Proxy Warfare in Ukraine

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Abstract

The ongoing Ukrainian crisis began in 2014 with street protests, supported by Western states, to topple the pro-Russian government of Ukraine. The crisis evolved into the invasion and annexation of Crimea by Russia, ongoing conflicts between legal Ukrainian government troops and Russian-supported local separatists in eastern Ukraine. This article analyzes the crisis within the theory of proxy warfare, which emerged during the Cold War as the most prevalent method of competition between the US and the former Soviet Union. The paper argues that the Ukrainian crisis presents an example of proxy warfare between the West and Russia for global hegemony, and that its result will affect not just Eurasia but security world-wide.

Keywords: *Proxy Warfare, Ukrainian Crisis, Crimea.*

Ukrayna'daki Vekâlet Savaşı

Öz

Ukrayna Krizi 2014 yılında Rus yanlısı Ukrayna hükümetini devirmek amacıyla batılı ülkelerce desteklenen sokak gösterileri neticesinde başlamıştır. Kriz Kırım'ın Rusya tarafından işgali ve ilhakı ile Ukrayna Hükümeti birlikleri ile Rusya tarafından desteklenen ayrılıkçı yerel halk arasında Ukrayna'nın doğusunda halen devam eden çatışmaya dönüşmüştür. Makale, krizi Soğuk Savaş döneminde ABD

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ile eski Sovyetler Birliği arasındaki rekabette çok yaygın bir şekilde başvurulan yöntem olan vekâlet savaşları teorisi çerçevesinde analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, Ukrayna krizinin Rusya ve Batılı Devletler arasında küresel hegemonya amacıyla yapılan bir vekâlet savaşı örneğini teşkil ettiğini ve sonucunun sadece Avrasya'dan ziyade tüm dünyanın güvenliğini etkileyeceğini öne sürmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: *Vekâlet Savaşı, Ukrayna Çatışmaları, Kırım.*

Introduction

Throughout history, war by proxy has been a common tactic for great powers to indirectly wage warfare against their opponents. Similarly, it played an important role in the competition between the US and the USSR for global hegemony in the Cold War era, especially after the advent of nuclear weapons. Both superpowers involved themselves in a massive struggle through the use of Third World countries as their proxies, without engaging in direct military conflict that could escalate into a dangerous total war including nuclear confrontation.

Indirect confrontation continued as the main form of warfare between the West and Russia after the Cold War, with non-state actors, especially terror organizations, emerging as the main proxies. Protracted civil wars as in Bosnia, Darfur, Rwanda, Georgia, and Syria became examples of the trend, with state and non-state actors engaged in violence while supported by external global and regional powers for their strategic interests. Another form of this West/Russian proxy warfare included the "Color Revolutions" and the so-called "Arab Spring," in which people were covertly organized to fight against the governments in question.

Street protests instigated in part covertly by the EU and US to remove the pro-Russian government in Ukraine engendered a strong reaction by Russia, which declared Ukraine's NATO or EU membership as a major threat to its national security. Russia invaded Crimea by sending in Special Forces units in uniform without insignia, with support by local pro-Russian Crimean organized by Russian covert agencies; subsequently Russia annexed the peninsula based on a controversial referendum as yet unacknowledged by many states. Russian-speaking inhabitants of eastern Ukraine, on the other hand, declared self- determination, triggering a protracted conflict against the Ukrainian government.

Thus, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine constitutes a fierce proxy war between western states and Russia for regional and global hegemony, rather than a civil war in Ukraine. Russian activities especially represent an excellent example of proxy warfare while western states preferred to focus on covert civilian movements. The fate of the conflicts will be based on the decisions of its supporters (the West and Russia) rather than the decision of the proxies (Ukraine and local separatists), reflecting one of the main principles of proxy warfare theory.

Proxy Warfare Theory

Most conflicts in the post-Cold-War era possess characteristics quite different from conventional warfare. Especially the conflicts in Ukraine, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan heralded a fundamental change in the nature of war, with irregular warfare emerging as the dominant form of warfare (Kiras, 2008: 304). Scholars felt compelled to describe these

conflicts via new warfare theories, such as proxy warfare, fourth generation warfare (4GW), hybrid warfare, low intensity warfare, asymmetrical warfare or compound warfare.

Proxy warfare is actually not a new phenomenon in international politics (Hughes, 2012: 2), representing instead a perennial strand in the history of warfare. (Mumford, 2013a: 1) Throughout history, states or empires have opted to encourage their proxies to attack strong adversaries for their political and military interests, refraining from direct military confrontation. As Mumford (2013: 45) put it, "the alluring combination of plausible deniability and lower risk has ensured that proxy wars are attractive to states seeking to defend or expand their interests or ideology."

Proxy warfare is defined as "an international conflict between two foreign powers, fought out on the soil of a third country; disguised as a conflict over an internal issue of that country; and using some of that country's manpower, resources and territory as a means for achieving preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies" (Deutsch, 1964: 102). Proxy wars are logical replacements for states seeking to further their own strategic goals while at the same time avoiding costly and bloody direct warfare. (Mumford, 2013: 41) Therefore it has been regarded as relatively cheap, risk free, and easy for states who have the power to enlist weaker states or groups to fight for their interests.

Proxy warfare especially played a crucial role in preventing direct engagement between the US and former USSR especially after the advent of nuclear weapons in 1945, "as the shadow of nuclear war ensured more acute selectivity in the conflict engagement given the consequences of a potential

nuclear exchange." (Mumford, 2013a: 2) As Craig (2010: 33) underlined, during the Cold War, the term 'proxy warfare' was used to refer to the superpowers' use of allied factions or states to pursue their global rivalry outside the strictures of Northern-Hemisphere nuclear deterrence.

The competition between the US and the USSR for global dominance during the Cold War was reflected in a series of proxy wars. As Ferrante (2008: 412) pointed out, during the Cold War the US and USSR took part in as many as 120 proxy wars fought in developing countries and falling short of direct, full scale military engagement. State actors of the Third World emerged as the main proxies of both sides in this period.

The Cold War witnessed many proxy wars between the US and the USSR. To the US government, the conflict in Korea was essentially proxy warfare to be waged against Kim II-Sung, a lesser opponent, in order to send a warning to Stalin, a far more powerful enemy. (Pearlmen, 2008: 65) Involvement of superpowers transformed civil war in Angola into the archetypal proxy war. (Rauta and Mumford, 2017: 100) In the 1980s, the US government began funneling aid to mujahedeen rebels in Afghanistan as part of an American proxy war against the Soviet Union. (Turse, 2012: 67)

On the other hand, both the West and the USSR repeatedly accused each other of sponsoring and supporting terrorism, and indeed, of secretly directing or controlling actions of ostensibly autonomous terrorist groups. (Innes, 2012: 2) The story revealed by the Cold War archives of the former Soviet Union has almost invariably been one in which the supposed 'proxies' or 'surrogates' of both powers efficiently manipulated their

sponsors at least as often, or more often, as they themselves were controlled or manipulated. (Marshall, 2016: 185)

In the post-Cold-War era, proxy warfare retained its importance as the main form of warfare between global and regional powers. As Mumford (2013: 45) argues, "modern-day proxy wars have become arm's-length 'effects-based operations' whereby a specific objective is desired (such as the downfall of an authoritarian regime) without risking foreseen consequences (conflict escalation with a rival superpower, for example) and at an acceptable monetary cost (an increasingly important factor given the state of the contemporary global economy) – all of which is achieved without a state having to directly commit military forces of its own." Because of the lower risk and lower cost of conflict engagement, non-state actors including terrorist groups and, more recently, private security companies have been used as proxies in the post-Cold-War era. (Mumford, 2013a: 4: Erol, 2007: 83.) Fort this reason proxy warfare is also called "warfare on the cheap." Highlighting this economical aspect of proxy warfare, Marshall (2016: 190) argues that "the role of cycles in the global economy may have as much a role to play in the recurrence of proxy warfare".

Modern civil wars are frequently fed by competing external supporters who use local proxies as part of a larger regional or even global struggle. (Estrin and Shapiro, 2014) Many scholars have described ongoing conflicts as proxy warfare between the West and Russia. For Berryman, (2011: 234) the August conflict in Georgia was a war over NATO enlargement - in effect a proxy war between Russia and the US. Rekha

(2017: 62) argued, for example, that the US and Russia were involved in proxy war in Afghanistan, pointing to Pakistan as the American proxy. Cockburn (2016) states that in particular the US and Russia fought an inconclusive proxy war in Syria, until the capture of Mosul by ISIS in June 2014.

One of the most important characteristics of proxy warfare is non-attribution. Much proxy warfare occurs in a covert or at least invisible environment in which attribution is hard to place. (Innes, 2012: IV) As Long (2018: 45) states, the sponsor of the proxy is unknown or at least can plausibly deny charges of support. Thus although known by all, none of the sponsors are directly blamed for support of the proxy in a way that could perhaps instigate direct warfare.

However, it is worth noting that technological developments in intelligence, reconnaissance, and information technology increased capabilities of detecting the support system for proxies in proxy warfare. As we have witnessed, Russian support for eastern Ukraine has been followed and detected by NATO through satellite systems and published online in order to pressure Russia internationally. (Lamothe, 2014) Similarly, Russia revealed videos of secret and dirty cooperation between ISIS and the US in Syria, highlighting that ISIS, in essence, has been functioning as a proxy for the US. (Sputnik News, 2017)

Proxy Warfare in Ukraine

At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, NATO leaders declared that Ukraine and Georgia would become members of the Alliance and decided to

begin a period of intensive engagement with both states at a high political level. It was the strongest commitment of the Alliance to membership by both states, which Russia regarded as its backyard. Already worried about more expansion of NATO eastward, the Russian leadership strongly opposed the decision, with Vladimir Putin threatening to re-target Russian missiles at the country if Ukraine joined NATO and accepted foreign military bases. Georgian membership in NATO was also described as crossing a red line for Russia. (Popeski and Antidze, 2008)

Operations by Georgian troops, with Western support, in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to restore its territorial integrity, however, resulted in the involvement of Russian troops and the occupation of Georgia by Russia, creating frozen conflicts in both breakaway regions. Georgia's hope for membership in the Alliance has slipped away to an unknown point of time and the Georgian government has completely lost control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which later declared independence officially and were recognized as such by Russia.

Ukraine experienced the same fate as Georgia, with street protests in 2014 (backed by Western states) to remove the pro-Russian government triggering rapid and decisive military action by Russia. The result was a new Cold-War-style confrontation between Russia and the West, especially the US and NATO, including deployment of new nuclear weapons and long-range missiles.

The conflict in Ukraine can be analyzed in three different phases. First, street protests in Ukraine covertly supported by Western states, especially the EU and the US, against the pro-Russian government. Second,

the invasion of Crimea with involvement of Russian troops supported by local pro-Russian Crimean and illegal annexation based on a controversial referendum. Finally, ongoing conflicts in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian government forces supported by Western states and Russian-backed separatists, which most likely will result in a "frozen conflict" as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Many scholars and politicians described Russian military activities in Ukraine, especially the activities of Russian Special Forces and pro-Russian locals in Crimea, as "hybrid warfare". The Wales Summit Declaration of NATO also described Russian military activities in Crimea as hybrid warfare. However, Erol and Oguz (2015: 275) argued that Russian military activities included more than those defined by hybrid warfare theory and argued that "Russia's hybrid warfare in annexing Crimea presented an intriguing case study for hybrid warfare theorists, since Russia's example has achieved distinctive results that are unprecedented in several ways."

Rauta and Mumford on the other hand argued that "Crimea cannot be equated with a proxy war as it was a covert action carried out with the support of local auxiliaries, and which later turned into a military intervention while the situation in Eastern Ukraine, on the other hand, displays characteristics of a proxy war as the separatist rebels are trained and supported by intervening actors" (Rauta and Mumford, 2017: 102) This points up the differences between the invasion of Crimea by Russia and conflicts in eastern Ukraine in the framework of proxy warfare theory.

However, the street protests that resulted in regime change and triggered the crisis and ongoing conflicts in eastern Ukraine (centered on pro-Russian enclaves in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions) are not well described in the framework of hybrid warfare. Both cases are examples of proxy warfare between the West and Russia, rather than civil war in Ukraine. Strutt (2014: 252), for example, defined the events in Kiev streets as proxy warfare between the West and Russia, while Horsfield (2017: 176) argued that we are witnessing US-Russia proxy warfare centered on pro-Russian enclaves in eastern Ukraine.

Robert Heinsch (2015: 360), on the other hand, analyses conflicts in Ukraine based on the arguments of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its 1986 Nicaragua and 2007 Genocide judgments, and in the 1999 International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) Tadić appeals judgment. He argues that "while greater clarity of information would be desirable, it seems likely that the situation in eastern Ukraine can be qualified as an internationalized non-international armed conflict, i.e., an original non-international armed conflict, which, through the indirect influence of Russia and the support it is providing to, and control it is exercising over, the pro-Russian separatists, has become an international armed conflict," while highlighting that it is not clear "whether this represents the beginning of the rampant proxy wars that characterized the Cold War."

Western Proxy Warfare against Russia

War by proxy has been a very common method for Western states, especially for the US, for centuries. However, as Pearlmen (2008: 65) pointed out, Americans would not coin the term until mid-1955 although engaged in proxy war before and after the Berlin blockade. For the US especially, intensifying involvement in world politics, proxy warfare was regarded as crucial policy for strategic outcomes. President Dwight Eisenhower called proxy wars "the cheapest insurance in the world" (Mumford, 2013: 41)

The USSR nuclear test of 1949 resulted in the emergence of "nuclear standoff", later formulized in the Mutual Assured Doctrine (MAD), urging the US with support of other western states to engage with the USSR indirectly via proxies. The western states invented several methods to organize and support its proxies in the Third World. The US utilized, for example, what they called "foreign assistance programs" as their tool for waging proxy warfare through indirect financial and material support for Third World allies engaged in intra- or interstate wars with communist opponents. (Mumford, 2013a: 100)

As we have seen, western proxy warfare played an important role in the competition between Russia and the West for global dominance after the Cold War. Street protests supported by western covert units to topple pro-Russian regimes in the states Russia regarded as its backyard such as Kyrgyzstan, Georgia or Ukraine, the so-called Color Revolutions, emerged as the main tool for the west to indirectly confront Russia. Russia regarded the Color Revolutions as an open proxy war waged by the West, with

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu summarizing the Russian view when he said, "The Color Revolutions are increasingly taking on the form of warfare and are developed according to the rules of war craft." (Golts, 2014a)

Although officially denied by the Western countries, many scholars accused the West of being the perpetrator of the street protests in Ukraine in 2014. Mearsheimer (2014: 1), for example, points to the Orange Revolution in 2004 as the beginning of Western involvement, arguing that "according to the prevailing wisdom in the West, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression…. But this account is wrong: the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis." Cohen (2015) supports him, claiming that mistakes in American policies against Russia triggered the crisis in Ukraine, and the crisis is not only Putin's fault. Milne (2014) argues that it's not Russia that pushed Ukraine to the brink of war, and the attempt to lever Kiev into the Western camp by ousting an elected leader made conflict certain.

American officials also accepted the western state's role in the crisis. President Obama admitted that the US "had brokered a deal to transition power in Ukraine." (CNN, 2015) US assistant secretary of state Victoria Nuland confirmed that the US had invested in total "over $5 billion" to "ensure a secure and prosperous and democratic Ukraine" - she specifically congratulated the "Euromaidan" movement. (Ahmed, 2014) On the other hand, George Soros, who is mainly noted for investments in other countries to shape the political atmosphere in American favor, stated that he "set up a foundation in Ukraine before Ukraine became independent of Russia, and

the foundation has been functioning ever since and played an important part in the Ukrainian crisis." (CNN, 2014)

When conflicts erupted in eastern Ukraine between Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed local separatists, the West declared open political support for Ukraine while providing overt and covert military support for Ukrainian troops. John Brennan, director of the CIA visited Kiev in April 2014, only a few weeks after the conflict started, and offered "non-lethal" assistance, almost certainly kit to counter Russian jamming and protect their own communications. (Norton-Taylor, 2014) The US intensified its aid over time, providing about $750 million in nonlethal arms to Ukraine in 2016, including body armor, night-vision equipment, radios and Humvees, as well as radar to pinpoint the location of enemy mortars. (Gordon, 2017) The EU states also provided military equipment for the Ukrainian government. The At the beginning of 2018, Trump administration stated that they plan to send lethal defensive weapons.

As for the invisible side of the war, it is certain that the West covertly supported Ukrainian troops to fight Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine; this is one of the natural tools for proxy warfare. It is highly unlikely that the West will be able to reverse the situation in Crimea or enable the Ukrainian government to control eastern Ukraine, but western state's proxy war against Russia would enable retention of the pro-Western government in power, which is crucial for continued NATO-Ukraine relations. That said, it is not likely that the West will militarily confront Russia for the sake of Ukraine's future.

Russian Proxy Warfare against the West

Fighting its adversaries through proxies, especially via Orthodox countries, has been a common method Russia has resorted to for centuries. Creation of Balkan states such as Bulgaria (Roman, 2003: 412) or Caucasian states such as Armenia (Cannon, 2016) was supported by the Russian Empire as a means of extending Russian influence by proxy. And at the end of the Russian Civil War, the first Soviet leader, Lenin, dwelt on the phenomenon of 'proxy conflict' on the Soviet Union's western frontiers as both a serious governmental challenge and as a means of political pressure on the Soviet Union's nearest Western neighbors. (Marshall, 2015: 185)

During the Cold War, Soviet leaders pledged rhetorical and often material support for many national liberation struggles. (Chapman, 2012: 337) In this way the USSR supported Third World countries, especially countries of the socialist bloc, politically, militarily and economically to fight the US and NATO or their proxies. The USSR fought proxy warfare against the US in Korea, Angola, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Vietnam and in many places around the globe for global dominance.

Russian proxy competition against the West continued after the Cold War, from Afghanistan to Bosnia Herzegovina. As Arduino (2018: 217) points out, "From the Russian standpoint, the role given in the military doctrine to proxy warfare has not changed since the time of the Soviet Union, only the actors." Iran, the Assad regime, and Shiite non-state actors emerged as the main Russian proxies in the Syrian conflict, the best known

and most recent proxy war between Russia and the West in the post-Cold-War era.

Ukraine emerged as the other main theater for Russian-West proxy warfare. Russia declared membership by Ukraine and Georgia in NATO as a red line for its national security, invaded Crimea, and annexed it based on a referendum. The annexation was condemned by Western states, which were regarded by western states as the main perpetrator of the crisis, but none of the steps taken by Western states effectively deterred the Russian military activities.

Russian-speaking locals in eastern Ukraine simultaneously attacked Ukrainian government troops, especially in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The unrest in eastern Ukraine emerged and continued as proxy war with the Donbas People's Militia and the Luhansk People's Militia emerging as Russian proxies on the ground. (Rauta and Mumford, 2017: 106)

Russia has provided weapons, ammunition and military equipment for separatists fighting the Western-backed Ukrainian regime forces. Golts (2014b) argues that several Ukrainian Army helicopters were shot down near Slovyansk by man-portable air-defense systems, or MANPADS, which most likely were brought in by units of Russia's special forces. Both Ukrainian and US officials accused Moscow of delivering surplus T-64 tanks and BM-21 multiple-rocket launchers to the pro-Russian separatists. (Deutsche Welle, 2014) The US and EU therefore imposed economic sanctions against Russia.

Russia deployed its conventional troops on the Ukrainian border and exercised several snap exercises on the Ukrainian border and simultaneously

in other parts of Russia in order to mask their main purpose. Snap exercises especially became the main tool to show the muscles of conventional capabilities. That constituted the main tool for intimidation and threat for Ukrainian regime to effectively fight against separatists in eastern Ukraine. This tactic played also an important role in the deterrence to NATO and the United States. Russian troops stayed on the Ukrainian border as the sword of Damocles until the annexation of Crimea was completed. (Erol and Oğuz, 2015: 269)

Moscow also proved remarkably effective in the use of non-military instruments of influence and diplomacy, which emphasized more-or-less plausible deniability in an effort to disable international responses and bolster domestic Russian support. (Allison, 2014: 1258) That included measures such as issuing Russian passports to the Russian speaking people in eastern Ukraine (to justify protecting 'its citizens abroad'), playing the energy card against Ukrainian government or information warfare with help of Russian language in Eastern Ukraine to undermine people's support in Eastern Ukraine for the central government and garner support of the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine

Irregular warfare has constituted the backbone of Russian military operations in eastern Ukraine. Russian irregular forces played a crucial role in the mass mobilization of the local population in eastern Ukraine, to destabilize the country and undermine the legitimacy of the legal government in the target country. (Oğuz, 2017: 8) As part of irregular operations, Russia evolved several methods to support separatists, such as humanitarian convoys despite warning by Western leaders that Russia is

using the humanitarian aid mission as a pretext for a military intervention in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. (Luhn, 2014) Russian President Vladimir Putin called Russian special units fighting in Eastern Ukraine alongside separatist "volunteers," denying involvement of Russian troops. (Oliphant and Sabur, 2015)

Therefore many scholars and politicians have described the ongoing conflicts in eastern Ukraine as Russian "proxy warfare" against the West. Blanks (2018) argues that "Putin is waging a proxy warfare against the West in Ukraine" while Peterson (2017) describes the conflicts in eastern Ukraine as "the forgotten proxy war Putin is fighting against the US and Europe." Golts (2014) on the other hand stated that "Russia is waging a proxy war in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine that it is bound to win."

Having declared Ukraine's membership in NATO as a red line, Russia did not hesitate to invade and annex Crimea or provide military support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, openly challenging the West as it had in Georgia. Therefore it is highly likely that Russian policies and decisiveness, rather than Western policies, will decide the future of Ukraine.

Conclusion

The West, especially the US, and the USSR engaged in a fierce struggle during the Cold War through their proxies around the globe, avoiding direct military confrontation that might escalate to nuclear war. They secretly provided support for conflicts in third countries, avoiding attribution for their involvement in the warfare. In the post-Cold-War era the West and Russia remained attached to this non-confrontation policy,

based as it was on proxy warfare mainly through non-state actors, especially terrorist groups. Western state's efforts to contain Russian influence via civil proxies in Central Asia, the Middle East or the Caucasus, by means of the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring resulted in protracted proxy warfare once Russia reacted strongly, as it did in Georgia and Syria.

The Ukrainian crisis ended the relatively peaceful period between the West and Russia, resulting in adaptation of Cold-War-style policies by NATO and Russia. NATO leaders accepted the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and provided the most significant reinforcement of NATO's collective defense since the end of the Cold War, while Russia reinforced military forces at its borders with NATO states, including deployment of Iskander missiles in the Kaliningrad enclave. Both side also increased naval forces and military activities in the Black Sea region, while annexation of Crimea provided a vital Navy base for Russia forever. Thus the Ukrainian crisis launched a new version of the Cold War between Russia and the Alliance led by the US.

Many scholars described ongoing conflicts in Ukraine as an example of proxy warfare between the West and Russia. It is clear that there is a fierce competition between western states and Russia in Ukraine rather than between pro-Western and pro-Russian Ukrainians. However, western activities focused on covert support for pro-western Ukrainian government fall short of being a proxy warfare if compared to Russian political and especially military activities that represent a good example of proxy warfare theory.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Devletler ve imparatorluklar zaman zaman güçlü rakipleri ile doğrudan sıcak savaşa girmek yerine üçüncü devletleri savaşmak zorunda bırakarak kendi hedeflerine ulaşmayı amaçlamışlardır. Ancak "Vekâlet Savaşları" ya da "Vekiller Yoluyla Savaş" olarak adlandırılan bu savaş yöntemine özellikle Soğuk Savaş döneminde ABD ve eski Sovyetler Birliği arasında nükleer savaşla bile sonuçlanma ihtimali olan doğrudan bir sıcak bir çatışmadan kaçınmak amacıyla sıkça başvurulmuştur. Bazı yazarların ifade ettiği gibi özellikle her iki devletin de nükleer silah elde etmesi bu konuda milat olmuş ve nükleer silahlar doğrudan bir savaşın önündeki en büyük engeli teşkil etmiştir. Kore Savaşından Angola'daki iç savaşa kadar geniş bir alanda uygulama alanı bulan "vekâlet savaşları" ile bu iki süper güç küresel ve bölgesel egemenlik mücadelesini doğrudan çatışmaya girmeyecek şekilde vekiller aracılığıyla sürdürmüşlerdir.

ABD ve Rusya Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde de bu politikalarını devam ettirmiş ve küresel hegemonya mücadelelerini yine vekâlet savaşları üzerinden yürütmeyi tercih etmişlerdir. Bosna Hersek'te Müslümanlara yönelik yürütülen soykırımdan Suriye'de halen devam eden çatışmalara kadar çok farklı bölgelerde bu iki devlet arasındaki mücadele vekiller aracılığıyla devam etmiştir. Bu dönemde iç savaşlar ve başta terör örgütleri olmak üzere devlet dışı aktörler vekâlet savaşlarının temel unsurları olarak karşımıza çıkmıştır. "Renkli Devrimler" ya da "Arap Baharı" adı verilen olaylarda net bir şekilde görüldüğü gibi batılı devletler özellikle de ABD ve AB gizli bir şekilde sivil halk hareketlerini organize ederek ve yönlendirerek Rusya'ya karşı vekâlet savaşları yürütmüştür.

NATO'nun 2008 yılında Bükreş'te yapılan liderler zirvesinde Gürcistan ve Ukrayna'nın üyeliğine yönelik resmi taahhüdü, bu iki devletin ittifaka üyeliğinin ulusal çıkarları ve güvenliği açısından kırmızı çizgi olduğunu her fırsatta dile getiren Rusya için bir dönüm noktası teşkil etmiştir. ABD'nin Gürcistan'da

Rusya'ya karşı yürüttüğü vekâlet savaşı Rusya'nın Gürcistan'a askeri müdahalesi ile sonuçlanmış ve aslında Abhazya ve Güney Osetya'da tekrar kontrolü sağlamak üzere harekete geçen Gürcü hükümeti bu iki bölge üzerindeki hâkimiyeti tamamen kaybetmiştir. Rusya bağımsızlıklarını ilan eden Güney Osetya ve Abhazya'yı resmen tanırken, Gürcistan'ın NATO'ya üyelik hayalleri başka bahara kalmıştır. Rusya'ya karşı Gürcistan hükümetini destekleyen ABD ise bir anlamda bu vekalet savaşını kaybetmiştir.

Uzun süredir NATO ve AB'ye üye olma umudunu taşıyan Ukrayna halkı da Gürcistan halkının kaderini paylaşmış ve ABD ile Rusya arasında yürütülen bölgesel ve küresel rekabetin kurbanı olmuştur. Ukrayna'da Rus yanlısı iktidarı devirmek amacıyla ABD ve AB'nin gizli desteği ile başlatılan sokak gösterileri ülkede çok büyük bir krizin başlamasına yol açmış ve Gürcistan'da olduğu gibi Ukrayna'nın AB ve özellikle NATO'ya üyeliğini kırmızı çizgisi olarak ilan eden Rusya'nın sert tepkisi ile sonuçlanmıştır. Rusya, Rus yanlısı Kırım halkının desteğini arkasına alan Özel Kuvvetler Birlikleri başta olmak üzere askeri birliklerini kullanarak kendisi açısından stratejik öneme sahip Kırım'ı işgal etmiş ve müteakip dönemde yapılan tartışmalı referandum ile Rusya'ya bağlamıştır. Ukrayna Abhazya ve Güney Osetya'da yaşandığı şekilde Kırım'ın kontrolünü tamamen kaybetmiş ve Ukrayna krizin başlamasına yol açan sokak gösterilerini organize eden batılı devletlerden bu aşamada somut bir yardım görmemiştir.

Kırım'daki olaylarla eş zamanlı olarak Ukrayna'nın doğusunda yer alan, Rusça konuşan halkın ve Rus etnik yapısının hakim olduğu Donetsk ve Luhansk bölgelerinde Rusya yanlısı ayrılıkçılar ile Ukrayna hükümeti birlikleri arasında çatışmalar yaşanmaya başlanmıştır. Rusya çeşitli yöntemlerle ayrılıkçılara her türlü askerî malzeme ve silah desteği sağlarken ABD Ukrayna hükümetinin yanında yer aldığını açıkça ilan etmiş ve Ukrayna hükümeti birliklerine önemli ölçüde askeri yardım sağlamıştır. Çatışmalar 2014 yılından beri devam etmektedir ve Ukrayna hükümeti bölgede henüz kontrolü sağlayamamıştır. Rusya bölgedeki krizi ve

çatışmaları devam ettirerek "dondurulmuş çatışma" haline getirmeyi ve bölgede diğer birçok yerde uyguladığı gibi bu bölgeyi politik bir baskı ve pazarlık aracı haline getirmeyi planlamaktadır.

Bu açıdan Ukrayna krizinin genel olarak Rus yanlısı iktidarı devirmeye yönelik sokak gösterileri, Kırım'ın işgal ve ilhakı ile Ukrayna'nın doğusunda Ukrayna hükümeti ve Rusya yanlısı ayrılıkçılar arasında hâlen devam eden çatışmalar olmak üzere üç ana safhadan meydana geldiği ileri sürülmektedir. Aynı şekilde, birbirinin devamı niteliğinde olsa da her safhanın farklı özelliklere ve karakteristiklere sahip olduğu iddia edilmektedir.

Rusya'nın Ukrayna krizine müdahale esnasındaki ve özellikle de Kırım'ı işgal ve ilhakına yönelik uyguladığı alışılagelmedik ve gayrı nizami harp teknikleri ağırlıklı askerî stratejisi genel olarak "karma savaş" ya da "birleşik savaş" olarak adlandırılmıştır. Her ne kadar tanımı konusunda tam bir uzlaşı sağlayamamış olsa da özellikle NATO Rusya'nın savaş stratejisi için resmi olarak karma savaş tabirini kullanmayı tercih etmiştir. Diğer yandan, krizin esas başlangıç noktasını teşkil eden sokak gösterileri safhası ABD'nin ve AB'nin Rusya'ya karşı uyguladığı bir vekâlet savaşı olarak nitelendirilirken Ukrayna'nın doğusundaki çatışmalar Rusya'nın batıya ve özellikle ABD'ye karşı bir vekâlet savaşı olarak adlandırılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak; Ukrayna krizinin farklı safhalardan oluştuğu ve bu safhaların farklı özelliklere sahip olduğu şeklinde görüşler olsa da Ukrayna krizi bir bütün halinde incelenmeli ve analiz edilmelidir. ABD ve AB batı yanlısı halkı ve Ukrayna hükümetini, Rusya ise Rusya yanlısı ayrılıkçıları vekil olarak desteklemekte ve savaş Rusya ve ABD'yi doğrudan sıcak savaşa dönüştürmeyecek şekilde bu vekiller arasında devam etmektedir. Her iki taraf ta askeri unsurlarının açıktan çatışmalara müdahil olmasından kaçınmakta ve vekillerini savaştırarak stratejik amaçlarına ulaşmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında Ukrayna krizi, ABD ve Rusya arasında Soğuk Savaşın sona ermesinden beri vekâlet

savaşları şeklinde devam eden küresel ve bölgesel rekabetin önemli bir safhasını teşkil etmektedir.

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