Introduction to the Special Issue
'Proxy forces in modern warfare'

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As the guest editors of the Security and Defence Quarterly, we are delighted to present a Special Issue devoted to the use of proxy forces in modern warfare. This phenomenon, the outsourcing of war and employment of non-state actors on the battlefield, however ancient, has been gaining momentum recently as developments in almost all contemporary conflict zones illustrate. Raging from the Central African Republic, to Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and beyond, contemporary wars are being waged more and more with or through non-state actors – proxies. Whether foreign military interventions, counter-terrorism operations, training missions, or hybrid wars, proxies have been there and, seemingly, are to remain. Therefore, it fell upon us to ensure that such an urgent and pertinent topic should not evade deeper academic scrutiny and, together with our corresponding Authors, both practitioners and academics, we hope that this Special Issue at least partially achieves this.

The idea of this special volume of the SDQ came after a conference organised by the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in January 2020, where we both presented studies on proxies for countering terrorism in different regions of the globe. It was a very relevant event considering the developments in various parts of the world, and we learnt that the use of proxies by states has been a bigger phenomenon. Since then, we have had many discussions in person and over on-line platforms during

the challenging times of COVID-19 lockdowns in Europe. We tried to turn the lockdown into an opportunity to focus on a research project that brought various aspects of proxy use together. For us, the idea was simple, to understand the phenomenon using previous literature and experience, learn from others' expertise, and thus apply generated information on proxy use to contemporary security developments.

Looking at the increasing, and often disturbing, activity of non-state proxy actors in Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, or even most recently in Nagorno-Karabakh, we can judge both the conference at the Marshall Center and this modest attempt of ours as very timely. By taking up this task of editing the SDQ Special Issue, together with our authors, we intended to address and answer the following questions: Why are states reluctant to use their military power and why do they prefer to outsource the use of violence? What is the process behind employing proxy forces? How do states justify the support they provide for such groups? What types of challenges do states face in controlling these groups? What makes the support from states so alluring to non-state actors? How do both sides make their calculations? Clearly, some of these questions have already been addressed by other experts; nevertheless, we decided to open a new stage for this discussion to bring the knowledge up-to-date, fill in the blanks, and present the interaction between the theory and practice of this seemingly new model of warfare, as we are about to argue in our article.

This Special Issue of Security and Defence Quarterly examines a simple dichotomy, the interaction between state and non-state actors. The state as the main actor in the international system interacts with many non-state actors in the domestic and international arena, and some of these interactions place themselves within the interest of Security Studies. Non-state actors can fight against states (e.g. terrorist groups fighting for political ends), cooperate with states (organised crime groups cooperate with state institutions), or try to exploit state institutions for their benefit. Another dimension of this interaction matrix is the state's use of non-state actors for its objectives and that is the main focus of this special edition.

The discussion is opened by James K. Wither, who provides a comprehensive understanding of armed non-state proxy groups and looks at their characteristics and how they are employed by states. Wither also touches upon why proxy use has increased recently and what benefits are involved in this interaction, "as well as the broader impact of proxy forces on the international security environment, including great power competition" (Wither, 2020). Zoran Ivanov takes Wither's question of the implications for the international security environment to a different level and starts his study by examining the causal relationship between key elements of the geostrategic environment that allow the use of proxies. He argues that key elements of the geopolitical environment (politics, military and technological capacities, etc.) influence the structure of the proxies and how they operate, and, as he contends, this flexibility provides an advantage to sponsor states to employ them as "multipurpose forces depending on the desired strategic outcome" (Ivanov, 2020).

Sascha Bruchmann then examines the powerbroker system in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Mali to contribute to the discussions about conflict in weak states where proxies are used to represent regional and global powers and their interests. His study makes an important contribution to the literature for understanding the local settings where "the powerbrokers originate in a context of self-governing communities trying to maintain their internal autonomy vis-à-vis a more centralised state and world system". This structure creates a perfect ground for the establishment of local militia groups and some of them become potential proxies for external actors. Finally, he argues "[d]uring conflict, the communities band together against a perceived external threat, building

neo-feudal political-military bodies. Pooling military resources under skilled leadership and privileged access to outside sponsors sparks the birth of a post-conflict political-military elite" (Bruchmann, 2020).

A series of case study-based analysis provides a deeper understanding of the role of non-state actors' role in international and regional security. Cyprian Aleksander Kozera, Paweł Bernat, Cüneyt Gürer, Błażej Popławski, and Mehmet Alper Sözer focus on five relatively distinct geographical areas to provide a comparison in different conflict theatres where proxy forces have been employed within the last decade. Their analysis focused on different aspects of the conflict and the nature of proxy use and argues that non-state actors "have become more and more visible on the contemporary battlegrounds and modern states employ those actors to further their objectives, as this limits their own political and financial costs" (Kozera *et al.*, 2020). They predict that because of lower costs, the lack of political accountability, the denial of their use, and the acceptance of limited responsibility for the outcomes, such "games of proxies" are becoming a new model of warfare.

In a combined effort, Christian Kaunert and Ori Wertman use the securitisation theory to understand "how the State of Israel has securitised Iranian hybrid warfare which has been mainly executed through its proxy terror organisations of Hezbollah" (Kaunert and Wertman, 2020). Their analysis looks at how a state being targeted by another state through proxies reacts to this challenge and how it perceives the threat. Jeferson Guarin P. goes further and examines the evolution of proxies by drawing attention to the relationship between the sponsor state and the proxy organisation. His study identifies how FARC and Hezbollah evolved from "purely armed organisms to consolidated political organisations in Colombia and Lebanon, and how this evolution has presented a criminal convergence in Venezuela based on drug trafficking and money laundering" (Guarin P., 2020). Engin Yüksel (2020), on the other hand, takes a different approach and examines how states calculate the involvement of proxies. He does so by investigating the case of Turkey and analysing the essential characteristics of the Turkish proxy war strategy in Syria and Libya.

Iveta Hlouchova takes a closer look at the Private Security and Military Companies (PSMCs) involvement in counterterrorism operations by providing insights about their future involvement and their implications for international security. She highlights the main challenges of the existence and operations of PSMCs such as "lack of transparency and accountability, the continuous significance of the plausible deniability and political expediency PSMCs provide to nation governments, and an insufficient and inadequate international regulatory and control framework with no sanction or enforcement mechanisms" (Hlouchova, 2020). Additionally, Seun Bamidele (2020), combining an interdisciplinary methodology, examines the efficiency of the Civilian Joint Task Force in countering the Islamic insurgency in Nigeria. He focuses on the employment of a local group by the Nigerian government in the Borno State and points to deficiencies in local stability that this strategy may entail.

Last but not least, Filip Bryjka (2020) starts from where Hlouchova left off and continues by clarifying how states control non-state proxy forces fighting on their behalf, which is a major challenge for states in the heat of the conflict. He proposes a framework for examining the relationship by focusing on the criteria that determine patron-proxy relations, factors that influence the selection process of proxy forces, and principles that govern the maximisation of potential benefits of using proxies, while reducing risks and associated costs.

All these articles present a different aspect of proxy use and the interaction of the dichotomy between state and non-state. We do hope that these studies will contribute to

the current understanding of proxy use in the international system and will expand our knowledge of the phenomenon.

We would like to express our gratitude to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies and the War Studies University for providing us with the platform and support to conceive and publish this volume.

We hope you enjoy reading it and we look forward to your feedback.

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