 1945. Accordingly, in this study, a new conceptual framework has been tried to be built by making use of the proxy war literature in order to eliminate the ambiguity that arises as a result of a very broad interpretation of the boundaries of the concept of proxy war. It is hoped that the new proxy war conceptual framework can contribute to eliminating this conceptual ambiguity seen in the literature. In addition, it is envisaged that this conceptual framework can help researchers in determining whether a civil war is a proxy war and in analyzing situations that are characterized as proxy wars.

In this framework, the study consists of three parts. In the first part, the content of the concept of proxy war and its basic elements are presented. In the second part, two common perspectives that make the concept of proxy war ambiguous are discussed. In the third part, the new conceptual framework constructed to eliminate the ambiguity regarding the concept of proxy war is presented. In the study, Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method was utilized both in identifying the problematic and in constructing the new conceptual framework for proxy war. Husserl's phenomenological method

consists of two stages. In the first stage, which is characterized as phenomenological reduction, it is tried to show that the social and political order we live in and take for granted is a social reality constructed in a certain time and place. The second stage, eidetic reduction, deals with how the given social and political order is constructed. This study utilizes the phenomenological reduction method to examine how the dominant understanding of proxy war in the literature is constructed. By utilizing the eidetic reduction method, the new conceptual framework of proxy war, which is put forward in the third part of the study, is constructed.

The New Name For The Old Strategy Of Defeating A Common Enemy: Proxy War

There is a common belief that a civil war by its very nature invites military intervention by foreign powers from outside the country. Neighboring states intervene in a civil war by siding with one of the parties to the conflict. On the other hand, it has become increasingly dangerous for another state to invade a neighboring country torn apart by internal conflicts with its own troops. Moreover, the realities of international politics between major powers today also limit such direct military intervention by regional or global powers. Therefore, military interventions are increasingly carried out indirectly. A state wishing to influence a civil war in a country for its own purposes and interests resorts to various strategies, such as illegally overthrowing the government in that country, supplying arms and ammunition to the parties to the civil war, and providing all kinds of aid, training and advisory support. A state engaging in indirect intervention can thus stay away from the conflict or pretend to do so. It can also deal with the international consequences of its involvement in the civil war relatively more easily (Duner, 1981: 353). By reducing the risks of direct military intervention, the proxy war strategy allows states to influence the internal affairs of other states and influence their foreign policies.

Proxy war is just one of the ways a state indirectly intervenes in the internal affairs of another state. Indirect intervention can be done in the form of a proxy war, or it can take place through donations made by one state to another state or its opponent in a civil war, such as military equipment, logistics and financial aid. What distinguishes proxy war from indirect intervention through donations is that in proxy war, an informal hierarchical relationship emerges between the indirect intervening state and the party it supports (the adversaries in the country where the civil war is taking place), i.e. the proxy.[1] An indirectly intervening state,

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1   In the literature on the concept of proxy war, there is a great diversity in naming the parties to the proxy war. The words 'activator', 'benefactor', 'patron', 'principal', 'superpower-patron'

variously referred to as a donor or sponsor, supports one of the adversaries of a civil war in another country. However, the donor demands that its aims be adopted by the side it supports in the civil war and that the civil war be continued accordingly. When the demand in question coincides with, or at least does not contradict, the interests and goals of one of the parties to the civil war, the party to the civil war in question becomes a proxy. Thus, while the state, which intervenes indirectly by making a donation, becomes the sponsor, the party of the civil war, which accepts the donation and tries to realize the interests of the donor by fighting on his behalf, becomes a proxy. The sponsoring state thus gains some degree of control over the proxy's actions. This asymmetric relationship between the donor and the proxy allows us to distinguish proxy war from the form of indirect intervention by donating (Groh, 2019: 27; Gök, 2021b: 730).

One of the important issues in proxy warfare is to examine what exactly states can achieve through sponsorship. When some states want to achieve their own objectives at a lower cost, or when they lack the resources, either militarily or economically, to implement their own policies in international politics, they may resort to alternative means to fill these gaps. In this framework, a state may choose to support armed groups in another country as a bargaining power to realize its foreign policy objectives while competing with other rival states. One form of such a strategy is to use an armed group in conflict against a government that is considered to be a rival to persuade the rival government by force. The armed group in question is often under-resourced and weak in its struggle against the government with which it is in conflict. By providing the armed group with arms and ammunition, logistical and monetary support, as well as political recognition, the sponsoring state can significantly increase the armed group's capacity against the government with which it is in conflict. This exchange creates an asymmetrical and informal alliance between the sponsor and the armed group. The sponsor outsources combat work in a conflict area to the armed group in question, while the armed group obtains the resources it needs to survive and continue the conflict against the targeted government. This exchange is beneficial for both the sponsor and its proxy, and results in increased coercive power for both sides (Bapat, 2011: 3-4). Therefore, to say that there is a command-and-control relationship between the sponsor state and its proxy in a civil war that

and 'sponsor' have been used to name the foreign power that carries out indirect intervention in proxy war. On the other hand, 'proxy', 'client', 'pawn', 'pseudo-volunteers', 'puppet', 'satallite', 'surrogate', 'volunteer' and 'tool' have been preferred to characterize the actor receiving foreign aid. The common enemy of the sponsor and the proxy are named 'adversary', 'opposition' and 'target'. See also: (Rauta, 2018: 453), (Rauta and Mumford: 2017: 101), (Duner, 1981: 353), (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1984: 266). In this study, it is preferred to use the term sponsor for the external power that indirectly intervenes in civil war and proxy for the party supported by the sponsor.

takes the form of a proxy war may mean underestimating the role of the proxy in civil war. The proxy appears to play a role in civil war that goes beyond being the subcontractor of its sponsor (Tınas, 2020: 127, 129; Innes, 2012: XVI). In the relationship between the sponsor and the proxy, the relative autonomy of the proxy vis-à-vis the sponsoring state is likely to decrease in cases where the sponsor provides most of the resources to sustain the civil war. Conversely, in cases where the proxy is able to fight the civil war on its own against its opponent with its own resources, the relative autonomy of the proxy vis-à-vis the sponsoring state is likely to increase. Therefore, the relationship between the sponsor and the proxy cannot be said to be hierarchical and dependent on a chain of command. It is important to underline that proxies are more than just the sponsors' subcontractors in a civil war. Cooperation between sponsor and proxy is sustainable when it is advantageous for both parties. While the sponsor-proxy relationship between Iran and Hezbollah can continue for many years because it is advantageous for both sides, the sponsor-proxy relationship between the US and Sunni groups in the civil war that started in Syria in 2011 was short-lived due to the incompatibility of goals and interests (Moghaddam and Wyss, 2018; Gök, 2021a: 126-127).

The concept of proxy war can be characterized as a new form of intervention developed as a result of the fact that states wanted to apply a very old foreign policy strategy of interfering in the internal affairs of other states and indirectly intervening in civil wars in other states after 1945, but the structural limitations of the UN system did not legally allow this. States wishing to intervene indirectly and intervene in civil wars in other states have started to use proxy warfare to circumvent the limitations of the UN system. The most important element that provides these states with this opportunity is the 'plausible deniability' discourse, which is an important component of proxy warfare. Plausible deniability, which is very useful for the sponsoring state and its proxy, poses a challenge for researchers examining whether a civil war in a country is a proxy war. The sponsoring state, which supports one of the parties to a civil war in a country, may deny military, financial and logistical support to its proxy on various grounds by using plausible deniability. This makes it difficult for researchers to determine whether a civil war is a proxy war or not, and who plays the roles of sponsor and proxy. In proxy wars, sponsors often do not disclose their support to their proxies (Hughes, 2014: 15). It can be argued that there are several incentives for states (i.e. sponsors) using proxy warfare to adopt plausible deniability. First, when a sponsor supports one side in a civil war, it seeks to prevent retaliation by the other side through plausible deniability. Second, in states with a democratic system of government, public opinion and opposition parties may not support indirect interventions. Third, if the sponsoring state's proxy fails in a civil war, this may weaken the sponsoring state's domestic public

support and damage its international prestige (Hughes, 2014: 15; Sönmez et al., 2020: 13; San-Akca, 2009: 593-596). Finally, we can say that states that play the role of sponsors in proxy wars adopt the rhetoric of plausible deniability due to the risk of exclusion from the international community as a result of violating the principles of sovereign equality of states and non-interference in each other's internal affairs, which form the basis of the UN system. However, plausible deniability is not the only challenge for a researcher trying to analyze a civil war using the concept of proxy war. In the proxy war literature, the interpretation of the boundaries of the concept in a very broad sense has obscured the concept to the point of characterizing almost every war as a proxy war.

Two Widespread Perspectives That Blur The Boundaries Of The Concept Of Proxy War And Their Critique

One of the most cited definitions of proxy war in the post-2010 period belongs to Andrew Mumford. Mumford's definition of proxy war largely summarizes the prevailing perspective on the concept in the literature. Mumford defines proxy war as an attempt by a third party to indirectly intervene in a conflict and influence the outcome of the conflict in line with its own desires (Mumford, 2013a: 1; Mumford, 2013b: 40). The weakness of this definition stems from the fact that the strategy of a third party manipulating a conflict in line with its own interests is quite common in many wars in history. The emergence of the concept of proxy war stems from the fact that this strategy, which is quite common in history, has lost its legitimacy in the UN system. Article 2/4 of the UN Charter prohibits states from using force or the threat of force in their foreign policies. Article 2/7 of the same text also prohibits states from interfering in each other's internal affairs (United Nations, 1945). However, states have somehow applied this strategy in the UN system and made indirect interventions in other states in order to realize their goals and interests (Gleditsch, 2007: 296). This situation has led to the emergence of the social reality called proxy war. However, the literature on proxy war ignored this situation and attributed the concept of proxy war to the pre-1945 period.

The definition of proxy warfare as wars in which adversaries fight each other while either jointly engaging in the conduct of the conflict with a third party or completely delegating the conduct of the conflict to the military forces of the third party they employ has become common in the post-2010 proxy war literature. This literature has argued that proxy warfare is a fairly common strategy today, but that proxy wars are not a new phenomenon for international politics. In these studies, proxy warfare was explained with Kautilya's "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" perspective and it was argued that proxy warfare is an ancient form of warfare dating back to Ancient India (4th century BC) and

Ancient Greece (5th century BC) without limiting the phenomenon to the post-1945 period.[2]

In the literature on proxy war, the argument that the US and the USSR turned to proxy warfare because they could not afford the great risk of fighting each other directly due to mutually assured destruction is often emphasized (Groh, 2019: 2, 10). However, this correlation fails to explain why great powers and regional powers resort to proxy warfare even though they do not possess nuclear weapons. It can be said that studies that try to explain the emergence of proxy war and why states resort to proxy war with the destructiveness of nuclear weapons do not take into account the relationship between proxy war and the UN system.

The different interpretations of the concept of proxy war in the Cold War are highly relevant to the debates it generates today. One of these problematic perspectives has become prevalent in the post-2010 proxy war literature. This became more apparent when the interpretation of proxy war, which will be discussed below, was applied to the Syrian civil war and the Russian-Ukrainian war. In this conceptualization of proxy war, two external powers/states fight in the territory of a third state. In this war, foreign powers try to realize their own foreign policy objectives by using some or all of the manpower, resources and territory of the country in which the conflict is taking place. The goals and interests of these foreign powers may be fully or partially compatible with the goals and interests of the domestic adversaries in the country where the conflict is taking place. In this interpretation of proxy war, the direct military intervention of foreign powers in a proxy war with their own military power and siding with one of the domestic adversaries is not considered as a conceptual problem. Thus, the Korean War and the Vietnam War could be considered as proxy wars (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1984: 263-4). It can be said that it was Karl W. Deutsch who popularized the conceptualization of proxy war in the Cold War. Since Deutsch's approach to proxy warfare has significantly influenced the studies that use the concept of proxy warfare today, it should be emphasized.

Deutsch described the proxy war in terms of its constituent elements. Accordingly, in order to be able to call a civil war a proxy war, 1) states clash with each other in the territory of another state, 2) an internal issue of the state in which the war takes place (seemingly) leads to the conflict, 3) the desire of other

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2   For studies conducted after 2010 that reinterpret the concept of proxy war, see also: (Hughes, 2014: 2), (Krieg and Rickli, 2018: 116), (Mumford, 2013a: 1, 11-12, 26-29), (Krieg, 2016: 99-100), (Towle, 1981: 21-22), (Moghadam and Wyss, 2020: 118), (Fox, 2019a: 49), (Ünalmış and Oğuz, 2019: 33), (Alca, 2020: 33-34), (Marshall, 2016: 185-189), (Fox, 2020: 50-51), (Bryjka, 2020: 192), (Groh, 2019: 49-50), (Deutsch, 1964: 103), (Brown, 2016: 244), (Loveman, 2002: 32).

states to achieve their own goals and implement their policies by using the manpower, resources and territory of the country in which the conflict takes place outweighs the internal conflict in the civil war. According to Deutsch, the aims of external powers and the aims of the internal parties to the civil war must appear to be fully compatible. In 1950, during the Korean War, North Korean communists believed that their goals were compatible with those of the Soviet Union and Communist China, which espoused communist ideology; similarly, anti-communist South Koreans believed that their goals and interests were identical to those of the United States and its allies. No matter how much the interests and goals of the warring parties overlapped, only North Korea's and South Korea's countries were devastated. The territory and civilians of the Soviet Union, Communist China and the United States were spared in the Korean War. Although the US and China also lost soldiers in the war, the soldiers who died were mostly Koreans (Deutsch, 1964: 102). Deutsch, one of the leading authors who popularized the concept of proxy war in international relations, provided us with important criteria on proxy war, but he also opened the door to a problematic understanding of proxy war as an inter-state conflict that takes place in the territory of a third state. Such an understanding of proxy war, which involves the direct military intervention of foreign powers in a civil war, has led to the blurring of the concept of proxy war and the treatment of almost every war as a proxy war. It is possible to say that the studies claiming that there were proxy wars before 1945 without associating proxy war with the UN system were highly influenced by Deutsch's definition of proxy war. In the post-2010 period, when the concept has become popular again, this understanding of proxy war has resurfaced in studies on contemporary interstate wars and civil wars by utilizing this concept.

Studies analyzing the US strategy of foreign intervention with local elements, which it returned to in the 2010s, as a proxy war have increased considerably in this period. They have analyzed the US strategy of employing local armed groups on the ground and bombing ISIS from the air, drone strikes and even the use of private military companies in the fight against ISIS as proxy warfare. They characterized the US's use of SDF/YPG forces on the ground in Syria without involving its own troops in the conflict and the fight against terrorism taking place in a country other than the US country as proxy war. From the same perspective, the civil war in Libya in the post-Gaddafi period and the Yemeni civil war that started in 2014 were also handled with the concept of proxy war. In the 2010s, the concept of proxy war, which had become widespread

during the Cold War and which was demonstrated above in Deutsch's treatment of the concept, thus reappeared in the proxy war literature.[3]

This interpretation means that the indirect intervention of the sponsor in a civil war, which is the distinctive element of the concept of proxy war, is left aside. It is also seen in these proxy war analyses that the sponsoring state does not directly participate in a civil war with its own troops, but supports the groups it designates as its proxy with various resources and makes these groups do the fighting. On the other hand, the relative lack of autonomy of the proxy supported by the sponsor in the civil war and the fact that the sponsor manages the proxy under its hierarchy like a subcontractor are ignored in these proxy war analyses. However, this situation implies a direct military intervention by a foreign power in a civil war. In this scenario, where the direct intervention is not carried out by the military forces of the state in question, it can be said that the proxy operates as if it were an official institution of the sponsor. The fact that civil wars in this scenario are also considered as proxy wars leads to overlooking the element of indirect intervention by a third party in a civil war, which is the distinctive element of the concept of proxy war. This leads us to analyze situations in which a state creates turmoil in another state, ostensibly causing a civil war, but in reality an inter-state war takes place, as proxy war (Salehyan, 2010, 500-501; Salehyan et al., 2014: 638; Hauter, 2019: 91-92, 99-100). Although the concepts of proxy war and civil war are intertwined, they deal with two different phenomena. Therefore, it is important to identify the distinctive elements of the concept of proxy war and to draw its conceptual boundaries both theoretically and practically.

Revisiting The Concept Of Proxy War: Six Criteria Of Proxy War

By looking at the proxy war literature and proxy war case studies using this concept, as well as taking into account the problematic posed in this study regarding the concept of proxy war, we can determine what criteria are required to qualify a conflict as a proxy war. First of all, in order to qualify a conflict as a proxy war, there must be a civil war. As emphasized throughout the study, the use of the concept of proxy war to interpret wars between states causes the meaning of the concept to become unclear. Secondly, a third party supporting one of the parties in a civil war must indirectly intervene in this conflict. There must be a relationship between a state playing the role of sponsor, the third party that carries out external intervention in the conflict, and one of the parties to the civil war playing the role of proxy (Rauta and Mumford, 2017: 101). It can be

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3   For examples of these studies, see: (Krieg and Rickli, 2018: 113), (Fox, 2019a: 50-51; 58), (Fox, 2019b: 2), (Fox, 2020: 52-53), (Rubright, 2016: 142-3), (Mumford, 2013a: 135), (Krieg, 2016: 97), (Kurt, 2019: 312-3), (Erol and Çelik, 2018: 31-34), (Waldman, 2018: 181, 183-184, 198), (Ivanov, 2020: 48), (Kozera et al., 2020: 78), (Yüksel, 2020: 139-140).

said that there are two situations in which an actor can play the role of proxy in a civil war. In the first case, a group fighting against a legitimate government can be a proxy. In the second possibility, both sides of a civil war can be proxies in a situation where state institutions have collapsed and there is no legitimate government, as was the case in Afghanistan in the 1990s after the Soviet withdrawal. Only states can play the role of sponsor.[4] In a civil war scenario where there is a legitimate government and a group challenging it, it is not possible for the government to be a proxy due to the principle of sovereign equality of states. Moreover, treating governments as proxies would make it impossible to draw a line between the concept of proxy war and the concept of war. It will lead to analyzing forms of cooperation between states with asymmetric power distribution under the concept of proxy war. This will lead to analyzing wars involving alliances and coalitions of war between states within the framework of the concept of proxy war. As emphasized in the study, this situation has resulted in the ambiguity of the concept of proxy war in the relevant literature and its retrospective application to the pre-1945 period, rendering the concept dysfunctional.

The third criteria for characterizing a civil war as a proxy war is that the sponsor and the proxy have a common enemy. Although the sponsor and the proxy may have different ideologies, worldviews and concerns, they have a common enemy, which is referred to as the target in the literature (Loveman, 2002: 32-3). The fourth criteria is that the relationship between the sponsor and the proxy should be comprehensive enough to last for a certain period of time. A concrete action or goal that can be achieved through short-term cooperation may not be sufficient to create a proxy war between the parties (Hughes, 2014: 12). The fifth criteria relates to the existence of a direct aid relationship between the sponsor and the proxy. This can take the form of monetary assistance, the provision of arms and ammunition, military training for the proxy's fighters, logistical support, or even the provision of the sponsor's country as a sanctuary for the proxy's fighters. The sixth criteria concerns the public visibility of the cooperation between the sponsor and the proxy. The relationship between the

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4   After 2010, a new trend has emerged in the proxy war literature that non-state actors can also be sponsors. However, it can be said that this understanding will render the concept of proxy war dysfunctional. Considering the sponsor as a non-state actor and the proxy as a non-state actor leads to ignoring the state actor, which is the distinctive element of the concept of war. Talking about conflicts sponsored by a non-state actor would mean including almost all kinds of actors in the ontology of international politics within the concept of proxy war. This will lead to the analysis of all kinds of conflicts with the concept of proxy war. This will cause the concept of war to lose its meaning. For studies based on this understanding, see: (Mumford, 2013a: 45), (Moghaddam and Wyss, 2020: 120), (Rondeaux and Sterman, 2019: 50-52), (Philips and Valbjørn, 2018: 416, 428), (Leenders and Giustozzi, 2022: 616-618, 633-635), (Wither, 2020: 20-23), (Solmaz, 2023: 156-160), (Cragin, 2015: 312, 315-316), (Ivanov, 2020: 38, 48).

sponsor and the proxy is built on circumventing the structural constraints of the UN system, which is the most important justification for the application of the proxy war method. Therefore, the final criteria of proxy warfare, especially for the sponsor state, is to deny its relationship with the proxy through plausible deniability (Loveman, 2002: 32-3). The plausible deniability strategy can be characterized as the protective element of a sponsor-proxy relationship, whether overt or covert.

There is a consensus in the literature on proxy war that the Soviet Union's direct military intervention in Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989 was a proxy war. In this subsection of the study, it is shown that the conflict in Afghanistan is also a proxy war by making use of the criteria proposed above that allow us to analyze a civil war as a proxy war. The example of Afghanistan is not used as a case study, but rather as a way to understand the new conceptual framework of proxy war as laid out above. We can briefly apply the above criteria to the civil war in question. The first criteria is met by the civil war that started in 1978 between the supporters of the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, which took over the government, and the armed group of Sunni Muslims who opposed it. At the invitation of the Afghan government, the Soviet Union directly intervened in Afghanistan by deploying its army in 1979 and sided with the government in the civil war (Sander, 2015: 563-5). The second criteria is that there is a relationship between the sponsor (the United States and other allied states) and the proxy (various Afghan resistance movements); the third criteria is that the sponsor provides about one billion dollars worth of arms, economic aid, training and other essentials to the Afghan insurgents, and that the Afghan resistance forces, the CIA and Pakistani intelligence (Inter-Services Intelligence-ISI) are in regular communication to coordinate the insurgency. The fourth criteria (alignment of interests and common goal between donor and proxy) is to halt and eventually remove the Soviet Union's forces in Afghanistan. The fifth criteria is met by almost 10 years of working together between the Afghan insurgents and the US and its allies following the Soviet direct intervention. The sixth criteria is met by the fact that the US indirectly supported the Afghan insurgents but denied doing so, especially in the first half of the civil war (Loveman, 2002: 43).

In a proxy war, we can talk about a situation in which for one side the conflict is a proxy war and for the other side it is not. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989 is one of the examples that shows that such a situation is possible. The civil war in Afghanistan was a direct military intervention for the Soviets because the Soviet Union openly deployed its own army into Afghanistan in large numbers to support the Soviet-led government in Afghanistan. For the United States, the war in Afghanistan was a proxy war. Because the US intervened indirectly in this conflict by arming and funding the

Afghan resistance fighters (mujahideen) who were fighting against the Soviets and wanted to drive them out of the country. Thus, the same conflict represented the characteristics of two different forms of intervention. For the Soviet Union, the form of intervention was direct (or a military operation carried out at the invitation of the Afghan government), while for the United States it was indirect, that is, through proxy (Mumford, 2013a: 15).

Conclusion

Proxy war, one of the popular concepts of the Cold War, has become popular again in international relations in the post-Arab Spring period, especially in the context of the Middle East region. The concept emerged during the Cold War and its conceptual framework was also shaped during the Cold War. The re-popularization of the concept today has led to the prevailing perspectives on proxy war during the Cold War period being carried to the present day. In this study, two dominant perspectives in the literature on proxy war are problematized. The first perspective includes the works of researchers who ignore the historical conditions in which the concept emerged and retrospectively analyze civil wars and wars in the pre-1945 period with the concept of proxy war. In the other perspective, there are researchers who adopt the above retrospective perspective on proxy war and analyze the situations in which other states intervene in a country's civil war and fight each other in that country with the concept of proxy war.

The study concludes that if we do not limit proxy wars to civil wars, we would have to characterize every war in history as a proxy war. The concept of proxy war loses its distinctive character if we consider two states fighting each other while other states provide arms, money and logistical support to the conflicting states (without taking sides) as proxy war. Proxy war is not an appropriate concept to explain wars between states, even if they take place only in the territory of a third state.

Another conclusion of the study is that proxy war is a social reality indirectly created by the UN system's prohibition of the use of force. Taking the social reality to which proxy war refers back to the pre-World War II period leads to anachronism. It is true that some elements of proxy warfare were observed in the relevant literature before 1945. However, the reason why the characteristic element of proxy war (indirect intervention in a civil war by an external power) is defined by a new concept (i.e. proxy war) after 1945 is due to the reinterpretation of an old social reality in changing conditions. After the loss of legitimacy of the use of force as a foreign policy tool, states were able to circumvent the prohibition on the use of force through proxy warfare. While it

is an old practice for states to pursue their own goals and interests by interfering in the internal affairs of other states, we can say that the continuation of this practice in the UN system by adapting it to new conditions has led to the emergence of proxy war. Therefore, the use of the concept to explain wars between states or situations in which other states fight each other in a third country considerably expands the conceptual boundaries of the concept of proxy war. This makes it difficult to distinguish between the concept of proxy war and the concepts of civil war or even war. When the literature on proxy war is examined, it is seen that researchers who interpret the concept of proxy war as quite comprehensive apply the concept to various historical examples within such an ambiguity. Drawing the boundaries of the concept quite broadly has led them to lose sight of the social reality that gave rise to the concept.

In this study, a conceptual framework for the analysis of proxy war is constructed by utilizing the literature on proxy war. In this way, it has been shown that the ambiguity caused by the rather broad boundaries of the concept in the relevant literature can be eliminated. It is hoped that this new conceptual framework can be a framework of analysis that researchers can use when answering the question of whether a civil war in a country is a proxy war or not.

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