Andrew Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*,

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RESEARCH ON CONFLICT in contemporary security studies has been following the path opened by the emergence of the 'new wars' debate in the aftermath of the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War. Martin van Creveld, John Mueller, Kalevi Holti, Mary Kaldor, and more recently Thomas Hammes and Rupert Smith have argued that there has been an increasing tendency to abandon major war in favour of new and different conflict patterns. For these authors, contemporary war has lost its rigidity. It has moved away from the recourse of battle and has become a clear reflection of the changes in the political and socio-economic structures of the world. And this distinct way of understanding and explaining conflict is premised on the notion that asymmetric wars, cyber wars and proxy wars capture the plurimorphous, flexible and increasingly intricate structure of contemporary forms of conflict.

Against this background, a particular case is represented by the phenomena of proxy wars, concept that has always been engaged in determining dichotomic paths of understanding. Complex and dominated by an overlapping relation between its signifier and the signified, the term points to a constant academic struggle to capture the meanings of the word in a comprehensive definition. However, Andrew Mumford's recently published book, Proxy Warfare, breaks away with this research direction as it firstly conceptualizes the proxy conflict pattern, while secondly constructing a comprehensive explanation of its historical appeal and of how it has manifested throughout history.

So what is then a proxy war? In the book Proxy Warfare, Andrew Mumford defines proxy wars as "the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome" (2013: 1). The most comprehensive definition of the proxy conflict hitherto is organised around three core elements: 'indirect engagement', 'third parties' and 'strategic outcome'. All of these units correspond to different questions, which Mumford examines in detail by making use of diachronically chosen case studies that offer not only a systematic understanding of proxy wars, but also a historical view of their evolution.

At the centre of the definition of proxy wars is the question of 'Who engages in proxy wars?' corresponding to the 'third party' segment of the definition. However, in order to assess this issue, the normative definition of a proxy war is completed by a constitutive one which explains the unique structure of a proxy war: "a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and their chosen proxies who are the conduit for weapons, training and funding from the benefactor" (Mumford, 2013: 11). The 'third party', thus, becomes the proxy actor of a benefactor which cannot pursue its strategic interests by directly engaging in conflict. The terminology used to capture this form of conflict behaviour makes use of the labels of Beneficiary and Proxy Agent, which makes a significant step forward in the research on proxy wars and proxy warfare as the label gives an account of one of the functions or roles of the party.

The second point in Mumford's definition refers to the "indirect engagement" or to 'How do states engage in proxy warfare?' The main mechanism that explains proxy wars is the process of substitution. Anticipated by the discussion on the terminological aspects, substitution implies a role transfer between the parties of the war. The particularity of wars by proxy is that they are indirect. As Mumford points out "any definition of proxy war that includes direct military intervention misinterprets what should arguably be seen as the fundamental cornerstone of our understanding of proxy war: indirect interference" (2013: 22-23). This is fundamentally connected to the low intensity and regional character of the conflict. These features impact directly the process of understanding how proxy wars are fought, and Mumford rightly states that "there is no one uniform way in which proxy wars are fought" (2013: 61).

Mumford organises the reasons for involving in proxy wars following the logic of consequentialism and it includes not only the purpose but the legitimation for that particular scope. For example, the discussion on the role of ideology brings novelty to the research on proxy conflicts in the Cold War because it integrates interest and power capabilities in a more comprehensive manner. Another example is the section on risk and proxy war which is strategically relevant and theoretically forming. Mumford argues that a proxy "circumvents, […], risks to a large, but by no means total, degree" (2013: 41) and bring to the scholarly debate the important aspect of conflict escalation by managing risk. Ending in a discussion on the future of proxy warfare, the book engages with the contemporary developments of proxy wars by touching upon the uses of private military corporations in conflict, cyberwarfare as well as the role of China in the present security environment. With these additions, Mumford moves the discussion on proxy warfare in a wider context and addresses current and real security concerns that shape the realm of policy making.

Remarkable for its theoretical depth, Mumford's book stands out also from the point

of view of the geographical and historical breadth. Using the civil war in Angola as a proxy war prototype that the book always returns to, the study walks the reader through an impressive array of cases that cover diachronically the evolution of modern warfare from the 30 Years War to the 21st century. These are treated comparatively and the analysis is coined in the intellectual framework of international relations theory. In this respect, Mumford plays the advantages of both neo-realist and neo-liberal theories and integrates them in an articulated study that is inquisitive, incisive and intellectually refreshing.

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