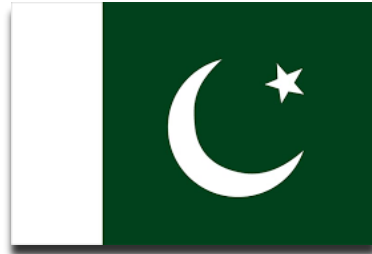


Pakistan Affairs

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Lecture Handouts for CSS

Module 1

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Proxy wars: Role of External Elements

Explicating Proxy wars

- Proxy War or War by Proxy defined during Cold War period.
 - Confrontation between two great powers by the use of substitute actors such as to avoid direct confrontation.
- “Directing the use of force by a politically motivated, local actor to indirectly influence political affairs in the target state.”

~ Tyrone Gloh
- The Cold War saw superpowers that financed, armed and aided proxies, without getting directly involved in the fighting, on a larger scale than any other in recorded history.

~ Dr Philip Towle
- The use of proxies was a virtual war on the cheap as the expense in arms, finances and political standing was minimal in contrast of going to war.

Proxy war

- After Invention of nuclear weapons, superpower confrontation could potentially escalate into the devastating mutually assured destruction (MAD) scenario.
- Patron-client relationship.
 - unequal power relation
 - exchange of special services
 - both parties find the relation beneficial
- A pertinent aspect of this type of conflict was that it differed from traditional conflict in being situated somewhere between inter-state and intra-state warfare.
- Philip Brewer sees this conflict type as hybrid – an inter-state conflict fought through intra-state means.
- Proxy war as a tool of foreign policy does not belong exclusively to powerful states.

Why proxy wars?

- Direct intervention requires a win to sustain an intervening state’s reputation and position in the international system. While, indirect intervention broadens the spectrum of acceptable outcomes and opens the possibility that winning is not always the goal of an intervention.
- Mostly non-state actor served as proxies for super powers / regional powers.
- Assumption in using proxy war as a strategy is that use of third party would reduce the risk of direct conflict between the two powers.
- In this type of war, states hire mercenaries, employ other countries to fight their opponents.

- Superpower also used proxy wars to increase their sphere of influence.
- The use of proxies was preferred because that is comparatively cheap as the expense in arms, finances and political standing was minimal in contrast of going to traditional war.
- It is an international conflict between two foreign powers, for protection of their national interests, fought out on the soil of third country.
- Proxy wars are sometime fought alongside full-scale conflicts as well.
- As the costs are lower, proxy war as a tool of foreign policy is more acceptable practically. For instance, very few Americans knew that US was bombing Libya, let alone which particular militia was supported in doing so.
- In simpler words, proxy war comes in play when a major power instigates a major role by supporting and directing a party to a conflict but for itself it refrains from indulging in fight directly.
- A lobby in the United States favours a plan for proxy warfare so that America can sustain its global influence.

~ Muhammad Amir Rana – Security Analyst. “Concerns of Proxy War”.

Why States Avoid Direct Confrontation:

- Four reasons that force a state to avoid direct confrontation and resort to proxy intervention.
 1. The risk of escalation increases if a state directly intervenes
 2. A lack of domestic support may risk the sustainability of the intervention
 3. A lack of international support negatively affects the cost/benefit ratio of the intervention
 4. A lack of capacity makes direct intervention untenable,

Rationale behind Proxy War:

- Fear of Mutual Assured Destruction
 - Hiroshima (6 Aug 1945) and Nagasaki (9 Aug 1945). The two bombings killed between 129,000 and 226,000 people, most of whom were civilians, and remain the only use of nuclear weapons in armed conflict.
- Public not in support of direct war
 - Soviet-Afghan war, USA supported Mujahideen
- Fear of international sanctions
 - Saudi-Iran rivalry
- Less expensive
- Difference in Military Strength

- In Arab-Israel conflict, Israel has edge in military profess; therefore, Arabs are allegedly supporting and funding terror organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas

Proxy War – Types:

- Tyrone L Groh argues that it can be divided into four distinct types:
 - **In it to win it**
 - **Holding action**
 - **Meddling**
 - **Feed the chaos**
- All four adhere to the idea that a state perceives that **“doing nothing” is too weak and committing the state’s own forces is too risky.**
- Caught in between, an intervening state will look for opportunities to advance its vital and desirable interests.

Proxy War Type 1 – In It To Win It:

- In it to win it, should occur when:
 - A state wants to influence the outcome of conflict (interstate) owing to its vital interests, such as its pursuit of security.
 - An intervening state desires a specific outcome based on its worldview. Thus, will offer more support and a higher level of commitment to enable its proxy to win.

Proxy War Type 2 – Holding Action:

- A holding action comes in when an intervening state wants to maintain the status quo.
- An proxy designed to prevent an enemy from attacking, or from moving its position in future war scenario.
- Available proxy has little political capacity and correspondingly only minute or no support among the target state’s population.
- In this situation, extending the conflict reduces the opposition’s claim to power because it cannot control the violence within the borders and may pave the way to greater concessions that do less harm to the intervening state’s interests.

Proxy War Type 3 – Meddling:

- Meddling finds its place when an intervening state has a desirable interest in altering the status quo, yet such a move contributes little to nothing in terms of vital interests.
- Further, it enhances the state’s position without risking any loss in capability or prestige. If the risk of escalation with a competitor is high or there are significant constraints (internationally and/or domestically) restricting the amount of resources that can be made available to the proxy, then meddling offers a viable option.

- Feeding the chaos comes in when a state perceives that gains to either **vital interests are unnecessary or impossible**, but **supporting a proxy to alter the status quo** remains possible.
- In cases where gains are not needed, but prolonging the violence indefinitely prevents the opposing side from adding to its own power and influence, feeding the chaos as a strategy becomes attractive.
- Feeding the chaos is often conducted covertly to avoid international or domestic blowback.

Requisites of Proxy War:

- Four major criteria for ascertaining the prospects of success of the proxy war.
 1. The numerical size of the rebel army.
 2. The volume of external financial and military assistance forwarded to the rebels.
 3. The resolve and ability of state's army to crush the armed rebellion.
 4. The physical presence of external military action by a foreign country.
- For successs 1,2 and 4 criteria must be as high as possible, while criterion 3 should be as low as possible.

Mechanism of Proxy Wars:

- Proxy wars were fought through following means:
 - Arms supply
 - Intelligence support
 - Training
 - Providing financial resources
- For example Soviet-Afghan war, Korean war, US - Vietnam war.
- It reflects actually a bipolar power competition whereas assurance of victory leads to prolonged wars.

Proxy War – A Foreign Policy Tool in Future?

- For the foreseeable future, proxy war will remain an integral part of any state's foreign policy options that meet the following three conditions:
 1. The state's interests and identity push it outside its own borders.
 2. The security and well-being of the state is connected to conditions in other states.
 3. The state maintains the capacity to engage in international affairs.

Intricacies in Proxy Warfare:

- Long and difficult to win – to very disappointment of policy makers in patron countries expecting cheap and easy solutions for regional security problems.
- Patrons and proxies inevitably encounter principal-agent problems.
- Sponsors must be ruthless; the point is to get proxies to fight and die for the sponsor's objectives.
- Proxies in turn try to manoeuvre sponsors to assume greater risks and commit more resources while pursuing their own more narrow agendas.
- Sometimes proxies try to pit potential patrons against each other.

Proxy Wars of Ongoing Epoch:

- Syrian Civil War (2011–present)
- Yemeni Civil War (2015–present)
- Russo-Ukrainian War (2022-present)