Changing the character of proxy warfare and its consequences for geopolitical relationships

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Abstract

The main purpose of the article is to examine the causal relationship between key elements of the geostrategic environment (i.e. political, military, and technological) and the changes in the characteristics of proxy force. Qualitative data analysis is used to identify the geopolitical environment conditions, actors, and their relationship. The causal analysis between key elements of the geopolitical environment, such as politics, military, and technological, therefore influences how proxy forces change character. The findings imply that the contemporary geopolitical environment is changing the character of the proxies. They can be used as multipurpose forces depending on the desired strategic outcome. The results advocate that proxies have a global reach beyond the traditional battlefield. These capabilities allow proxies to be used in a wide range of political, economic, and military activities, especially in peacetime, and, therefore, influencing, changing, and damaging the state's mutual relationships. Despite differences between several theoretical perspectives of security theories, many concur on the low desirability of proxy force. The changing characteristics of proxy war allow state and non-state actors to wage war with a minimal use of force, or none at all, beyond the traditional battlefield. Political violence demonstrated through proxy force to fulfil foreign policy goals has become even more violent. In such action, disregarding the sustainable strategic goal can easily damage the state's international relations and threaten international and regional stability. The overall findings show the urgency for a more holistic approach in the analysis of proxy warfare as part of security studies and military operations.

Keywords:

Introduction

Proxy warfare has dominated the scenery as the most preferred tool for war fighting since the end of World War II (WWII). In contemporary complex settings, proxy warfare is a product of mutual relationships between actors, as well as the surrounding conditions, and has an influence within any given geostrategic environment. Changes to the variables of the geostrategic environment are therefore in direct correlation with changes to proxy forces. Consequently, substantial changes are evident in the characteristics that make proxy forces, more efficient and flexible. Although proxy warfare has been a part of military operations for a decade, it was never analysed as part of security studies or warfighting. Contemporary complex geostrategic competition have positioned proxy forces as the first allure of states pursuing strategic outcomes that are outside of the public eye and off the defense budget. The article argues that changes to the key elements of the geostrategic environment directly shapes and influences changes to proxy forces. As a starting point, this article takes Andrew Mumford's definition that "proxy wars are the product of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and the chosen proxies who are the conduit for the benefactor's weapons, training, and funding" (Mumford, 2013). Likewise, the analysis is delimited to the political, warfighting and technology spectrums as key elements of the geostrategic environment that will examine in correlations to changes of proxy force.

Although extensive academic research has examined the dynamics of proxy warfare as relationships between states or non-state actors as benefactors and proxies as conduits for the benefactor's goals (Mumford, 2013; Turse, 2012; Cragin, 2015; Cleveland and Egel, 2020; Fox, 2019; Ahram, 2011; Groh, 2019; Innes, 2012), much less research has been conducted to investigate the causal relationship between the geostrategic environment and changes that happen to the proxy force (Mumford, 2013). The growing capability of the proxy force to act beyond the traditional battlefield conveys the need for research into the dynamic of changes of character of the proxy force. This need is illustrated in many ways, such as the increasing numbers of trained proxies from Asia through the Middle East, Africa and South America. The US alone is involved in more than 97 countries training proxy forces (Turse, 2012, pp.147–152). In the last decade, Russia and Iran have increased their involvement in training and sponsoring proxy forces too. At the same time, many states, including the US and EU member states, often experience protests and revolts against their respective governments that are led by numerous different groups and organisations. Evidently, the civil unrest and division of societies are opening a window of opportunity for any group or individual with malicious intent to act as a proxy force.

The main purpose of the article is to examine the causal relationship between key elements of the geostrategic environment (i.e. political, military and technological), and the changes in the characteristics of proxy forces. This article aims to go beyond a mere analysis of what a proxy force is and its engagement on the traditional battlefield, as current literature analyses proxy forces and methods of warfare in the traditional settings of war. However, warfighting is only one realm of the geostrategic environment. The politics, economy, geography, society, information and technology, physical environment and time are variables that influence changes in the geopolitical environment too. The holistic approach to the analysis of the geostrategic environment is missing in the field of proxy forces. Hence, the article accentuates a different approach to examining proxy forces in correlation with the key elements of the geostrategic environment.

To further our understanding, the article examines political, warfighting and technological elements of the geostrategic environment that induce direct changes to the characteristics of a proxy force. The research questions driving the analysis are:

 - How do changes in the political realm affect the character of the proxy force?

- How do changes in the warfighting realm affect the character of the proxy force?

- How is technological innovation altering the proxy force?

In addition, this research is delimited to politics, warfighting and technology which are by far the most directly produce changes to character of the proxy force in contemporary geopolitical environment but are under-researched.

The article follows a simple structure. Primarily, it identifies the key changes derived from politics, warfighting and technological innovations. Secondly, it identifies the effect that is altering the character of the proxy force, followed by examples that are beyond the traditional battlefield.

Key changes in the political environment

The political realm of the geopolitical environment is under heavy pressure from the populace. Some people have lost trust in their governments, and this erosion of trust of governments is dividing societies and making states vulnerable to proxy warfare.

This distrust is coming from three major areas in which governments have failed their citizens. First, the widening gap of inequalities; the decreasing wealth of the middle class and rising poverty. Second, people's voices are being considered less and less in government decisions. Third, promotion of migration has led to the fear that society is rapidly and ethnically changing. According to a Pew Research Center study, in which the level of satisfaction of the citizens of 26 countries with regard to their democracies is measured, citizens of 24 countries asserted that they were dissatisfied with how their countries are run by politicians (Wike *et al.*, 2019). Delving deeper, Eatwell and Goodwin, in their book 'National Populism; Revolt against the liberal democracy', examine trends that are making democratic societies unstable and unpredictable (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018). Common for both studies is the ideological division of societies stemming from a lack of trust in the politician and the political system. Political upheaval is dividing societies and thus making people susceptible to external influence. Presently, wars are predominantly fought in a population-centric manner, yet internal political divisions offer windows of opportunities for adversary states to employ proxy forces, sponsoring any state or non-state actors that have strategic interests.

Divisions in societies are a direct result of how politicians run state affairs. This is a trend that is becoming increasingly easier to identify in western countries. "Since 2006, democracy in the world has been trending downward. A number of liberal democracies are becoming less liberal, and authoritarian regimes are developing more repressive tendencies" (Diamond, 2020, p.1). The rising political elites promote distrust in politicians and state institutions where the voice of the people is increasingly silenced.

The scholars, Martin Gilens and Professor Benjamin Page of Northwestern University, in their study published by Princeton in 2014 analysed 1,799 policy issues in detail. Their conclusion was that the American public have a miniscule, statistically insignificant, influence over policies that US governments adopt (Gilens and Page, 2014). The same trend exists in Europe, too.

In the EU, distrust in politicians has been growing since the recession in 2008, as the intensifying sovereign debt crisis tore into the European markets. It painted an image

that Brussels had disconnected from the opinion of its member states. Regardless of this, several EU countries had to take harsh austerity measures to safeguard the EU's financial stability (Deutsche Welle, 2008). Implementation of these measures has had big political implications since. In Italy, there was a change of government spearheaded by the former EU Commissioner Mario Monti. He immediately increased taxes and extended the pension age, making it easier to sack workers. As a result, Monti lost the election in 2013, in part due to the "Vaffancullo Day", a movement against corrupt politicians in Italy (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, pp. 102–103).

The situation was even worse in Greece, as national debt put Greece on the brink of bankruptcy and led to a debate on the country leaving the Eurozone. However, since the EU's credibility is only as good as the unity of its members, it put pressure on the Greek government to take harsh austerity measures that fuelled riots across the country (BBC, 2012). The rioters' dissatisfaction was not just with the government that implemented harsh measures but also with the pressure put on it by the EU. In both Italy and Greece, over 2/3 of the population share the belief that their voices in the EU no longer counts (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, p. 104). Interestingly, the reasons for the protests that broke-out in other parts of the world were also similar in nature.

Street protests shook the capitals of Chile, Colombia, Honduras and Peru. All protestors shared the same reasons for revolting against the political elites governing their countries. The failure to address economic stagnation, politicisation of judiciaries, increased corruption and organised crime have resulted in political instability and societal divisions to deferent groups. Political elites are ignoring people's voices that are seeking revision of economic and governance systems (Shifter, 2020). For several decades, the political class has become rooted in their respective governments. Regardless of the political party, any elected politician focused on retaining their political power and influence. It seems like voting in elections makes no difference (The Dialog, 2019).

The Effect

The trend of political instability is dividing societies and creating conditions for individuals and groups to be deployed as proxies. There are three major effects these changes in the political environment have resulted in. Firstly, these changes are leaving western states exposed to proxy influence by adversaries. Secondly, these changes have fuelled a shift in the international system from bipolarity to multipolarity. Thirdly, it has led to the strengthening of political decisions to pursue any strategic outcome without direct confrontation.

Many Western states are struggling with tensions in their domestic affairs in the shape of political polarisation that is dividing societies into different groups of political ideologies and therefore promoting distrust. As a result, Western states are, now, more vulnerable to proxy influence than ever before. Suspected Russian involvement in the 2016 US elections has shown that even today and even the US is not safe from global proxy forces (Alina, 2019). The second order effect from these allegations have led the way for the US to become politically polarised and have given rise to distrust in the democratic political process and the politicians, and further boosted the division of society. In France, close contact with a Russian bank to get financial support during the elections contributed to Le Pen's loss of the elections and positioned her party in the grey area of Russian cross-border financing, organised crime, money laundering and military operations (Sonne, 2018). Moreover, Germany was targeted by active Russian influence during the election in 2017 hinting that even a leading country in the EU is vulnerable. The Russian strategic goal was to influence Germany as a leading voice in EU policy-making over the Middle

East, Crimea, and Ukraine which would directly affect the Russian position in the region (Stelzenmuller, 2017). The implied conclusion here is that Russia has increased its activities by directly targeting the leaders of democracies and their domestic vulnerabilities stemming from the political division of societies in those Western countries.

Smaller states within Europe, such as the ones in Western Balkans, are in a more difficult situation. They are stuck between the strategic interests of great powers. They are also are in a state of prolonged political instability that could transform them into weak states, or some of the already weak states into failed states. The emerging ideological contests have opened a window of opportunity for adversary states to threaten another state's domestic interests by using subversion (Cleveland, 2020, p. xiv). Increasing proxy capacity to effectively target the state's security system and disrupt foreign policy actions has led to global power disbalance.

The US National Intelligence Council (2012) predicted in the year 2012 that diffusion of power will dominate the years to come. There are two main factors that contribute to diffusion of power. The first is globalisation through its enabler that is the liberalisation of economies. As a result, globalisation is reshaping international relations between states, strengthening multinational corporations and individual interests that have a stake in proxy conflict outcomes (Rondeaux and Sterman, 2019). The result is the creation of amorphous networks of states, corporations or organisations that have shared strategic interests. The Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) alliance has emerged as the global economic and political power that is significantly influential in shaping the geopolitical environment (Nuruzzaman, 2019). The second factor is the US decision to re-define its role in the global arena. The second order effect of the US abandoning the global leadership role has allowed many states in the region to act independently and pushed them to strengthen their influence in shaping the regional relationships according to their national interests. Furthermore, traditional adversaries Russia and China have gained more freedom of operation and access to many countries where they can assume the role of proxy.

China, with mighty economic and military capabilities, is the biggest rival facing the US at the moment. It is predicted that China has the potential to become the largest economy, capable of surpassing US by 2030 (NIC, 2019). Different than the US, China's strategy is playing the long game with the aim of managing the time element and securing long-term goals. More importantly, China has the potential to exploit proxies as it has sway on both the interests and ideologies of numerous other countries (Mumford, 2013). For example, China utilised the port of Piraeus in Greece to secure its interests and dominate the European market. They signed an agreement with Greece for an investment of over 600 million euros in the port of Piraeus in 2008 to enable China Ocean Shipping Company - COSCO to use two main container terminals for 35 years (Van Der Made, 2019); thus leaving a strong footprint and instantly becoming a competitor on the EU market. They are exploiting any individuals, groups or organisations, including political parties and politicians, to act as proxies to secure their strategy for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In this complex environment, avoiding direct confrontation with opponent states or adversaries have proven successful. It seems that this will dominate political decision-making and military action in the future.

The dynamics of changes in the geopolitical environment is creating a window of opportunity for states to pursue their strategic interests without direct confrontation. Engaging a proxy force at any level to exploit the opportunity to disrupt the activities or limit the influence of adversary states have been proven to inflict less political damage to politicians and cost less than traditional military deployment. The second order effect is the potential undermining of the state's international relations. In the past decade, conflicts

in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan have been dominated by the indirect confrontations of great powers and regional states by proxy forces. However, these have had a high price and risked damaging bilateral and multilateral relationships between the countries. The damaged relationship between the US and Turkey over the deployment of proxy forces is one example. The US have been supporting the Kurdish People's Protection Unit – YPG in Syria, the longtime antagonist of Turkey. Knowing that YPG cannot bring a sustainable strategic win over ISIS, the politically motivated US proceeded to legitimise its support. The problem was given added complexity when domestic political pressure from the opposition party was put on the current US administration to meet with YPG leader Gen. Mazloum in DC (Van Der Made, 2019). Using proxy force as a tool for internal political purposes further undermines bilateral relationships with Turkey.

Changing character of warfare

The dynamics of the outcome of the war (winning or losing) will change the characteristics of any proxy warfare because of the limited role of the conventional army and the rise of private military companies as multi-level assets.

The security apparatus of each state is designed to fight the Great Power competition of the 20th century (Cleveland, 2020, p. xix). Finally edging the USSR, the US military has reigned over the security environment since the end of the Cold War. Obviously, the lessons learned from the conflicts fought in the last few decades of the 20th century in South East Asia, South America and the Middle East are not yet fully comprehended, since some of the same mistakes are repeated over again. Prolonged conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are perfect examples. Conventional armies were deployed to fight revolutionaries, guerrillas, and terrorists. There were numerous tactical successes without the securement of a long-term strategic win. Winning and losing in such conflicts are defined by the control and the influence exerted on the domestic populace, and not by the domination of a territory (Cleveland, 2020, p. iii). Additionally, since 9/11, the American strategy of preemptive war followed by aggressive nation-building have proven that using a conventional army to rebuild destabilised states is politically very unpopular and a costly endeavour without a guaranteed positive outcome. Moreover, this endeavour has put additional pressure on policymakers to revise the role of the Conventional Army and the defence budget. As a result, states are presently looking for alternative solutions to the extensive use of proxy forces to secure a strategic outcome as geopolitical competition is increasing in intensity.

The contemporary security environment is characterised by unconventional traits such as transnational crime organisations, social movements, transnational terrorist organisations and guerrillas with global reach. Any answer from the nation states by conventional means will be limited, unsustainable, come with huge political risk and could wreak havoc (Robb, 2000, p. 234). There are two main reasons that will limit the role of the Conventional Army and support the increased use of proxy forces in future conflicts:

The first is Global interconnection. Globalisation with its proponent of a free-market system is making states interconnected and interdependent. The global economy and social relationships make states integral to the global community which minimises the possibility of becoming a target for conventional invasion (Robb, 2007, p. 57). States are exploiting free market opportunities and to do so, they enter into economic alliances to secure profits. In turn, the direct effect behind economic cooperation is positive political relationships between states (Long and Leeds, 2006, pp. 433–451). Nevertheless, geopolitical competition over strategic outcomes still persists between states and within economic alliances. Global interconnection and multinational institutions are

reducing the friction over the next conventional war. Furthermore, international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), even with their limited character, have been given the role of granting the legitimacy in warfare (Robb, 2007, p. 57). On the other hand, globalisation is offering extraordinary opportunities and the means for transnational terrorist organisations, organised crime groups and global guerrillas to communicate and coordinate their activities. Globalisation is providing states with great opportunities to covertly sponsor organised crime, terrorism, and insurgencies. In such a complex security environment, the conventional army is being deployed with a limited role, such as to assist friendly states who require security assistance under limited rules of engagement in International Law, Law of Armed Conflict and to maintain bilateral relationships.

The second is the limiting of the defence budget. After 9/11, the War on Terror has dragged the US and the Global Coalition into a protracted conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria for the foreseeable future. These conflicts haves proven that military assistance and state-building strategies increase the duration of a conflict and spearhead an increase in the number of insurgent groups. Since 2014, the US has spent over $35 billion on building the Iraqi security forces via financing, education, and equipment (US DOS, 2020). Even though the spending by other allied states in the Global Coalition is not even comparable to the US spending on security assistance, Iraq is still a failing state, unable to prevent the emergence of the Islamic State and the advent of Iranian-backed proxies. Military expenditure is already starting to go down due to the high cost of soldiers' lives and a prolonged conflict without a forceable outcome. As well as the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis. Hence, proxy forces are already assuming a major role in the continuation of waging wars or pursuing a strategic outcome. In the US, pressured by the prolonged conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan that cost many American lives and contextualised by any future recession from Covid-19, defence budget cuts are inevitable. In Europe, military expenditure is expected to be cut in the near future because of the negative economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis (Janes, 2020). This limitation will push countries to find cheaper ways to wage wars. Proxy force appears to be the most suitable, cheapest to engage and politically risk averse action to take, since one can deny any connection or involvement, in a similar manner to Russia in the past decade, as they have masterfully denied the involvement of their private military company Wagner in Syria, Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Nevertheless, proxy warfare is not always a cheap option. "The empirical research suggests that providing military assistance — including weapons, funds, and logistical support — increases the duration of conflict and the impact of fighting on the civilian population" (Benowitz and Ceccanese, 2020). The US "war on terror" in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001 has imposed high economic, political and strategic costs (Brown and Karlin, 2018). "In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the clientelist model of proxy warfare predominated despite the fact that decades of internecine conflict arose directly out of systemic abuses of power by the very same Afghan and Iraqi security institutions that the United States inherited as partners" (Rondeaux and Sterman, 2019).

The Effect

Private military companies (PMCs) emerged as the best suitable solution for the states to continue to wage war through proxy forces as a product of the change in the dynamics of warfare and policy making. Likewise, private contractor companies became a new avenue for business attractive to influential individuals. (NY Times, 2003).

Soldiers being killed in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, terrorist attacks on almost every continent, an upcoming financial crisis bigger than the Great Depression - these stories

dominate the media today. This has a direct influence on changes to warfare, since governments cannot recruit enough soldiers, and on political pressure from the public and political opponents. The solution is private military companies who are not new in the field of security and military operations. In such complex settings, PMCs are the best choice governments have because of their ability to wage war outside of the public eye, pursue an initiative for geopolitical strategic outcomes overtly or covertly, and make business deals that strengthen multinational corporations and reduce the cost of waging war. The PMCs are typical for the US and Russia.

During the 1990s, two main factors enhanced the rise of PMCs. As the Cold War ended, the states started to withdraw their conventional armies and to downsize the massive numbers. Concurrently, the spread of liberal democracy and capitalism forced armies to be engaged in irregular warfare against dissident countries and leaders. The mantra was that democratic countries are less likely to fight each other. However, instead of democracy and peace, the product was the rise of numerous insurgent and rebellious groups and terrorists around the world. Downsizing and outsourcing private companies to support the military and its operations was reinforced by the economic ideology of capitalism during the Reagan-Thatcher era (Baum and McGahan, 2009, p. 21).

Massive numbers of unemployed military personnel, especially Special Forces, ended up in PMCs that were created by the same former Special Forces experts. This capacity was a perfect fit for governments aiming to pursue their strategic goals in the already transformed scene of warfare with revolutionaries and civil wars. Without attracting the attention of the public, these governments got the necessary instruments to continue to wage wars dynamically. They were engaged in activities such as weapons procurement, police training, intelligence gathering and the close personal protection of civilian leaders as part of the foreign military assistance (Stephenson, 2010). After 9/11, the US decision to invade Afghanistan and Iraq soon after, with the consent of the Bush administration, opened the door for PMCs to play a key role in the military operations (Karli, 2009; Baum, 2009). Over the years, PMCs have become a major industry with transnational enterprises that offer the required services to wage a war with military ranks and hierarchy, or avert security environment interventions via negotiation, advisory or intelligence services (Baum and McGahan, 2009, p. 6). The Russian government has since found PMCs to be the best asset to deny any connection with any military activity in Syria, Crimea and eastern Ukraine while actively changing the security environment to achieve its strategic goal (Spearin, 2018).

Regardless of overall budget cuts, governments allocate a good deal of their budget to PMCs for mutual benefit. The US allocated over $320 billion to federal contractors in the fiscal year 2017; the majority are PMCs working along with the US military (Schwartz, Sargent and Mann, 2018). The UK allocated around 50 billion pounds for FY2019 and kept over 45% for contracts, including PMCs (UK Public spending, 2020). The Russian Wagner group have a contract with the Russian government worth over $150 million per month (The Moscow Times, 2016). They have become an integral part of the military and security industry. Likewise, the numbers indicate that governments are limiting the conventional army and introducing PMCs as a new element that enriches their instruments for political pressure.

Their emergence was inevitable due to privatisation, globalisation and due to the intensifying urge to spread liberal democracy, which has swiftly limited the role of conventional armies. Their active role in shaping the security environment has raised the question of control. Deborah Avent, in her book The Market of the Force: Consequences of Privatization, raised valid concerns over who controls the private military companies. Both

states and PMCs are involved in preventing or producing violence. For the states, there are already established mechanisms of domestic and international law to 'control' violence. The PMCs such as Blackwater are intentionally positioned in a grey area, since they have proven, with their aggressive activities in Iraq and Afghanistan, that they can produce violence with minimal consequences (Sullivan, 2018). The Russian Wagner group was involved in the cruel killing of a man at the al-Shaer gas plant near Palmyra, Syria in 2019 without any consequences, yet (Mackinnon, 2020).

Enjoying the comfort of minimal consequences and the ability to operate in different environments where the conventional military is bound by law, PMCs as organisations or as subcontractors are paving the way to take over the lead in future proxy wars.

Technological innovations are substantially influencing the character of the proxy force

Technological advancement can empower malcontent individuals or small groups to act as proxies because these advancements are generally available worldwide.

The evolution of technology has made voice, picture and video more dangerous than a rifle. Emerging technologies, such as commercial drones, cyber weapons, 3D printing, military robotics, and autonomous systems is limiting the state's security apparatus to provide security for its citizens (Cronin, 2020, p. 8). Using technology for malicious activities is as old as technology itself. The author Brian Jenkins (1975) in his article "New Technology Terrorism and Surrogate War: The Impact of New Technology on Low Level Violence" was arguing in 1975 that technological advancement is creating more vulnerabilities for society and providing modern guerrillas and terrorists with new weapons they can exploit. Today, we are witnessing many examples of the new breed of technology being used for terrorist attacks or the abusing of data privacy for political purposes by both terrorists and private organisations with malevolent intentions. Technological advancement enables malcontent individuals and/or private organisations to have global reach and to operate independently. These capabilities allow them to act as proxies in certain settings of power competition and political violence. "Technological advancements are heightening global instability in ways that extend far beyond the battlefield" (Cronin, 2020, pp. 9–10). It is essential to re-examine the traditional thinking of warfare, defining what today's battlefield looks like and, more importantly, what victory means.

Emerging technologies have allowed proxy forces to become global actors. Cyber warfare is a buzz word that overwhelms the media today. However, cyber space is only one of the novel changes that enables proxy force and states to act beyond the traditional battlefield. One has to look beyond cyber space to understand the dynamics of the changes in proxy warfare. In short, cyber space is usually used as an enabler for abuses of technologic innovation. The leaders of private companies in digital technology development, such as Facebook, Google and Microsoft, are focused on their profits, disregarding the possibility of malicious abuses of their technology (Cronin, 2020, p.10). Global communication mediums such as social media are used to shape public opinion and are utilised by groups to recruit members and gain support and legitimacy. Internet activism played a crucial role in the Egyptian uprising against autocratic leader Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Interestingly, research shows that 50% of the Egyptian populace was internet illiterate, and yet internet activism for political purposes was more than enough to change the President (Eaton, 2013, pp. 6–9). The emerging technologies go beyond social networking and communications. They help enable malcontents to carry out sophisticated attacks. They allow for the harvesting of commercial drones and 3D printers to manufacture deadly weapons to carry out remote attacks on soft targets. The attack on Yum Kippur synagogue is proof

that emerging technologies are being used to attack civilians and state security systems. The purpose of the perpetrator with his 3D printed gun was not the killings but inspiring other terrorists and malevolent individuals and groups to follow suit (Hoffman and Ware, 2019). Technology was always both a part and a driver of the evolution of warfare. Today's technological innovations enable proxy war to be more desirable for both states and non-state actors. Nobody can dispute the technological advancement since it is the main driver for human evolution. At the same time, technological innovations are being used by guerrillas and terrorists for malicious activities. Considering Brian Jenkins' article from 1975 today, we can conclude that risks are inherit in technological innovations. Today, all technological innovations are widely accessible and can be modified to take warfare beyond the traditional battlefield. Technological advancement enables perpetrators to gain capacity to "derail the key drivers of economic globalisation: the flow of resources, investment, people, and security" (Robb, 2007).

The Effect

Unlimited opportunities of technological advancements provide "new means of conducting political violence by any militant group or self-radicalised individuals" (Cronin, 2020, p. 6) widening their reach beyond the traditional battlefield. These technologies allow these individuals or groups to be able to act alone or allow them to be sponsored by states to shape public opinion, create security instability and disrupt political processes.

Today's emerging technologies improve combat power and global communication, empower malicious individuals or small groups with the lethal capability to a level that the state's security apparatus can only control in a limited way and provide security. The non-state actors, rogue lone actors and insurgent groups, including PMCs, are gaining freedom to operate outside the law. Malcontent individuals and organisations are gaining the power to access and control civil and state information and use it against them (Cronin, 2020, p. 8). Simultaneously, states are invading the privacy of civilians for different political purposes. Furthermore, states are using these rogue actors as proxies to achieve their strategic goals. Both states and malcontent organisations are pursuing grievances for power to control the targeted state's political decisions and resources, to undermine the targeted state's security apparatus and legitimacy, and to take geopolitical competition beyond the traditional battlefield where proxy forces play a major role.

Great powers like the US, China and Russia will still be giants with massive defence budgets and will continue to be leaders in technological advancements. Traditionally, PMCs, private data processing companies, and other private consultancy companies were contracted by states. Today, the new technologies empower them to act independently beyond the traditional relationship with the state. They are capable of gaining and establishing a relationship with multiple states based on profit and mutual interests. Terrorist organisations are able to gain capacity to successfully confront major powers in protracted attrition conflicts. They operate in the grey area of international law and keep clashes below direct confrontations. Yet, they are able to achieve incremental territorial, economic, and political gains (Cronin, 2020, p. 659). Emerging in 2011, DAESH has been extensively using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to recruit new fighters, gain sympathisers and spread ideology (Awan, 2017). DAESH is considered to be a pioneer in using innovative technology as they mastered the use of drones, allowing them to be effective in tactical operations such as raids, quick irregular skirmishes, targeting from distance and undermining a stronger enemy (Balkan, 2017). PMCs and other private data processing are gaining capacity to operate independently since they are constantly acquiring new technologies to be competitive on the market and are focused on profit-making with a disregard for the economic and political consequences. Yet, states can use

them for a variety of malicious activities and still successfully deny any involvement. Besides PMSs, the private data processing companies offer different skills and capability to act as a proxy force beyond the traditional understanding of a proxy's role. The case of Cambridge Analytica in 2016 proved that private data companies have the capacity to operate independently and can disrupt the political processes of states and can be utilised to coerce political decisions or to heat up competition between states. This case has proven that non-state actors, including corporations and private companies, can influence political events by exerting their influence via digital technology (Wilson, 2019). Nevertheless, the case of Cambridge Analytica has attracted a high level of attention, political, and legal consequences that demands more analysis and discussion from the proxy force perspective. We are entering a new era where different actors (rather than traditional rebels and insurgents) have become able to assume the role of a proxy force and where proxy forces move beyond the traditional battlefield for the purpose of geopolitical competition.

Conclusion

We are living in an interregnum period where significant changes in the geopolitical environment are expected. These changes are inducing substantial changes in proxy warfare, moving the fight beyond the traditional battlefield. This style of warfare allows major states such as the US, Russia, and China to continue perusing geopolitical strategic goals without direct confrontations and to increase their capabilities in a coercive strategy. The small states and non-state actors have gained the capability to counter major states' strategic activities or substantially influence regional economic and political environments.

Changes in the characteristics of proxy warfare are an ongoing phenomenon. It is critical to understand the consequences of this alteration through examining the root causes of those changes. This article shows the importance of examining the correlation between changes to the key elements of the geopolitical environment and the impact of these changes on proxy warfare.

Key elements such as politics, warfare and technological innovation are influencing the changes of character of proxy forces. Changes in the political domain directly influence how states perceive the geopolitical environment and how they wage wars. The era of liberal democracy has produced mass protests in all continents motivated by revolts against political elites, inequality and hyper ethnic changes to the societies (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018, p. 25). The aftershock is dividing society into malcontent individuals and groups that are able to assume the role of a proxy force. These subjects can operate independently or be sponsored by states that have strategic interests in the country or a region. Division in western societies is creating windows of opportunity for other states or non-state actors to target the western way of life from within (Ikle, 2006, p. 59). Political decisions to wage war have substantially changed the type of warfare in the past two decades.

The age of conventional wars ended with WWII. Since then, warfare has been irregular and focused on population-centric operations. The Cold War gave enough incentives to the US to take the lead in countering Russian influence by promoting democracy and capitalism in many countries through proxy forces, regardless of their state capacity. "After World War II, the U.S. eagerly embraced foreign surrogates, generally in poor and underdeveloped countries, in the name of the Cold War" (Turse, 2012, p.132). Yet, these proxy wars did not bring strategic success nor make the countries democratic. Training, advising and fitting out Taliban proxies in Afghanistan in the 1980s drew the US into almost two decades of disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Turse, 2012, p.126). Unable to achieve sustainable strategic success using a conventional army in ir-

regular warfare limits its role in future warfare. Tactical successes do not bring a strategic victory in such population centric warfare since winning and losing is defined by controlling and influencing the populace rather than dominating the territory (Cleveland and Egel, 2020, p. iii). PMCs offer an option for states to wage a less destructive and cheaper war outside the public eye. PMCs have become an integral part of a state's warfighting capabilities. They can bring profit to states and allow politicians to deny any official involvement in any conflict. Offering an alternative way to wage wars, technological innovation has brought unlimited capability but, consequently, increased a state's vulnerability to adversary states and non-state actors.

Technological innovation has empowered malevolent individuals and organisations to act as proxy forces with a reach that goes beyond the traditional battlefield (Cronin, 2020, pp. 8–10). In politically polarised, socially divided societies, any adversary state or non-state actor can indirectly or directly sponsor these technologically empowered malcontent individuals and groups to target the states from within. It is not just the cyber realm that provides capability for global influence. Commercial technologies such as 3D printing, drones and communication software provide opportunities for these technologies to be used for violent means. The unlimited opportunities offered by these technological advancements allow states to find and sponsor proxies without direct engagement with states. Likewise, non-state actors gain the capability to act alone or as a sophisticated proxy force beyond the traditional battlefield. This empowerment of malcontent individual groups is in direct correlation with today's imbalance of power in the geopolitical environment. Geopolitical competition has become a game without rules where states international relations can easily be damaged.

The complexity of the changes of the characteristics of proxy warfare are being examined from different angles by many authors. Andrew Mumford, in his article from 2013, "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict", identified that transformation of traditional warfare and the rise of PMCs will lead to changes in the character of proxy warfare. Considering that cyber warfare is one realm with technological advancements, the effects that these technological innovations have in changing the character of the proxy force has much in common with Audrey Cronin's book, Power to the People, written in 2020. There is less research on the causal analysis of changes in the political realm of the geopolitical environment on the changes of character of the proxy force. Authors such as Matthew Goodwill and Rodger Eatwell in their book "National Populism: Revolt against Liberal Democracy" address how political changes are connected with changes in society. Likewise, the Pew Research Centre has undertaken a similar study on the satisfaction of the populace with regard to how their country is run, including major pillars of the state that are politics, the economy, the media and the military.

We are living in a period where geopolitical competition has produced many trained and armed proxy forces in many destabilised regions. A mission to become the leading power or to gain geopolitical advantages in influence and resources without direct confrontation drives any malcontent individual or group to become proxy forces for states or non-state actors. The changing characteristics of proxy war allow politicians to wage war without or with minimal use of military force. Political violence demonstrated through proxy forces to achieve foreign policy goals has become even more violent. In such cases, disregarding the sustainable strategic goal can easily damage the state's international relations and threaten regional stability.

My intention was to make this article a starting point for further discussions and provide a different aspect for examining such a complex issue. The proven flexibility of proxy forces and waging proxy wars in recent history requires further urgent examination.

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