

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies
Department of Security Studies

Master's Thesis

2023

Dalibor Bělohlávek

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**2021 Taliban Takeover: Defeat of the Afghan National
Security Forces through the lens of proxy warfare theory**

Master's thesis

Author: Dalibor Bělohávek

Study programme: Security Studies (Bezpečnostní studia)

Supervisor: Ing. Bc. Luděk Michálek, Ph.D.

Year of the defence: 2023

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In Prague on August 1, 2023

Dalibor Bělohávek

Bibliographic note

BELOHLAVEK, Dalibor. *2021 Taliban Takeover: Defeat of the Afghan National Security Forces through the lens of proxy warfare theory*. Prague, 2023. 64 pages. Master's thesis (Mgr.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political studies, Department of Security Studies. Supervisor Ing. Bc. Luděk Michálek, Ph. D.

Length of the thesis: 23,910 words

Abstract

The war in Afghanistan conflict represents the longest engagement the United States has ever been involved in, and despite significant resource allocation and loss of life, the nation-building effort eventually failed. The most salient representation of the entire Afghan experience was the rapid collapse of the Afghan National Army. Despite the years of training by the Western forces and the resources poured into it, after the United States withdrew it rapidly collapsed and was defeated by Taliban forces. This thesis aims to examine the relationship between the United States and the Afghan National Army within the context of proxy warfare theory, drawing lessons that can be applied to future conflicts of a similar nature. Firstly, this study delineates the evolving nature of 21st-century warfare and underlines why it is essential for the U.S. to acknowledge these changes, acquiring valuable insights to better navigate future challenges. To this end, the research scrutinizes the Afghan conflict, which is not typically perceived as a classic case of proxy warfare. Using the perspectives of four different proxy warfare theorists, each with distinctive approaches, common characteristics of proxy warfare are distilled and applied to analyze the case of the Afghan National Army and its relationship with the U.S. While this thesis concludes that the relationship between the Afghan National Army and the U.S. cannot be entirely encapsulated within a proxy-patron framework, particular elements of this relationship fit the proxy warfare theory and offer valuable lessons and insights that should be reflected in possible future proxy conflicts.

Abstrakt

Válka v Afganistánu reprezentuje pro Spojené státy americké nejdelší konflikt, do kterého byla země kdy zapojena. I přes množství vynaložených zdrojů a ztrát na životech, snaha o vybudování (stabilního) státu zkrachovala. Celá afghánská zkušenost může být nejlépe ilustrována na rapidním kolapsu Afghánské národní armády. Navzdory roků západního výcviku a značnému množství alokovaných zdrojů, byla armáda po stažení amerických sil rychle poražena hnutím Taliban. Cílem této práce je prozkoumat vztah mezi Spojenými státy a Afghánskou národní armádou skrze optiku teorie o proxy válkách a získat z něho ponaučení, která mohou být aplikovatelná v budoucích konfliktech stejné povahy. Práce nastiňuje evoluci válek ve 21. století a předkládá argumenty, proč je pro Spojené státy klíčové tyto změny rozeznat a získat tak důležité poznatky umožňující budoucí výzvy lépe překonat. Za tímto účelem výzkum využívá konflikt v Afghánistánu, který není vnímán jako typický příklad proxy války. Práce nahlíží na problematiku perspektivou čtyř hlavních teoretiků proxy válek, každý s výrazně odlišným přístupem k tomu, co lze považovat za proxy konflikt, a identifikuje společné charakteristiky, se kterými tyto čtyři (teorie/ teoretici) operují. Tyto charakteristiky jsou poté využity k analýze Afghánské národní armády a jejího vztahu se Spojenými

státy. Přestože závěr výzkumu je taková, že konflikt nelze plně posuzovat za proxy válku, je identifikována řada dílčích elementů, které do logiky proxy válek zapadají, a jejichž poznatky mohou sloužit k ponaučení v budoucích konfliktech tohoto typu.

Keywords

Proxy Warfare, Afghanistan, United States of America, Taliban, Afghan National Army, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency,

Klíčová slova

Proxy Války, Afghánistán, Spojené Státy Americké, Taliban, Afghánská Národní Armáda, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency,

Title

2021 Taliban Takeover: Defeat of the Afghan National Security Forces through the lens of proxy warfare theory

Název práce

2021 Převzetí moci Talibanem: Porážka Afghánských národních bezpečnostních sil optikou teorie proxy válčení

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1. Introduction

The war in Afghanistan has become the longest conflict the United States has ever been involved in. What began as a just retaliation to the 9/11 attacks, however, has turned into a complicated and painful quagmire, very much reminiscent of the United States's infamous involvement in the Vietnam War.

The endeavor to establish a democratic system in Afghanistan has incurred an enormous cost in terms of resources and human lives, including those of Afghans, U.S. citizens, and other allied nations that responded to the invocation of NATO's Article 5 following the heinous 2001 attack. Throughout the engagement, the U.S. government has spent 145 billion dollars in an effort to build up security forces, institutions, and civil society, in addition to the 837 billion dollars spent by DOD on the war itself (SIGAR 2021, VII). The cost of life was 2 433 US troops, 1 144 allied troops, at least 66 000 Afghan troops, and more than 48 000 civilians (ibid). It is noteworthy that the number of U.S. casualties in reports assessing the war never included the contractors. While the Department of Labor lists 1 774 civilian contractors dead, some estimates claim the actual number is up to 3 917 dead, which would vastly overshadow the number of regular troops and make the weight of the sacrifice even larger (Watson Institute 2022, INSIDER 2019). This immense amount of resources, finances, life, and energy that was poured into Afghanistan over almost two decades and spanning four U.S. presidencies, in the end, resulted only in the embarrassing withdrawal and re-establishment of the Taliban government, and the United States had joined a list of powers that were eventually in Afghanistan broken and humiliated.

One of the most prominent and shocking aspects of this takeover was the poor performance of the Afghan National Army, which was for the entirety of NATO's involvement in the country trained, equipped, and financed by the coalition of the not only NATO member but a broader coalition of the involved states International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It was only when the news across the globe circulated pictures and footage of Taliban fighters celebrating with the seized American equipment that was supplied to the Afghan forces that the questions about how is it possible that the force with such a long period of training and the provision of resources by Western lead coalition faltered so quickly in the fight. While there was a high degree of scepticism about how long will the Afghan Army be able to oppose the Taliban insurgents rapidly gaining ground, the most pessimistic estimates were talking about the ability to oppose for months. In the end, the Taliban routed the Afghan forces in a matter of weeks in an unprecedented fashion.

Following the takeover, some authors, commentators, and military experts sought to analyze the causes of the military ineffectiveness and the failures of the two decades of nation-building and

military campaign in Afghanistan. However, what is often missing from this conversation is placing this into the broader picture of military theory and drawing concrete lessons applicable to the other wars waged in an unfamiliar cultural setting. The unsuccessful effort in Afghanistan is usually studied merely as a case study or, at best, compared to other similar cases. This paper aims to extrapolate broader implications from this event for the conduct of warfare in the 21st century, where conventional clashes and symmetric warfare will most likely be of less and less importance. The mode of warfare on which this thesis is focusing is that of proxy warfare. The thesis, therefore, seeks to examine if the Afghanistan conflict can be considered a proxy conflict to draw lessons and implications from it that the United States's and NATO's militaries can apply in future conflicts of similar nature.

The first section of this paper explains the significance of this topic and why it is necessary to not only pay close attention to the past campaigns fought in unconventional or asymmetrical matters but also to be careful not to omit cases where it might be not so apparent that lessons for a certain strain of warfare theory can be drawn from. While it is evident that the campaign in Afghanistan provides many lessons for counterinsurgency efforts, asymmetric warfare, or nation-building, it might be less obvious that it provides lessons for proxy wars as well. The first section, therefore, presents the changing nature of warfare in the 21st century, how it connects to the proxy war in Afghanistan, and the benefit of this study. Afterward, the theoretical framework of proxy warfare is introduced. Given the non-existent consensus about what everything entails, proxy warfare, the approaches of different authors are carefully discussed. Based on the collection of different authors, the common themes with which all authors work are selected and used as criteria for what can be considered proxy conflict and proxy relationship and what cannot. The following section gathers as much information as possible about the primary force into which the United States poured its resources and which ultimately failed in the 2021 takeover. Different aspects are presented to better understand the cores of the ineffectiveness and what led to the eventual defeat. The relationship between coalition partners, primarily the United States and the Afghan National Army, is then set into the aggregated framework of the proxy theory, and it is assessed if the relationship follows the patterns set out by the proxy warfare theorists and what concrete externalities that the different theories mentioned could be found in the case of ANA. Given the importance of the phenomenon of proxy and agent relationship within the proxy warfare theory and the discussion that followed the fall of the Afghanistan state about what could be done better, the relationship between the US and ANA is examined in the context of proxy warfare theory and implications about on where on principal-agent line the main roots of the downfall were are presented. The primary goal of this thesis is to draw lessons from this conflict which can be used in future conflicts where the NATO

forces will try to win a conflict through an agent with different cultural background, receiving Western training, doctrines, and equipment.

2. Significance of the topic

The argument can be made that the contemporary United States of America is the most powerful conventional force this world has ever seen, comparable only to the likes of the Roman Empire or British Empire at peaks of their power, with a defense budget larger than that those of following ten countries on this list combined (Nagl 2022, 8). However, the military success record since Second World War does not necessarily reflects this. While the United States is on a tactical level and in conventional clashes an apparently unstoppable force, it is again and again belittled by smaller, usually irregular adversaries, and its tactical successes are not developed into long-term strategic victories and stable political gains.

Despite its status as a global military powerhouse renowned for its conventional and technological might and its nuclear capabilities, the United States' ability to navigate in non-conventional types of warfare seems to be unreliable at best. Whether it is winning a campaign against irregular forces and insurgencies, engaging in proxy warfare, choosing the correct proxies, and establishing stable partnerships where the surrogate can achieve long-term success, the US seems unable to find the right blueprint for success. This reality seems somewhat ironic given the fact that the roots of US warfare lie in the unconventional ways of engaging adversaries. Since before its conception, the commanders who later waged the War of Independence would, during wars with French colonies, implement irregular force of Native Americans for specific tasks like scouting and ambushes (Pearlman 2004, 12-14). Later in the fate-defining war against British forces, George Washington would, given the restrictions, and limited resources which prevented him from waging full-on conventional war, be forced to mix irregular and conventional operations and rely on unreliable militias to control the countryside (Morelock 2004, 78-79). According to some authors, even the nascent United States itself could be seen as a proxy of France in its global conflict against Great Britain (Brown 2016, 244). The long history of the use of irregular forms of warfare, using force multipliers, surrogates, and proxies since its conception, would warrant the assumption that these forms of war will receive substantial attention. However, this does not seem to be the case.

When being engaged in irregular warfare, the US forces time and time again reached tremendous achievements at the tactical level, whether it was peace missions in Bosnia, counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, or partnered counterterrorism operations in Yemen. The incredible tactical successes are again and again followed by strategic missteps, which inevitably lead to the failure of the entire campaign (Cleveland 2000). Eventually, all individual

tactical or even operational achievements are in vain, and the government is forced to answer uncomfortable questions to the public regarding whether the campaign was worth sacrificing lives and spending financial resources in the first place. This is the effect of the new era we entered some time ago in which winning more battles on a tactical level does not inevitably lead to winning the war (Barno 2006, 19). The successes on the battlefield in the conventional clashes are, therefore, progressively more and more detached from the overall success of the military campaign. The inadequacy of the tactical successes on the eventual result of the counterinsurgency is a factor that is progressively more recognized by the U.S. military itself. This is evident through a segment in the COIN field manual, which emphasizes that even though insurgents might never be able to defeat COIN forces in combat, they can still achieve their strategic objectives. Hence, it can be inferred that mere tactical victories do not guarantee a favorable outcome in COIN endeavors (U.S Department of Army 2007, 50).

The massive conventional power of the United States and the fact that it seems to fail repeatedly in irregular types of conflicts is the reality of which the adversaries of the Western world are more than well aware. Therefore, while deterring the aggression of its rivals will still require substantial conventional or nuclear capabilities, irregular and proxy conflicts are anticipated to be the primary arena for confrontations in the foreseeable future (Nagl 2022 XIII-XIV). This is the reflection of the deliberate strategy of the United State's adversaries, who understand that they are not able to put on a credible fight against the superpower via conventional means. On the other hand, the many lessons of the past show that unconventional approaches are where the military giant of the United States might have its Achilles heel. This realization is very well demonstrated by the infamous strategy paper of the People's Liberation Army written by its colonels, Quiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. In this work, PLA's commanders lay out the military strategy with which China has to approach its biggest rival. Rightly they assess the unlikelihood of success in the direct military confrontation, which creates a need to contest the United States through indirect approaches, and China has to focus on developing such capabilities. The strategy which is best summed up by its authors in two sentences "fighting the fight that fits one's weapons" and "building the weapons to fit the fight" (Liang, Xiangsui 1999, 6). After more than two decades since the paper was originally published, it is easy to see that the lessons these authors were trying to pass down were implemented in the doctrines and approach the "Middle Kingdom" is taking. David Barno noted a similar trend claiming that the United States adversaries understand the value of asymmetrical approaches when combating the immense conventional strength of the US forces. In the meantime, the colossus that is the US conventional strength created a rigid system that cannot respond to the changing and asymmetrical nature of modern war (Barno 2006, 15).

This new era of focus on asymmetric and unconventional ways of wars was described almost two decades ago by a former marine colonel T.X Hammes in his book *The Sling and the Stone*. In his work, Hammes noted that we are entering the Fourth Generation warfare era, characterized by a decentralized and non-hierarchical approach to warfare. In this new era, both state and non-state actors are using unconventional means to achieve their aims, and rather than confronting armed forces directly, adversaries target political establishments and policymakers. In this environment, the enemy achieves victory by putting immense pressure on its adversary's political establishment, which eventually causes them to capitulate independently of possible conventional military successes on the battlefield. According to Hammes, the traditionally focused militaries are not well suited to function in this new era of warfare (Hammes, 2004). The notions made by Hammes even further echo the changing dynamics in warfare where the tactical level is becoming less and less relevant and serves as a blueprint for how the weaker force can overcome stronger adversary by realizing it does not need to win in the conventional clashes with its adversary military but target different aspects to slowly win a war of attrition in political and strategic field. This new theorized dynamic took very much tangible form in the eventual victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The rivals of the United States recognize these realities, and not only are they creating doctrines to exploit these weaknesses, but we already can see them being put into practice. Therefore it is crucial for the United States to not only enhance its capabilities in unconventional ways of war but, even more importantly, to learn valuable lessons from past cases when such conflict did not end in the desired outcome. The long campaign in Afghanistan became to be widely accepted as a major strategic and political failure for the United States of America. It is therefore crucial not to sweep it under the rug and try to forget it but carefully study what exactly went wrong, what were fractional successes, and learn lessons from them which can be in the future conflicts applied and implemented into the doctrines of different branches of United States military apparatus. The areas where the effort in Afghanistan provides valuable lessons are numerous. The most obvious ones that come to mind are the area of nation-building from the effort to establish a democratic government that would be allied with the West. The many implemented programs like the Disarming, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) efforts provide valuable lessons in peacekeeping and peacebuilding areas. From the military perspective, Afghanistan is most often seen as a case of fighting insurgency and irregular adversary, which undoubtedly was the case. This thesis argues that in order to grasp the intricacies of the war effort in Afghanistan, it is beneficial to adopt a slightly non-intuitive lens - one that views the conflict through the theory of proxy warfare.

As previously mentioned, it is cardinal for the United States to be closely focused on unconventional ways of warfare as it is a domain that, for the aforementioned reasons, will be quite likely increasingly targeted by its adversaries as it provides quite a cheap and easily exploitable way

how to combat the still world's number one superpower. These unconventional ways of warfare are a broad range of very diverse methods. It ranges from economic warfare, hybrid warfare, information warfare, and propaganda to irregular warfare, which undoubtedly is a cornerstone of how engagement in Afghanistan should be understood. One way the adversaries can circumnavigate the need to enter the conventional conflict with the United States is through a proxy war. The instrument, which got into prominence, especially during the Cold War, allowed the superpowers to engage each other and to try to achieve their long-term strategic goals without entering into the conventional conflict, which at the time it was feared would result in possible nuclear war, mutual destruction of both superpowers and possibly the end of the civilization and mankind as we know it. It is to be expected that this particular tool that allows state actors to circumnavigate the conventional power level of the other and engage him through indirect means will be in the repertoire of those powers, and we will experience a revival of the importance of proxy wars. For this reason, it is crucial to study and pay attention to the conflict, which in one way or the other could fit this description, and learn the lessons from them to avoid repeating the same mistakes in conflicts where the consequences might be severe. While what constitutes proxy warfare is the object of a widespread debate and the conflict in Afghanistan does not necessarily intuitively fits the description on first look, it should be argued that it is necessary to learn a lesson from the conflicts where even only particular aspects of this mode of warfare were applied.

The typical example of proxy warfare is understood as a conflict where two superpowers contest each other in a third country through surrogates without superpowers themselves deploying any or only limited conventional capabilities and putting the "foot on the ground," this understanding is somewhat limited. However, in the past decades, many authors tried to expand upon this definition in order to reflect better post-Cold War developments and ongoing Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). When considering these modified and expanded theories, proxy warfare becomes a conflict where a state actor decides to rely some of its fighting capabilities on any form of surrogate. The proxy theory is then from a significant part focused primarily on researching the relationship between the principal power and its chosen agent (proxy), the difficulties that can arise from waging war through an agent, or how the agent can serve as a force multiplier or fulfill a certain gap in the fighting capabilities of the principal and supplement this required niche.

Without a doubt, the United States engaged in principal and proxy relationships with various local actors throughout the different stages of the Afghan campaign. These relationships varied greatly in nature and purpose, with varying levels of cooperation with US forces. During the start of the campaign, when there were no conventional forces available, there was increased reliance on the irregulars in the form of the Eastern and Northern Alliance. Later when the bulk of the Taliban regime was defeated, and the nature of the Afghanistan mission changed, the United States and its allies tried

to establish and train Afghanistan National Army (ANSDF), which was supposed to secure the new regime in the place, and in essence, then work towards United States' strategic goals in the region as their surrogate.

The lessons that are key from the cases when a state actor wages war through a surrogate are how well the cooperation went, how effectively the surrogate worked towards the strategic goals of a principal power, and if it did not diverge and follow its own agenda. Additionally, when a power uses a proxy to achieve its military goals, it often supplies the surrogate not only with additional resources, whether financial or material, in the form of weapons and ammunition but also supplements the agent with its advisors or provides training. The highest possible form of this relationship then includes changing the fighting force so it, to a certain extent, mirrors the way in which its principal fights. The implementation of the superpower's doctrines in its client states or proxy forces is a phenomenon known from the times of the Cold War, where especially Arab armies often implemented Soviet doctrines, usually with very undesirable results (Pollack 2019). The way in which the state armies in the developed world, or even nonstate irregular groups, are able to implement United States' doctrines may be fundamental in future conflicts. The cases arising from the War on Terror or conflicts that followed the Arab Spring have revealed the United States' tendency to disregard local realities and cultural aspects of the groups they try to use as a proxy. This lack of foresight has frequently led to, at best, a complete loss of control over the proxy or its defeat. At worst, the proxy turns against its former patron or triggers a large-scale insurgency movement that fundamentally alters not only the character of the country where it operated initially but sometimes that of the broader region.

The United States' failure in Afghanistan is frequently likened to the failure in Vietnam due to the similarities in the military outcome, public perceptions, and the transformation of what was intended to be a short operation into protracted conflict and quagmire from which there was no satisfactory escape. Following the unsuccessful Vietnam campaign, the US Department of Defense declined to conduct a thorough examination of the causes of the failure. Instead, the solution was to vow that the United States would never fight in similar wars again (Cleveland 2020, XV). That resulted in the reality where the US became unprepared for these types of conflicts in the future. Similarly, Mumford mentions how there was a lot of focus from the military and academia on asymmetric conflicts when the war in Vietnam was ongoing. However, once the US forces withdrew, this interest soon disappeared. For this reason, there were no reflections made, and there was a later need to relearn this type of war when Afghanistan and Iraq became asymmetric conflict quagmires (Mumford 2013, 5). In the post-Vietnam era, the United States military has become overly focused on traditional force-on-force conventional engagements despite the reality, which indicates that these conflicts are less likely to occur than asymmetrical ones. The planners and analysts became

overfocused on the conventional types of conflict, and the methodologies and tools being developed were not able to correctly predict the type of engagements that would be more prevalent (Clancy, Crosset 2007, 88). In order to avoid repeating past mistakes and to prepare for the evolving nature of warfare, particularly in regard to the prominence of proxy wars, it is imperative to thoroughly investigate the factors that contributed to the failures in Afghanistan and to work towards functioning doctrines in regards to building up capable indigenous forces.

3. Research

3.1 Aim of research

The aim of the study has two main objectives. Firstly, it advocates for increased attention to be paid to the phenomenon of proxy warfare, which may likely become the preferred mode of warfare in the future for a plethora of reasons. After Russia invaded Ukraine, some authors claimed that we are experiencing some sort of a trip via a time machine with the discussions of deterrence and nuclear retaliation reemerging in the public discourse. This occurring phenomenon can be illustrated by a summer 2022 issue of Foreign Policy magazine titled “Back to the Future Issue,” which presented collections of essays and articles by multiple authors discussing the reoccurrence of the themes known from the Cold War like an Iron Curtain, return of non-alignment, nuclear deterrence, arms race, and other related subjects (Bell et col 2022 27-58).

The international theatre indeed seems to a certain extent like a Cold War 2.0, with many of its typical features returning to both the public discourse and the strategic toolkit of the involved powers. Given the mentioned revival of the aspects typical for the Cold War, it should be assumed that a higher proliferation of proxy conflicts, undeniably one of the most defining features of the bipolar world, will be among them. Therefore, it is imperative to look for the lessons, particularly in conflicts that may not conventionally fall under the umbrella of proxy warfare, in order to prepare for future conflicts of this nature.

The primary aim is to put Afghanistan campaign into the context of proxy warfare and derive lessons from it that can supplement the broader theoretical proxy war framework. To this end, the study will examine the case of the Afghan National Army, which can be viewed as a primary instrument used in the campaign, through the lens of selected characteristics typical for proxy. The secondary aim of this thesis is to provide additional context for why the forces supported by the United States ultimately failed, which, when considered through the framework of proxy theory, can provide a new perspective and insights into the war effort in Afghanistan.

In order to achieve this, the thesis tries to answer the following research questions.

1. Can the US involvement in Afghanistan be considered a proxy conflict, and which specific characteristics of the relationship fulfill the necessary criteria in order for it to be considered a proxy conflict?
2. If the answer to (1) is yes, then considering the proxy theory, where the line between a proxy and a principal was a leading source of military defeat
3. Which negative externalities typical for the proxy and principal patron relationships occurred in the case of the relationship of the United States and ANSDF

In order to answer the first question, the case of the ANA is used. Its aspects are carefully presented and discussed. The framework in which they will be critically assessed is used by synthesis of multiple proxy theories; the logic of this synthesis is described in a later section. After selecting the key aspects of the proxy, the ANA case is contrasted with each of them. By this approach, it can be answered if the relationship can be considered as that defined by the proxy theories and what negative externalities typical for these relationships arose from it.

Following the analytical section, Based on the findings and answered research questions, the general lessons that can be learned from the conflict in Afghanistan for the possible conflicts where the United States might be delegating some parts of its war effort to a surrogate are presented and discussed.

Apart from supplementing the research on proxy warfare, and providing an additional lens through which the effort in Afghanistan can be studied, and drawing necessary lessons from it, the usage of the proxy framework in this thesis provides lessons for the general counterinsurgency theory.

3.2 Literature review

There is currently a wide variety of the authors and researches focusing on proxy warfare. The proliferation of the academic literature and emergence of the proxy warfare theory itself has a roots in the Cold War. At that time even the bipolar setting of the world it was the only possible way for the two superpowers to pursue their strategic interests without direct confrontation with its adversary, which was rendered impossible due to the mutual nuclear deterrence. As it was mentioned in the methodology sections, there is large disparity in the approach of different authors and their understanding of what entails proxy warfare and what are its characteristic based on which it can be decided if the conflict is indeed a proxy warfare or not. This is largely due to the fact that many initial

theories were developed during the Cold War, where a proxy war referred to a conflict in which one or both sides were supported by a superpower with the goal of achieving long-term strategic objectives or simply balancing the influence of the other superpower in a specific region.

As it will be described in a later section, over the years, the reasons for employing proxies have evolved over time, resulting in a broadening of the characteristics associated with this phenomenon in post-Cold War literature. In order to obtain a holistic view of proxy warfare theory and avoid selection bias the approaches of five scholars in this book are used discussed, and from the work of these authors the general theory and characteristics with which the case of ANA will be studied is drawn from.

The primary cornerstone for this study is a work *Proxy Warfare* written by Andrew Mumford. This work provides an overview of fundamental theoretical concepts for proxy warfare and its characteristics accompanied by multiple cases. Some of the mentioned case studies mention the possibility of simultaneous conventional or direct intervention and proxy effort within the same battle space, which is a required argument if the relationship between the United States and the ANSDF can be considered a proxy relationship and that the presence of the conventional ground forces does not automatically negate the possibility of considering the proxy framework. One of the frameworks operating with the simultaneous use of the regular and irregular forces within the same battle space is a theory of compound warfare introduced by Thomas Huber. The basis of his theory, alongside with multiple case studies by different authors, was presented in work *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot*. The finding of Huber and his coauthors provide many lessons from the cases where the regular and irregular forces worked towards the same operational goals, which the thesis argues was the case in post-2021 Afghanistan.

The more modern take on the proxy warfare theory is the work of Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, *Surrogate Warfare: The Transformation of War in the Twenty-First century*. In this work, the authors try to modernize somewhat outdated theories about proxy warfare, most of which have its origins in the Cold War era. To reflect the changes of the preferred strategic thinking since the end of bipolar order author present their own theory of surrogate warfare which according to them provides more flexible theoretical framework for any type of war effort substitution than the more typical cases of the Cold War. The significant amount of secondary sources from the number of authors focusing on the change in the nature of warfare in recent decades is considered in order to emphasize the significance of the topic.

Understanding the role of the United States in Afghanistan, its long-term strategic goals, and the quantitative assessments of the achieved success and cooperation with the Afghans is drawn

from a number of primary sources and reports. One of the most valuable sources are the documents and reports published by the United States federal institution established to function as a safeguard in ensuring that the resources poured in to the post-war building effort in Afghanistan are used effectively. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) established in 2008 is a valuable source of reports and assessments of the efforts the United States achieved in its post-conflict rebuilding as well as crucial reports termed “Lessons learned” aimed at focusing on the problematic aspects of the Afghanistan mission that should serve as a deterrent example for future similar efforts.

3.3 Methodology

This study aims to determine whether the relationship between the United States and the Afghan National Army can be considered a proxy-agent relationship according to the wider theoretical framework of proxy warfare. The challenge in examining such a relationship is that there is a significant disparity between different researchers as to what can or cannot be understood as a proxy conflict. Therefore, there are no universal criteria with which the case in question could be studied. Given the disparity of the different approaches between various authors, the use of one theory would create a sort of distortion or selection bias when the theory of one author could be chosen in order to prove that a conflict in question was indeed a form of a proxy conflict, while the criteria of different scholar could interpret the same data of the same case as unfitting the proxy war framework. In order to avoid this selection bias, this research seeks to provide a more holistic and unifying framework and criteria that can be used to analyze the case in question. In order to do so, the four different proxy warfare frameworks are chosen, and viable characteristics that are to be examined are chosen only those that are omnipresent in the theories of all mentioned authors. Excluding the characteristics that are unique to only a single scholar allows us to find truly relevant characteristics and mitigate possible bias of individual researchers.

Through a synthesis of different approaches, the four common characteristics of what constitutes a proxy are chosen. In addition to that, four negative externalities that frequently arise with the use of a proxy force are then also aggregated in the same manner. Only if they are in some form mentioned by all authors are they to be considered relevant.

The data about the case are primarily of qualitative nature. While it might seem that the quantitative methods would provide a more accurate depiction of how a military force operates, it is not entirely the case, especially in asymmetric conflict, where conventional force is engaged with insurgents. Some researchers noted that when we look at how analysts and planners interpret data from contemporary operations, we notice a trend toward gathering of large amounts of quantitative

data. However, this can lead to a lack of foundational understanding of what success really means in irregular warfare and counterinsurgency at its core (Clancy, Crosset 2007, 88).

As it is pointed out by Seth Jones in his research of counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan, the most useful metrics that can be used in assessing the success of a force engaged in counterinsurgency are of qualitative nature (Jones 2008, 68). The metrics like engagements won or lost can only hardly be considered reliable metrics of a successful counterinsurgency effort. Given the nature of the insurgency, which takes root among the regular population and oftentimes targets civilian targets in order to damage faith in its adversary, there are no reliable metrics on how to measure this. Even in the case where the force in question would be flawless in the engagements with its rival, the insurgents can always target soft targets or civilians. The massive loss of life connected to this then creates a situation where we can only hardly say that the counterinsurgency effort is sufficient despite the fact that the force is performing flawlessly.

Clancy and Crosset (2007) further demonstrate this on a hypothetical example of quantitative data on the rate of military casualties resulting from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), where over a certain period, a casualty per device could be calculated. Later if the number of casualties would remain stable while the number of IEDs would increase, the casualty rate per device would decrease. The issue is what should be the conclusion of this phenomenon. While on paper, it would seem like an improvement because the number of military casualties was lowered, there is a strong possibility that the tactics, techniques, or procedures are not a cause of the decline. Soldiers could travel less often outside of the protected compound, insurgents may switch to different tactics, and so on (Clancy, Crosset 2007, 88). This further highlights the limitations of a purely quantitative approach in assessing the success of counterinsurgency missions.

The same perspective is shared by J.B Potter, who points out the shortcomings of over-focusing on the quantitative factors to evaluate military forces. Which he asserts was an approach that the U.S. military adopted when assessing ANSDF. Military effectiveness is more than a number game, and focusing on quantitative aspects made it so that the Afghan forces looked impressive on paper, but ultimately they were easily defeated (Potter 2022, 44). Similarly, in the context of proxy warfare, assessing the relationship between a benefactor and a proxy or a client, aspects like the degree of influence one actor over the other cannot be reliably measured (Ladwig III 2017, 8). For these reasons, quantitative metrics are a reliable tool only when examining engagements between two conventional militaries in a regular war.

Furthermore, counterinsurgency researcher Miles Kits have observed that studies attempting to emulate statistical research in the explanation of war outcomes often rely on identifying the

presence or absence of certain causal variables. However, this approach fails to provide a deep understanding of how these variables interact and evolve to generate the eventual outcome of the conflict. The influence of this structural tradition on strategic studies, particularly in the study of insurgency and counterinsurgency, has led to the creation of oversimplified models that do not account for unquantifiable phenomena, which are what, more often than not what ultimately determines the outcome (Kits 2020, 65-67). It becomes apparent that this overemphasis on these models leads to difficulty in applying findings from one case to another due to the difference in variables, while qualitative parallels that could exist may remain overlooked.

Moreover, this thesis does not primarily aim to assess the effectiveness of the ANA; rather, it seeks to investigate how it interacted with the United States, And how successfully it implemented the doctrines introduced by the USA, ISAF, or NATO coalition forces. These aspects are predominantly qualitative in nature and can be only hardly measured in numbers. The few aspects where the effectiveness of the army-building effort can be quantified are the ones like number of soldiers, if current recruitment matches the sought-out goals or ethnicity representation percentages on different positions. While these aspects are discussed in the research, it is not a focal point that centers on examining the ANA through the lens of proxy warfare theory, where the success of army-building is just one piece of the mosaic in the broader operation in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2022. Therefore, the study primarily employs quantitative methods to examine ANA. In the features like the overall numbers of soldiers or representation of certain ethnicities, the approach could be described as mixed methods but with a bigger emphasis on qualitative aspects.

This study employs a combination of primary and secondary sources to analyze various aspects of the Afghan National Army, which are subsequently evaluated against four aggregated proxy warfare criteria. Secondary sources used in the study include works by multiple authors who have written about the Afghan National Army and its conduct throughout the conflict. A valuable primary source that helps to give an essential insight into the allied effort are reports produced by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which is even in the year 2023, producing reports and documents mapping the involvement in Afghanistan. Furthermore, primary source information previously available on various Afghan governmental agency websites was also utilized in this study. Unfortunately, since the Taliban takeover, these documents are now either inaccessible or have been replaced with content generated by the current regime. Therefore, the study also draws upon the work of researchers who had the opportunity to write about these aspects during the period when these primary sources were still available.

This research constitutes a case study that aims to draw lessons for proxy war doctrines from the entire effort in Afghanistan, specifically focusing on the Afghan National Army. It is important

to note that the study extends beyond the singular focus on the ANA and incorporates the entire period from the time the United States made the decision to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan to the moment when the Taliban successfully took over. This broadening of the case to a chronological timeframe rather than a singular unit is necessary to understand the role of the ANA and its eventual downfall. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors leading to the ANA's failure, it is essential to examine what predated it and to understand the preceding forces utilized by the United States before the establishment of the ANA. Such an approach enables more detailed exploration of the lessons learned from the failures that occurred.

4. Theoretical framework

In order to be able to accurately assess if the relationship between the ANA and the U.S can be coined as a relationship fitting into the proxy warfare logic and assess the features of this relationship, it is necessary to set the theoretical framework of proxy warfare itself and discuss different interpretations of it with which different authors work. This section first presents a general introduction to the topic of proxy warfare. This section begins with a general introduction to the concept of proxy warfare, including a discussion of what it entails in general terms and why state actors may choose to employ this form of warfare. Afterward, four different approaches to the definition of proxy warfare theory are introduced, and a literature review of their author's work is presented. In order to set a framework with which the thesis can assess the subject matter of this thesis, the common characteristics of a proxy war present in all of the mentioned approaches are synthesized and presented.

4.1 Introduction to proxy warfare

4.1.1 What is proxy Warfare

Proxy warfare is most commonly defined as the indirect engagement in conflict with the aim of influencing its strategic outcome and involves a relationship between two or more actors, including a benefactor who is a state or non-state entity external to the existing conflict, and their selected proxies, who act as intermediaries for the provision of weapons, training, and funding by the benefactors (Mumford 2013, 11). In its most rudimentary form, it can be described as relationships where one power is trying to reach a long-term strategic goal by re delegating the main burden of war on to different subject either because it wants to avoid certain externalities inevitably arising from participation in the conflict or it is simply restraint in some way and cannot be allowed to directly engage in order to pursue this goal – the constraint can be material like geographical distance of the theatre in which the power wants to participate or even legal issues preventing the power to enter the

conventional war. This delegation allows delegating power to pursue long-term strategic goals indirectly via the chosen proxies.

4.1.2 Why engage in proxy warfare?

4.1.2.1 Cold War Logic

What are the different reasons the state actor might delegate part or all of its war burden and war effort execution to a proxy? The reasons why states use this mode are various. The different forms of surrogacy of war effort existed throughout history, but it was only in the twentieth century and the bipolar order of the world that war by proxy was transformed into a prolific method of conflict (Mumford 2013, 12). While the most famous uses of a proxy strategy were known from the Cold War, the use of proxies during that time was more a matter of necessity than a choice. In a hostile bipolar world, neither of the superpowers could afford to engage its adversary in a conventional direct manner, given the fact that both superpowers possessed a nuclear deterrence. The Mutual Assured Destruction logic forced both the United States and the Soviet Union to try to find ways in which they were able to pursue their strategic interests without antagonizing their adversary and risking nuclear war. Under this new paradigm of strategic thinking, limited wars had to replace total wars, and small wars replaced big conventional wars (Mumford et col. 2014, 2). One of the ways superpowers could contest each other without entering into an open conflict was by using different proxies, whether state or non-state, across the globe that were often in conflicts with actors supported by the other superpower. In that way, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to wage war against each other without ever entering into an open conflict. The best-known examples of this form of conflict from this time were the proxy wars of Vietnam, where the Soviets were undermining the United States' effort to preserve the South Vietnamese government with the use of Vietcong guerrillas and North Vietnamese regular army, and the proxy effort in Afghanistan where United States was using mujahedeen to oppose Soviet forces (Brown 2016, 244, Krieg, Rickli 2019, 20).

It is cardinal to understand that while this approach deriving from Cold War logic is the most famous use of proxy warfare, and it is a type of use that started the proliferation of the theories focusing on this mode of war, the avoidance of direct confrontation is only one reason why the state might seek to relegate some of its warfighting to a surrogate. Assertion of some authors even is that understanding of proxy warfare as a state actor exploiting its objectives in an international struggle against another external actor with whom it does not want to engage directly is a mere relic of the Cold War (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 6). In the current state of affairs, the reasons why the state would want to engage in such a way are more complex, and a proxy war serves as a valuable cure for a plethora

of different diseases. The state's decision to pursue this mode of war is based on a complex interplay of its interests, ideology, and assessment that direct intervention in a contested theatre is either unjustifiable, too costly, whether financially, morally, politically, or materially, avoidable, or simply unfeasible (Mumford 2013, 30). These more nuanced motivations have become increasingly significant in contemporary wars, as opposed to the "textbook" examples from a bipolar era.

4.1.2.2 Force multiplier and niche supplementation

One of the most basic uses of a proxy is as a force multiplier in a conflict where the engaged actor either needs to boost its current forces, which are not sufficient enough in order to win the conflict, or where a state actor needs force with a particular niche or specialization which is required in a current battlespace. The proxy, in this case, is usually a force multiplier in the battle space where the principal already has a conventional presence. The advantage that the specific irregular force can provide ranges from valuable knowledge of local terrain to a specific way of fighting or increasing legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

The advantages that can be reached by combining conventional forces with the local irregulars are described in the theory of Thomas Huber called Compound warfare, where there is simultaneously functioning regular and irregular force working within a varying degree of unison to reach a common strategic or operational goal. The usage of compound warfare offers a significant advantage as it puts pressure on the enemy to simultaneously mass and disperse their troops. If the enemy chooses to mass their troops, they become vulnerable to attacks on their communication lines by irregular forces. Conversely, if the enemy chooses to disperse their troops to protect their communication lines, the regular forces can destroy them. Furthermore, the regular forces can provide valuable support to local irregular forces. The main force can pressure the enemy to withdraw their troops from areas where the guerrillas operate, allowing the irregular forces more freedom to act. The main force can also provide training, equipment, funding, and strategic information to the guerrillas, advising them on when and where to act in order to contribute to the overall military goals (Huber 2004, 2).

With these facts in mind, it is easy to see how the combination of conventional forces with local proxies can open new operational and tactical options to a principal leading a conventional effort. Apart from opening new operational possibilities, the use of a surrogate as a multiplier can have a benefit on a tactical level, and an actor can supplement capabilities that his conventional force is lacking. As noted beforehand, the surrogate force does not have to simply fill in the lack of a pure number in the rank and file, but they can also provide a specialized form of warfare or specific expertise. Krieg and Rickli note that in the past, surrogates "provided cavalry skills to patrons who

were lacking this skill; they mastered technology that the patron's troops could not, such as archery or slinging. They were seafarers helping traditional land powers to develop a naval capability. But even traditional naval powers such as Britain long relied on auxiliary forces and privateers to bear the burden of war at sea on its behalf" (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 74).

A crucial benefit of employing an indigenous auxiliary force is that it can lend a degree of legitimacy to a foreign power intervening in another country. As Krieg and Rickli note, "local surrogates who are part of the social fabric on the ground are more likely to be perceived as legitimate actors than the patron's own forces with little or no connection to the sociocultural environment. Particularly in COIN operations, local surrogates can augment the counterinsurgency legitimacy in the eyes of local populations." (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 79). This logic is further supported by the U.S. Army Counterinsurgency field manual and Interagency COIN guide, mentioning that all outside forces are eventually seen as occupiers and U.S. direct involvement serves the narrative and propaganda of insurgents. So while it might be easier for U.S. forces to conduct most of the COIN operations by themselves, it is better to relegate the bulk of these efforts to the indigenous surrogate in order to create a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of the local population (U.S. Dept. of the Army 2007, 47, Interagency COIN Initiative 2009, 29). The somewhat counterintuitive advantage of delegating parts of the operation to a surrogate who will conduct it less effectively echoes the principles described in the methodology section that the war effort cannot be purely quantified, and it is not pure numbers that decide success.

Strategists and war planners have to consider unquantifiable factors, as is the psyche of a local population. As has been previously established, singular tactical successes, no matter how impressive, are not a guarantee of long-term strategic success, particularly in conflicts such as counterinsurgency operations, where sociological factors and relationships with the local population must be taken into account. The use of local forces can therefore be important if not the most important, part of winning the hearts and minds of the population in which the conflict is taking place.

4.1.2.3 Everywhere war

An additional rationale why it is desirable for the states to use the surrogate instead of its conventional forces is the increasing complexity of the world that arose from the fall of the bipolar order. In the contemporary setting, the superpowers have to be able to be engaged in countless number of theaters and hotspots in order to ensure the success of their overall strategic objectives. Given the reality of the far more interconnected world, no theatre can be ignored as there exists the risk of spillover and the domino effect, and the unsuccessful campaign in one theatre can have a dramatic impact on

campaigns led elsewhere, as well as have a significant influence on seemingly unrelated matters and policies.

An instance of this phenomenon of this serves the refugee and immigration waves emanating from war-torn countries such as Iraq or Syria. The mismanaged operation in Iraq has indirectly given rise to a host of security challenges and predicaments, which have transcended geographic boundaries and general issues associated with the original conflict zone. This ranges from relatively mundane concerns, such as the security of European borders, to complex factors, such as Turkey's utilization of migrants as a bargaining tool against the European Union, the supplementation for terrorist organizations across the globe, Iran's attempt to fill the resulting power vacuum, and numerous other externalities.

This high degree of connectivity caused by the multipolar anarchic international system and globalization means that the countries have to pay a high degree of attention to different theatres and cannot overlook or abandon conflict without the risk of it impacting the number of different both geographical and political areas. The need to context a high number of spatially dispersed zones, the countries require capabilities that would allow them to do so. For most countries, such capabilities are impossible to possess by conventional means. However, by using different types of surrogates across a number of different regions instead of an actual conventional army, the actor can be essentially omnipresent without having any or only limited physical presence in the theatre where it needs to ensure its desired strategic outcome.

4.1.2.4 Circumnavigation

Another crucial gain that the states can exploit from using different surrogates is the effect of a circumnavigation of the burdens of war. Any war effort is always connected with certain burdens it lays on a state, its treasury, and, most importantly, citizens. Whether it is loss of life, economic hardships, or moral aspects of the war in question, the state must consider how its war effort is seen in the public eye. While this aspect and the effects the disgruntled population can have on an unpopular war effort is most visible in democratic societies, as was the case with public perception of the Vietnam War and to a lesser extent in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, it is essential to note that even non-democratic or even authoritarian regimes of today need to take public perception and effects it has on the domestic population of their war effort into consideration as is increasingly evident in Russia after the invasion into Ukraine in February 2022.

With a proxy, a state can circumnavigate this effect by delegating the war effort to a surrogate far away to whom the principal's domestic population has little to no emotional ties. While it may

sound cynical, the loss of life of a distant surrogate is much more acceptable to the public eye than the loss of a professional soldier who enlisted into the conventional military of a state in question. Furthermore, frequently it does not even need to reach this point as the involvement in a proxy effort is usually far more subtle than a conventional war effort, which allows the state to be engaged in multiple warzones without public scrutiny. For Krieg and Rickli, the need to remove military action from society's checks and balances is the single most important driver and aspect of what they call surrogate warfare in both liberal and illiberal states. According to these authors, it is precisely this need to circumnavigate the public's opinion that distinguishes the modern proxy wars from the different types of surrogate engagements used in antiquity, the Renaissance, or even the Cold War Era (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 77).

This aspect is progressively more and more relevant as the rise of social media gives the public the possibility to be in constant engagement with the images and information coming from the battlefield. The increasing prominence of this aspect can be seen in the ongoing war in Ukraine, where Russia is losing popularity war not only abroad but with the domestic audience as well. After nine months of conflict, the growing discontent with the so-called "special operation" and its effects it has on Russian people resulted in increased pushbacks against the regime resulting in 1 300 arrests, thousands of young Russian men fleeing the country from ongoing mobilization, and undermining of establishment from far-right opposition. Resulting in a situation in which, according to some researchers, more Russians have fled the country since the announcement of mobilization that has joined the fight in Ukraine (McCausland 2022, 16-17). Pushback from both its opposition and the domestic population is something that Russia did not have to consider between the years 2014 and 2021, when it fought in Ukraine only through proxy war via the separatists, irregulars, and private military contractors. All these factors are made possible by the high degree of plausible deniability of surrogate forces, meaning that if done correctly, it can be hard to link the actions of a surrogate to those of the principal. In that case, whether it is a domestic public or international community, it allows the state to follow its strategic interests in areas where being connected to the execution of certain operational objectives might be seen as undesirable.

Following the weariness of the public from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan it is, according to some researchers, precisely the option to circumnavigate the perception of the involvement in conflicts which made the United States include the proxy wars in its strategic toolkit and in recent years increasingly rely on it (Brown 2016, 243).

4.1.3 Patron-client relationship

A key element of the proxy warfare theory is the conceptualization of the actors involved in its dynamic as an agent and the principal. Understanding the relationships between these two actors is cardinal to understanding the specific dynamics of proxy warfare, which is, to a certain extent, a primary distinction from the regular modes of warfare of which the actors intending to wage proxy war need to be aware.

In general terms, the principal-agent dynamic refers to a scenario in which a principal selects an agent to act on its behalf when the agent is better equipped to efficiently achieve the desired goal. Through this delegation, the principal can achieve their objectives at a lower cost by entrusting the task to an actor who possesses certain features, which make them more effective than if the principal were to perform the task themselves (Ladwig III, 26-27). In the traditional context of conventional warfare, the state delegates the need for organized violence through military action to its armed forces. This relationship typically has a high degree of hierarchy, which grants the agent little to no autonomy to act outside the political and strategic control of its principal – the state. In this conventional dynamic, the agent is bound to the principal through institutionalized instruments and control mechanisms which highly reduces the agent's autonomy (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 116). Given the predictable nature of this principal-agent relationship, this low degree of autonomy gives a state a high level of control over how its desired operations will be conducted.

For a number of reasons described in the previous chapters, the state sometimes decides to accept the trade-off where this predictable, highly structured dynamic is exchanged by delegating this role to an outside surrogate actor who acts in the stead of the principal. The delegation of tasks to an agent who is not bound by institutionalized instruments in such a way that it cannot operate outside the scope of the principal's wishes as a regular army is connected to the number of externalities and specific aspects that the principal proxy relationship brings.

Given the reality that both agent and principal in the context of proxy warfare are two symbiotic but independent entities with their own long-term goals and logic for their action, the relationship can have a very high degree of fluctuation. The proxy and benefactor relationships occur when there is an overlap where the long-term strategic goals of different actors call for the same operational objectives. Therefore, the relationship is only temporary, and both parties decide to enter it only as long as it is useful toward its long-term strategic goals. The principal-agent relationship in the context of proxy warfare is highly dynamic and unreliable for these exact reasons.

Over time, the connection between the principal and agent can deteriorate, and the proxy can stop being useful for its principal. This can occur due to a variety of factors, such as a shift in the strategic dynamic of the theater, the proxy's inability to achieve the military objectives sought out by the principal because the costs of sustaining the proxy outweigh its gain or for a number of other factors outside of the proxy-benefactor nexus, like the pressure of international community. On the other hand, the shift can also occur from the proxy's end. This happens when there is ideological or political change on either side of the relationship or when the power level of the proxy grows in such a substantial way that it is able to define its own political objective and form its own long-term military strategy independent from benefactor (Mumford 2013, 19-20).

4.2 What constitutes Proxy War

In order to be able to assess the hypothesis that the United States' involvement in Afghanistan can be studied as a type of proxy conflict, it is necessary to clearly define the parameters of what the proxy conflict is and what are necessary conditions the conflict has to meet so it can be considered proxy war. The most mundane definition provided by Andrew Mumford states that proxy wars are a situation in which third parties use indirect engagement in order to influence the strategic outcome of a conflict (Mumford 2013, 11). While this laconic definition seems straightforward and simple, the issue arises mainly in discussing what does and does not can be understood as "direct intervention." This section aims to present different definitions and approaches by different proxy theorists to decide if the intervention in Afghanistan can or cannot be understood as a proxy conflict. By examining different approaches as to what characteristics seem to be reoccurring and most vital in classifications of different authors, the key characteristic will be selected, which then can serve as a general proxy warfare framework with which the case of ANA and the United States can be critically assessed.

4.2.1 Bar Siman Tov

Israeli scholar Yacoov Bar-Siman-Tov's work is one of the earliest theoretical frameworks of proxy wars. Siman-Tov wrote his article in the 1980s, and therefore his approach reflects best the original Cold War approach of the proxy war, where this mode of warfare was understood mainly as a way to circumnavigate direct confrontation and reach the superpower's strategic goals by other means as discussed in previous chapters. Siman-Tov directly mentions proxy warfare as a direct consequence of the invention of nuclear weapons and its subsequent implications for the strategic cultures of the nuclear powers (Siman-Tov 1984, 263). According to Siman-Tov, we can recognize two main types of proxy war – the local war with external intervention and without.

In the first usage of the term, a proxy war is understood as a conflict between regional states behind either one or more of them stands a superpower that provides some type of support to an engaged actor. This support can be in the form of financial support or the provision of arms. The supply (usually material in nature) is then a supplementation or a surrogate for direct intervention in a local conflict. The reason why a superpower decides to intervene is that it needs to advance its political or strategic interests, but the level of acceptable risk does not necessarily meets the urgency of the goal in order to intervene directly. Based on these definitions, every regional war without the intervention of major power would be considered a proxy war as long as one of the adversaries in the theatre has some sort of relationship with "out of the region" major power (Bar Siman Tov 1984, 263). Despite the article being written during the bipolar superpower struggle, the author does not consider it as a necessary requirement for the classification of war as a proxy war for both sides of the conflict to be a surrogate actor for the outside power. As long as one side of this conflict meets the requirement, the conflict can be considered a proxy war.

The second type of proxy war is then understood as a situation in which the major power intervenes directly because the supported side in the conflict is losing despite the indirect support of the patron. The need to intervene for the major powers is created by the fact that the outcome in which currently losing side is undesirable for the broader strategic goals of the patron outside of the theatre in which the war is being fought. Therefore, an international conflict between different superpowers, fought on the territory of a third country, in which major powers use some portion of that country's resources or manpower to achieve broader geopolitical goals. (Bar Siman Tov 1984, 264). According to the author, the conflict can still be considered a proxy for the following reasons – "(1) War was fought out on the soil of the small state, while the territories of China, the Soviet Union, and the United States remained untouched. (2) War was designed to advance the political and strategic interests of the superpowers rather than those of the small states by using some, or all, of the small state's manpower, resources, and territory as means for these ends. (3) The goals of the superpowers appear wholly compatible with those of the small states." (Bar Siman Tov 1984, 264).

Based on the Bar Siman Tov definitions, it is evident that his theory of proxy warfare is very much a product of his time. The theory is very much major power-focused and purely state focused. While the prominence of the non-state actors, insurgencies and non-state actors like terrorist organizations is the focus of the conflict studies mainly in the past few decades, we can already in a decade where the theory was being written find cases where a state-centric approach for proxy warfare does not suffice. The superpowers regularly supported popular movements, non-state networks, and insurgencies in the countries belonging to the sphere of influence of their rival superpower in order to tip the scales of balance. In the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, the United States famously supported non-state Mujahideen to halt the Soviet's advance. This case meets all the

criteria of the proxy wars despite the proxy in question not being a state actor. While the Bar Siman Tov work is frequently cited, it is necessary, even while considering the bipolar world in which it was created, to at least broaden the terminology to include non-state actors alongside the state ones.

4.2.2 Andrew Mumford

Mumford's study of proxy warfare can be considered as a sort of meta-study, taking into consideration the views of many authors studying proxy warfare since the concept originated during the Cold War.

While Mumford's approach leaves larger room for interpretation than Bar-Siman Tov, it still can be considered a largely traditional interpretation of proxy warfare. Rather than considering a wide range of delegation strategies, including technological elements or unconventional surrogates, Mumford's perspective emphasizes traditional actors, focusing on the roles of state actors in the form of superpowers and non-state factors, usually in the form on insurgent groups or the small client state powers.

In Mumford's conceptualization of proxy warfare, the principal and the agent are usually political entities, such as nations or organized groups. The reason for the utilization of proxy warfare is, in Mumford's view, motivated primarily by circumnavigation principles and an effort to avoid large-scale conflict rather than niche supplementation or utilizing the proxies as a force multiplier.

The theory is primarily focused on the optic of actor-based perspective, strategies, and tactics used by the principal in the utilization of clients as well as negotiations involved in forging these relationships. This conception of proxy warfare stresses the importance of strategic delegation of war burdens. This delegation is a conscious choice made by a patron to shift the risks and costs of conflict onto a proxy. It's a calculated decision based on an understanding of the potential benefits and drawbacks and is far from an incidental or unintentional occurrence. This highlights a key difference between different authors who allows for the case where delegation can be unintentional or incidental. While Mumford recognizes the evolution of proxy warfare from its Cold War roots, he remains traditional by not untangling does not concept from its close association with superpower involvement. Similarly, while discussing the role of delegation on technical elements, he considers them only as an extension of the direct tools of warfare and innovations rather than a form of delegation (Mumford, 2016).

4.2.3 Vladimir Rauta

Vladimir Rauta's article, "Proxy War - Reconceptualization" (2021), presents an effort to tackle an obstacle discussed in a previous section of this thesis: the absence of a clear, definitive framework for understanding and studying proxy warfare. This gap in the existing body of knowledge has caused significant challenges to scientific research, as it hampers establishment of a clear analytical approach to the topic. As a result, the term "proxy warfare" is applied inconsistently across the literature or is outright dismissed due to its perceived lack of analytical utility arising from its unclear content.

This inconsistency has led to the proliferation of alternative conceptual labels, such as the previously discussed concept of surrogate warfare, remote warfare, or compound warfare, further muddying the waters of research in this domain. Addressing this issue, Rauta proposes a three-component definitional structure for proxy warfare, which includes a material-constitutive feature, a processual feature, and a relational feature. This novel approach, anchored in the tradition of semantic concept analysis, aims to untangle the convoluted issues surrounding the definitions of proxy warfare.

The material-constitutive feature, as conceptualized by Rauta, emerges as a primary cornerstone of all patron-proxy relationships. It entails the external support offered by a patron to an actor operating within a conflict zone. This support can assume various forms. In its indirect form, support might entail the provision of weapons, finances, and other resources. In contrast, direct support could involve the patron contributing its own troops to the proxy's cause (Rauta, 2021, pp. 13-14). This incorporation of direct support within the scope of the material-constitutive feature is particularly significant since it paves the way for the option to consider the conflict in Afghanistan as a form of proxy warfar

4.2.4 Krieg and Rickli

The approach of these two authors is significantly broader compared to the theoretical frameworks of other authors. For them, the traditional Cold War proxy war mode is only a small piece of a mosaic that together creates what they term "surrogate warfare." The concept of surrogate warfare presented by these authors significantly broadens the proxy warfare frameworks with which most of the other authors work. For Krieg and Rickli, any form of allocation when an actor delegates some of its war burdens to any agent is considered surrogate warfare. Therefore it is any mode of warfare where a patron externalizes a strategic, operational, or tactical burden of warfare, either partly or wholly, to a substitute with an intent to minimize the patron's own burden of war (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 58). The

principle of delegation in this approach encompasses not only state actors but also technological agents, which according to these authors, can be considered as a form of proxies as well, ranging from the drones employed in a battlezone to the use of cyber warfare. The inclusion of technological elements in their surrogate theory is a point where these authors diverge the most from the other authors. While the use of technological components that do not require constant human elements is frequently discussed, it is usually seen as a supplement or a multiplier rather than a complete delegation to the other element. As Mumford notes on the example of drones, the most often discussed technological component in this debate, while they are indirectly piloted, they only fulfill a direct substantive function. They carry military markings, sometimes even flags, and while they are controlled remotely or even controlled by AI, it is still part of the directly waged war where the difference from manned aerial bombardment or missile attack is only in the means rather than nature of the instrument itself (Mumford 2013, 23-24). The inclusion of the technical surrogates by Rickli and Krieg is highly problematic as it further muddles the waters of the proxy theories where the definitions and clear distinctions between what can and cannot be considered proxy.

Given the broad scope of this definition, it is challenging to find necessary universal requirements for what can or cannot be considered proxy warfare in their approach. According to the surrogate theory, the agent and a principal do not even necessarily have to enter a proxy and patron relationship formally, but there can, in a specific situation, be cases where surrogacy is unintentional, and the agent-client relationship forms indirectly and by chance. The substitution also does not necessarily need to be full, as authors see even force multipliers in the form of historical auxiliary forces or mercenaries that only supplemented conventional forces instead of entirely substituting them as a form of limited surrogacy (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 18-19). While in some historical cases like 14th century Venice, Florence, and Genoa, the delegation to nonstate surrogates became almost complete (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 19). In the approach of these authors, the delegation strategy ceases to be a product of a Cold War but an ongoing approach used by almost all countries in one form or the other throughout the course of history. The term in this work is also untangled from the reliance on the superpower involvement as even developing states often delegate a significant portion of their violence to nonstate forces. These surrogates can, especially in multisectarian states, serve as a valuable tool in maintaining control over fractured societies as these militias are often, for sectarian reasons, willing to engage in acts that might be problematic for conventional forces.

The term surrogate warfare is not used synonymously with proxy warfare. Instead, it is used as an umbrella term for any form of delegation of the burden of warfare to an agent, of which proxy warfare is, but one part alongside concepts of remote warfare and compound warfare, which are by these authors considered as a form of substitution as well.

The need to implement these other modes of war under the umbrella of war substitution is dictated by the fact that traditional theories of proxy warfare make one side in a hierarchy subservient to the other. However, the concepts like compound warfare show that relationships can be more egalitarian in cases where a patrons forces and agent's forces act simultaneously, only with different degrees of coordination, without one actor in a relationship not necessarily following orders of the other (Krieg, Rickli 2019, 6). The authors aim to address the shortcomings of traditional proxy warfare theories, which can be rigid and outdated in the current international landscape, by presenting a more flexible and inclusive characterization of war substitution.

4.3. Common characteristics

Based on the previewed approaches, it is visible that the concept of proxy warfare is subject to varying interpretations among scholars, resulting in a lack of consensus regarding the defining characteristics of such conflicts. In order to establish a coherent framework for the critical evaluation of the relationship between the United States and the Afghan National Army (ANA), as well as the broader Afghan National Security Forces (ANSDF), it is imperative to identify the shared elements underpinning the proxy theories of Mumford, Rauta, and Yaccoov Bar Siman Tov, as well as the surrogate warfare theory proposed by Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli. Based on the review of the work of these authors, the common characteristics with which they all work are the following:

1. Indirect involvement: Proxy war must involve external actors who use indirect involvement in conflicts through a third-party agent
2. Control: External actor exerts varying levels of control over the proxy forces
3. Strategic advantage: External actor uses proxy force in order to gain a strategic or operational advantage in a contested area with the limitation of a risk to their own forces
4. Protraction: Proxy warfare leads to the protraction of conflict, with the conflict continuing even after external actors withdraw their support

The second examined phenomenon connected to the use of proxy warfare is the phenomenon of negative externalities that are specific to the use of an agent to conduct violence on the principal's behalf. In order to assess if some of those characteristics applied in the case of ANA and APL the following factors are mentioned by all proxy warfare scholars with whose theoretical framework this research operates. The primary externalities specific to the use of a proxy force are the following –

1. Loose of control – The control over the conduct of the agent creates environment where agent does not further the principal's long term strategic goals

2. Escalation and Instability – Use of a proxy force leads to escalation, where the conflict intensifies beyond the original intention of the principal actor, or it creates instability in the entire region (merged)

3. Human rights abuses – Given the limited control of a principal over the proxy, its independent conduct oftentimes leads to human rights abuses

4. Prolonging of the conflict – The use of a proxy can lead to a long-term conflict, the external actors may not have a clear exit strategy or may continue to provide support for the proxy force that is not able to survive on its own, or the continue to support the proxy even after the original objectives were achieved

With the use of the synthesized factors from the wider theoretical framework on proxy warfare, the parameters of the relationship between the United States and ANA are examined, and the ascertainment if they can be considered as a part of proxy framework is made.

5. Initial Stage of Conflict: Context before ANA

The management of the Allied approach to the Afghan forces was roughly following a similar pathway as the management of the entire after invasion management of rest of the Afghani institutions. Given the hasty start of the war on terror in response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, there was only a little time window to plan any post-conflict rebuilding.

In his congressional address on September 20 following the attack on the World Trade Center, President George W. Bush demanded from Taliban to hand over Al Qaeda leaders, close the terrorist training sites on its territory, and allow US access to them if they would refuse to hand over the terrorist they will share their fate. After the Taliban leaders refused, reasoning with bin Laden's status as the guest, the United States was given the casus belli to begging with military action against Afghanistan (CRS 2021, 7)

US military had never before considered an invasion of Afghanistan, and therefore the plans for the war had to be made quickly (Friedman 2022, 401). The negative effect of limited time was only enhanced by the fact that the United States Department of Defense was purely focused on overthrowing the Taliban regime and did not make any considerations about how Afghanistan will be governed and managed after this goal was reached (Hammes 2016, 278). The mismanaged start of the United States' tenure in Afghanistan would, to a large extent, be a pretext for the rest of the long campaign that became the longest war in the history of the American nation.

The initial part of the invasion of Afghanistan was a very clear example of proxy warfare. For the United States, it was not easy and not advisable to launch a conventional invasion. Prior to the 9/11, the Pentagon was not operating with the possible scenario of an invasion of Afghanistan (Nagl 2022, 10-12). United States army, therefore, did not possess any off-shelf doctrine for invasion of Afghanistan that would be war-gamed or trained. For that reason, at the very beginning of the conflict, it could conduct only airstrikes and was progressing very cautiously with an effort to make the involvement on the ground very limited (Friedman 2022, 406).

Unlike the US Army, the CIA has operated in Afghanistan for more than three decades and had some agents in place. This would be crucial at the start of the campaign when it became clear that only Air Strikes won't suffice to reach the United States goals. The decision was made to work with the forces opposing the Taliban regime, namely the Northern Alliance, which was relatively well organized and already in the control of roughly 20% of the country (Friedman 2022, 407). The proposed vision was, therefore, limited intervention in the form of Air Strikes, which would support irregular forces of the Afghan Northern Alliance on the ground, for which, as a communication bridge, would function the United States operatives and limited numbers of special forces on the ground. One of the primary reasons for this approach was that there were concerns springing from the lessons learned from the Soviet Invasion when large conventional numbers of Soviet forces in the country alienated the civilian population against the invasion as well as the inability to intervene at the time directly (Gallagher 2019, 73).

It is important to note that for the CIA, the main goal was to fight against Al Qaeda and hunt for Osama Bin Laden rather than toppling the Taliban regime. Given the fact that the strategy of Afghan militias supported by Air Strikes worked well in the clashes with the Taliban, a similar approach was tried in the hunt for Bin Laden in the mountainous ranges of Tora Bora. Since the forces of the Northern Alliance, which after the fall of Kabul refused to venture further south or east (Friedman 2022, 413), could no longer be used, the CIA had to put together a new force to take upon this task. Since there was still no prospect of conventional U.S. military force on the horizon, the CIA put together an Eastern Alliance of Afghan warlords. The idea being that it will be able to function on the same blueprint as previously successful cooperation with the Northern Alliance in the fights further inland. Given the urgency, the CIA had no proper time to vet the new militias, who were oftentimes at odds with each other and would prove to be very unreliable. Each of the three employed warlords had their own goals, and the only incentives keeping them together would be monetary rewards (Friedman 2022, 416).

While the capture of Ben Laden was not achieved, the initial campaign was still considered by many as a tremendous success and revitalization of the American way of war. It took only 100

CIA officers, 350 Special Forces soldiers, and 15 000 Afghan militia allies, alongside air strikes, to defeat a Taliban army estimated at 50 000 to 60 000 fighters plus several thousand al-Qaida combatants (Jones 2009, XXII). This said the relations between the Eastern Alliance and limited US forces were uneasy at best. As stated, the Eastern Alliance warlords were motivated mainly by financial gain, which infuriated US officers. The actual military engagement effectiveness of Afghan militias during the siege of Tora Bora proved to be very subpar. The forces were not very motivated, they were oftentimes routed under enemy fire, and as showed, the cultural differences played a part as they would regularly abandon their positions to break the Ramadan fast or refuse to fight in some instances (Friedman 2022. 418).

Considering the above-mentioned, the usage of the proxies at the start of the conflict was met with mixed results. While the Northern Alliance proved to be successful in its conquest of Kabul, the Eastern counterpart was not able to reach the goal of the capture of Bin Laden in Tora Bora. The cultural specifics of militia combatant and the limited control that the CIA had over them can be seen as a primary cause of their subpar effectiveness. The inadequate performance of the militias in this initial stage of the conflict and the lessons learned from then necessitated the need for a different approach that would materialize in the form of the formation of a new national army. The externalities caused by the tribalistic nature of militias would be considered, and the U.S. military doctrines applied and Western training provided, as well as the issues with limited control mitigated by embedding the military personnel in the Afghan military. The effort in remote warfare was not enough to meet the United States' strategic goals, and it was shown that the presence of the conventional military cannot be avoided.

6. Aspects of the Afghan National Army (ANA)

6.1 Background of ANA establishment and need for a centrally lead army

The ANA's inception can be traced back to the conferences held in Bonn and, more importantly, Petersburg between December 2001 and December 2002 (Younosi et al 2009, 12-13). At the first conference in Bonn, the selection of Hamid Karzai as the head of the interim government marked the start of a new regime and the beginning of the post-Taliban post-governance era (CRS 2021, 7). Apart from establishing the new political framework for Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime, the idea of the new Afghan National Army was here introduced for the first time (NPS 2006, 1). The need for the creation of the new force was primarily pushed by the United States, for which

the idea of what instrument would achieve long-lasting security and stability in Afghanistan changed a few times over time since the opening invasion in 2001.

Initially, the coalition relied on militias that were paid for and supported by the United States but not accountable to the central Kabul government. In 2002, the numbers of these militiamen were around a staggering 100 000 to 200 000 combatants (Giustozzi 2015, 123). At first, the existence of these militias seemed sufficient and working, but as the Taliban resurged, it became clear they were unable to hunt down the insurgents and their allies. To achieve enduring strategic success, the most politically acceptable solution was either to expand or replace the currently existing militias. This logic eventually led to a prioritization of establishing a new centrally-led army (Giustozzi 2007, 47). Furthermore, the coalition as a whole required a dependable force that could operate in Afghanistan. In addition, at that point, the still only conceptual Afghan National Army provided a justification for not deploying peacekeeping troops throughout the country (Younossi et al 2009, 11). This rationale indicates that, at the time, there was a reluctance by coalition members to take on more extensive direct military commitment in the country.

The push for the independent Afghanistan army was furthermore in line with the standing doctrine of the United States military. The basis of this logic can be found in the US Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency manual, which states the following “ U.S forces committed to a COIN effort are only to assist a host nation government. The long-term goal is to leave the government able to stand by itself. In the end, the host nation has to win on its own. Achieving this requires the development of viable local leaders and institutions... While it may be easier for U.S. military units to conduct operations themselves, it is better to work to strengthen local forces and institutions and then assist them. Host nation governments have to final responsibility to solve their own problems. Eventually, all foreign armies are seen as interlopers or occupiers: the sooner the main effort can transition to host nation institutions, without unacceptable degradation, the better“ (U.S Dept. of the Army 2007, p 47).

Based on the aforementioned points, it becomes clear that the creation of the central army was consistent with military operational logic, the strategic logic of the campaign from a long-term perspective, and the broad political consensus of the various stakeholders involved.

The original assumption that individual warlords, militias, and tribes could be seamlessly integrated into the newly created Afghan state and help bring in needed stability was soon proved incorrect. Additionally, while the foreign military forces could ensure the survival of the central government, they by themselves were unable to significantly expand their power in the provinces, which were primarily governed by various non-state actors. Given the complexity of the political

landscape and competing interests involved, the various powers were not inclined to engage in different areas of conflict without benefits to their own agendas, even further emphasizing the need for the establishment of a centrally led army (Giustozzi 2007, 47). That being considered, it is imperative to acknowledge the fact that the institution of the central army in Afghanistan was a time and time tried process that never managed to produce a very successful outcome. In the history of Afghanistan as a state, militias have demonstrated their capacity to turn the tide of war against foreign adversaries rather than the national army during times of crisis. Therefore Afghanistan's military strength always extended beyond the mere numerical strength of its central army and is rooted in the efficacy of its tribal militias (Younossi et col 2009, 7).

During the Petersberg conference, it was established that created force that would ensure stability and security under the new regime should be an ethnically balanced, voluntary force consisting of not more than 70 000 members (GAO, 2005). The United States assumed a leading role in the reconstruction of the ANA, with the responsibility of planning and implementing the process (NPS 2007, 1). However, it is essential to note that already at the time, it was recognized that the creation of the Afghan forces apparatus would be a multilateral effort, with other nations pledging to donate military equipment or assistance rather than providing direct financial aid (Younossi et col 2009, 12). While the US took charge of the ANA, the other countries led the effort in other sectors of the security apparatus. Germany was in charge of the Afghan police, the United Kingdom of the counter-narcotics sector, and Japan of disarmament efforts (International Crisis Group 2010, 7, SIGAR 2017 14). The multitude of actors involved in conceptualizing the new military force often had different ideas about what nature the new force should have and approached the process of conceptualization with different agendas. Nevertheless, a consensus was eventually reached, and it was decided that the new central army should serve the following functions:

1. To Protect the political process as defined by the constitution
2. Replace every other militia and organized military force in the country
3. Fight insurgents and terrorists
4. Work closely with coalition and other international forces (GAO, 2005)

The significant challenges of creating a national force in a highly fragmented society, as in Afghanistan, quickly arose. Various Afghan factions often delayed the development of ANA as much as possible, while others tried to seize as much control of this new institution as they could (Giustozzi 2007, 47). The early attempts to use existing militias as a foundation for the new force were quickly discarded due to two primary reasons. Firstly, these converted militia units were shown to be largely ineffective when confronting insurgent forces, and tribal politics rather than campaign objectives heavily influenced their decision-making processes. Secondly, the high levels of illiteracy and

nonexistent formal education among the militia officers and warlords precluded their ability to operate within a structured hierarchy typical of conventional military forces (Younossi et al. 2009, 14, Giustozzi 2015, 126). This point is further supported by Chan, who notes that while the militias member had a considerable combat experience from the decades of conflicts, they were all guerilla fighters not used in a similar type of professional, organized military loyal to the state. Apart from the illiteracy issue, their inability to function in an organized army was also strengthened by ethnic rivalries and tribal ties in the local regions where the central government had only limited influence (Chan, 2009, 26).

Another reason why the model of an army based on the bedrock of the former militias was rather a political one. One of the proponents of a militia-based system was Afghani interim Minister of Defence Fahim Khan. Khan's vision was to create a large force of 200 000 to 250 000 soldiers, where as a basic building block for this new institution would serve already existing militias, and the newly created professional army wing would be only its supplement (SIGAR 2017, 15). One of the reasons for a desired large army was the possibility of countering the threats originating from perceived rival Pakistan. This idea did not fit into United States policy, which at the time saw Pakistan as a key ally in the Global War on Terror. The United States' vision was a small, light infantry force that could be rapidly deployed across Afghanistan to counter the internal threats rather than contest other rival countries, which often were considered US's allies (ibid). For these reasons, the ANA was, from the start, conceptualized as an army clearly meant to be solving internal issues only and not to clash with the armies of different countries. This fact can be best demonstrated by the fact that training did not include any anti-aircraft or anti-tank training but, on the other hand, had a significant focus on dealing with the civilian population (**Giustozzi 2015, 28**). The fact that the army was trained in the control of civilians, which is at least in democratic countries, not on the usual agenda of conventional armies but not in the ability to clash with conventional state forces further proves the intended single issue it was supposed to tackle

All the mentioned factors strongly contributed to the initial issues with establishing the force, which was much slower than required. Giustozzi also notes that from its very beginning, the ANA was torn between two opposite concepts as to what its intended role should be. The uncertainty that would eventually be one of the core reasons influencing the effectiveness of this force in CT operations, one being the only form of the indigenous auxiliary force of an occupying foreign power or being a true national army able to have a monopoly on force in Afghanistan and serve primarily as the instrument of the Kabul government and its aims (Giustozzi 2007 48). The reality of the fact that it was an outside patron force dictating the nature of the newly created army and keeping its technological level purposefully low in order not to antagonize allied countries like Pakistan clearly rather point towards the former.

6.2 ANA organization and structure

The Afghan National Army was structured and organized in a manner consistent with that of a typical conventional army. Its hierarchical structure consisted of units, formations, and headquarters, all arranged along the lines of the standard military model. The ANA was divided into Regional Commands (CORPS), with the Ministry of Defence and General Staff overseeing the operations from Kabul. The regional Commands, located in Kabul, Gardez, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif, respectively, were responsible for overseeing and coordinating operations in their respective regions (NPS 2007, 2).

The Afghan army was primarily an infantry-centric force. At its inception, most of its brigades consisted of three light infantry kandaks – equivalent to battalion- one combat support kandak and one combat service support kandak. At the same time, designated quick reaction forces having a different composition, with the three infantry kandaks being replaced by commando, mechanized infantry, and armored kandaks. For combating irregulars, the specialized units proficient in this kind of warfare, the special combat veterans, have been selected to form six 650-man commando kandaks, which were supposed to be the best equipped and most highly trained in the army (Chan 2009, 27). This structure was designed to enable ANA to respond quickly to threats and provide appropriate levels of firepower and mobility while also ensuring that combat support and service support were integrated into the overall structure.

The exact numbers of the army were changing over the years, and it can be said that the initial number of 70 000 soldiers was a strong underestimation. The set goal number was initially increased to 80 000 at the 2008 Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting in Tokyo (Younossi et al 2009, 7). Then the goal number to 122 000 later in the same year (Ibid). Later during the presidency of Barack Obama, the goal was further increased to a staggering 240 000 (Giustozzi 2010,37). This increase was to be done by creating the new CORPS, establishing the new brigades to the existing corps, and increasing the structure of three-battalion brigades to four battalion brigades (ibid). The mentioned numbers were, however, only declared goals of recruitment and manning. While exact quantification of troops is difficult due to issues like desertions and omnipresent problems with AWOLs (absent without leave), when examining figures presented by different authors over the year, it becomes clear that the intended target set up by politicians was never met. Chan reported 63 000 troops in the field and 9 000 in training in 2008, when the goal of 80 000 soldiers was just increased to 134 000. In 2009 while the goal number was 122 000 (or 134 000 counting soldiers in training), the real number was roughly 79 000 members (Younossi et al. 2009,7). Therefore further increase in the number goal came even before the 2008 set goal was even close to being fulfilled.

The constant increases in the set goals before the previous one would even be fulfilled had detrimental effects on the entire training structure and system. In order to be able to cover the constantly increasing demand, the training centers were forced to shorten the already short training course both for the soldiers and the officers. The simultaneous increase in the size of the classes and shortening of the training period would lead some to label these courses as producing only a “cannon fodder” (Giustozzi 2010, 37).

6.3 Ethnic aspect

Throughout its existence, achieving ethnic diversity within the ANA has been a significant difficulty due to the country’s diverse and ethnic makeup, as well as years of civil war and distrust among different groups. Despite this, achieving an ethnic balance in all CORPs and battalions has been one of the key intended goals already set out from the conceptualization of the ANA in 2022, as evidenced by the primary set-out functions of the new army mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Monitoring the progress and success of the desired ethnic balance was during the existence of ANA a difficult task. One reason for this was the fact that the numbers were never officially disclosed by governmental bodies. The effort to rough sum up the ethnic composition of the ANA was made by RAND corporation researchers in 2009. Since there was no reliable census data available, the report’s findings are only an approximation of the maximum desired number of different ethnicities within ANA ranks. Nonetheless, it does provide a picture of the ethnic composition in the ANA itself without regard to if it does or does not reflect the ethnic makeup of the locations in which the CORPS in question was located. At the time of the conducted research, it was officially recognized by the MoD that there was a surplus of Tajiks in the ANA officer and NCO ranks. According to the findings of RAND researchers comparing current numbers to five estimates of the ethnic compositions of the Afghanistan population between 1980 and 2007, this MoD statement was proven true would be true. On the other hand, Hazaras and Uzbeks were heavily underrepresented, and Pashtuns roughly fell in line with their population estimate (Younossi et col. 2009, 21-22). While the researchers did not comment on the ethnic composition in the non-officer enlisted roles, the overall underrepresentation of certain ethnic groups, while still prevalent, seems to be lower compared to officers and NCOs.

A more holistic picture from a similar time period is provided by Giustozzi. Similarly, as RAND researchers, he notes that the specific numbers are difficult to get from large art because the Afghan Ministry of Defense was reluctant to provide information regarding the ethnic composition of the entire army (Giustozzi, 2009, 38). At least some rough picture can be provided by the available

numbers of 206th Corps, which in 2008 consisted of 40% Pashtuns, 38% Tajiks, 14% Hazaras, 6% Uzbeks and 2% other ethnicities(*ibid*). How accurate these numbers really are is difficult to say because, according to Giustozzi, officers oftentimes tended to state different ethnicities than they had in order to have a better chance at promotion (*ibid* 38-39). This aspect can be supported by the fact that Tajiks are overrepresented in NCO and CO positions. At the same time, Hazaras often claim they are being discriminated against and prevented from further promotions (*ibid* 38). It is not entirely clear if the disproportion among the officer's ranks was truly caused by the discrimination factors or if it was at least initially just a product of circumstances. For instance, the fact that the initial recruitment was conducted mainly around Kabul would favor the overrepresentation of the Tajiks in the NCO and CO ranks just based on the fact that they were the dominant ethnicity in that region (Giustozzi 2015, 137)

In the days of early ANA, the U.S. military tried to solve the issue of desired diversity within the ranks by enforcing strict ethnic diversity quotas. However, these quotas failed to solve the deep-seated sociological issues. For instance, while Pashtun quotas would be technically met on paper, their representation in the ANA ranks from southern Afghanistan, where the Taliban was most prevalent, was minimal (Sigar 2017, 184). Therefore while the overall ethnic balance might be achieved, it would overly represent groups only from certain regions and did not allow for the sought-out trickle-down effect where the increased interaction with the new regime could weaken the Taliban position in certain regions. That said, the unrealistic expectations of the MoD in this effort show the problem of understanding the local realities entirely. It is hard to imagine that the families from the village in the areas where the Taliban has a more substantial presence or is even in control would consider sending their members to serve in the Army of the central government and risk retaliation. This fact can be further supported by the fact that according to Afghani intelligence, the Taliban cells were very well informed about who was collaborating with NATO and central government forces (Jones 2009, XXV). For individuals who would want to collaborate with the government, it would often be a hazardous move, given that the central government was unable to provide security and protection in the rural areas. A fact illustrated very well by the statement of then director of Afghani National Directorate of Security (NDS) Amrullah Saleh - "When villagers and rural communities seek protection from police, either it arrives late or arrives in a wrong way" (Saleh 2006, 4). Furthermore, even while not considering the unfeasibility of this move for security reasons, it would probably not be very lucrative, given the fact that at one point Taliban was offering three times higher pay for the deserted ANA soldiers (Giustozzi 2007, 52), indicating better financial conditions in service of Taliban in general. Therefore, it should be seen as logical that the recruitment process's success was highly dependent on who was in the region in question in power or more present.

While somewhere enforced quotas created a false sense of representation, in other cases, it allowed certain groups to monopolize the officer ranks. In an effort to part with the pre-ANA militia system, the cap on Tajik representation was introduced in order to prevent former Northern Alliance monopolization of the force. This action was based on a misconception and presumption that the Northern Alliance was composed of Tajik forces to a higher degree than the United States expected. The misconception was based on the fact that the majority of the NA leaders were Tajik. However, over-representation on the top did not reflect a reality among rank-a-file members of the militia. The combination of the effort to meet Pashtun quotas and the effort to limit NA, at the time thought to be Tajik, only resulted in the political domination of the force by the close circle of Pashtun commanders previously affiliated with the Northern Alliance (Sigar 2017, 184) So not only the quotas would not ensure the diversity, but would actively create the issue it was trying to prevent in the first place.

This section highlights the complications arising from Afghanistan's diverse ethnic makeup, which the American and Afghan governments were unable to adequately solve. The ethnic balance in the army's officer and NCO's ranks was not indicative of the army's overall ethnic composition, resulting in feelings of discrimination among certain groups. One of the primary stated goals while establishing ANA was that multiethnicity would be one of the key features and the ANA would go beyond tribalistic and ethnic differences; this objective clearly remained unrealized. Furthermore, when there was an effort to enforce bigger diversity or use the pretext of diversity for a hidden agenda like limiting the influence of the Northern Alliance, the effects of them would only deepen the issue. The misuse of the quotas is further proof of the United States' total misunderstanding of cultural and societal realities in which they became embroiled, and that they, in the words of Donald Rumsfeld, not only had no idea against they fight but as the misunderstanding of Northern Alliance ethnic composition shows also who was fighting at their side.

6.4 Women in ANA

In the cultural context of Afghanistan, it is interesting to mention that the Afghan National Army allowed women to serve in its ranks. Although the number of women serving was relatively low, the fact serves as a stark contrast with the regime that is in power contemporarily.

Initially, the positions open to women mainly were as support for male-inhibited roles, primarily involved in logistics, medical support, and finances (Taylor, 2010). Later the opportunities would, to a certain extent, expand. In the year 2012, ANA personnel included 379 women, out of which 268 were officers, 104 NCO's and 6 holding the rank of soldier (SIGAR 2012, 91). While the recruitment of women soldiers was considered a low priority, the need for them in fields such as

intelligence and law was recognized, and support for their inclusion was provided. In May 2014, the Afghani MoD ordered a comprehensive effort to double the number of women in the ANA by May 2012. This effort, though, was not met with a high degree of success, as the limited number of positions women could enter was somewhat limited given the fact they could not serve in outright combat roles (SIGAR 2017, 149). Although the intended objective was to have 10% of Afghan security forces comprised of women, the unsuccessful implementation of reforms was not thoroughly evaluated, and instead, new targets were established with more lenient deadlines (Zawulistani 2018). While the implementation of radical reforms to increase the number of female soldiers did not meet with success, there was nevertheless a steady, gradual increase in their numbers over the years. Last available figures from before the ANDSF ceased to exist showing 1 472 females serving in the ANA in the year 2020, and for comparison 4 017 in the Afghan National Police (ANP) (SIGAR 2022, 1).

6.5 Training

The bulk of primary military training would be conducted through Afghan National Training Command (ANATC HQ) in Kabul (NPS 2007, 4). Here recruits would undergo a seven-week basic training during which those showing potential for leadership would be pulled out of their kandak and sent into a separate NCO course conducted by the United Kingdom (Chan 29). Both the enlisted soldiers and NCOs would then train separately for six more weeks and afterward would be reunited as one cohesive unit (NPO 4, Chan 29-30). In addition to basic combat skills, the basic training program would also aim to build new bonds and, more importantly, break down barriers between different ethnic groups (Chan 29).

As a result of the distinct training tracks for soldiers and NCOs, overseen by different countries, it would be necessary to consolidate their training in order to facilitate their function as a dependable, cohesive unit. To achieve this end, the army would undertake a two-week-long field exercise, conducted by the Canadians called Collective Lanes following the completion of basic kandak training (NPS, 2007 4) . This exercise would serve to validate the tactical effectiveness of the united by simulating various scenarios, including raids, ambushes, different attack/defense scenarios, and non-combat-specific scenarios. Additionally, prior to being rotated into combat operations, training with COs and HQs would all be included in this program.

While the training of enlisted men was overseen primarily by the United States military, the officer training would be far more diverse regarding what countries conducted them. As mentioned, the NCO course was conducted by the UK. The CO training would be conducted initially through only one program created by the United States. A program called Primary National Military Academy was planned as a four-year university type course modeled on the same framework that

would be used in US West Point. However, with the increases in the target goals of the ANA numbers, this slow-paced program would soon not be enough as it was not producing officers at the required rate. To address this issue, a shorter 24-week course called Officer Candidate School was established and run by the United Kingdom. This program enabled it to cover increasing personnel demands. Additionally, an officer who already had previous experience would receive an eight-week training program at the French Officer Academy.

Continual training and mentoring of the ANA was carried out through the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team program (OMLT). Each OMLT would be assigned 12-19 trainers with various areas of specialization, who would then be assigned for at least six months to individual kandaks, brigaded or HQs. The goal of OMLTs would be, according to NATO, to "provide training and mentoring to support ANA units operational deployment and to provide liaison capability between the ANA and ISAF force (NPS, 2007 4).

The training would not be monopolized by the UK, Canada, and the United States. Apart from mentioned France, the additional 11 countries would be providing training in specialized areas, not all of them being NATO members (Chan 29). For instance, neither an ISAF nor a NATO member, India deployed a military team to Afghanistan in mid-2007 to conduct infantry training on weapons handling, map reading, and battalion-level staff work (Chan 30).

6.6 ANA battle efficiency and morale

The ANA, despite years of substantial investment and support from international allies, exhibited varying levels of efficiency on the battlefield. The performance of the ANA was hampered by issues such as lack of commitment, inadequate training, as well as dependency on foreign forces.

Lack of commitment on the battlefield was a frequently reported issue, as was a failure to aggressively pursue insurgents, sometimes even ignoring activities within close proximity to the checkpoints where soldiers would be stationed (Giustozzi 2015, 179). This observation aligns with reports from Western troops, which often characterized ANA personnel as "battle-shy", lacking in self-confidence, and overly dependent on external support. ANA officers, in particular, were not expected to resist insurgent forces independently in situations where there was no foreign support (Giustozzi 2015, 179-180). This lack of self-confidence and commitment inevitably translated to ineffective performance on the battlefield. There were recorded instances of ANA soldiers hiding in ditches, fleeing the battlefield, or refusing to respond to enemy fire (Giustozzi 2015, 180). Despite the efforts of instructors from the coalition armies, it was reported that the ANA "remains an ill-

disciplined force weakened by drug abuse and desertion” (Chan, 2009). Furthermore, concerns were raised about the Afghan troops following rather tribal honor ties and strategic culture rather than national army one which was resulting in unreliable performance in engagements, where the force could either break under the fire when the objective did not align with their tribal ties or in other cases showing-trigger happy tendencies where the restraint would be warranted (Chan, 2009).

Another significant factor of ANA’s operational efficiency was its dependency on U.S. military forces whether on the on-ground force or even more significantly in the last years of the conflict on the significant air support provided by the U.S Airforce. The decision to withdraw all U.S. military personnel and significantly reduce U.S. support had then a detrimental impact not only on the operational efficiency but also on the morale of ANA soldiers. The Afghan troops had long relied on the U.S military presence to protect against large-scale losses and to ensure their government’s accountability in paying their salaries. However, the U.S-Taliban agreement of 2020, and subsequent events, undermined this dependency and gave rise to a sense of abandonment within the ANA (SIGAR, 2023). The air support provided by the United States proved to be a significant factor in the success of ANA, and there can be observed direct correlation between the reduction of the airstrikes after the Donald Trump administration started its negotiations with the Taliban and the slowing down of the ANA advancements. In the year 2019, U.S Air Force conducted 7,423 airstrikes, most since 2009 which correlated with the significant advancements of ANA and recapturing the territory from the Taliban (SIGAR 2023). After the signature of Doha agreement and limitation of the air support from the side of the United States, ANA was not able to make further progress against the insurgents, and after the complete withdrawal of U.S forces was quickly defeated, making it was clear that that the Afghan forces never really became an independent force as it was intended when they were established.

The high degree of reliance on the foreign military partly stemmed from the fact that it was designed to mirror the image of U.S., forces by applying doctrines that required a high degree of professional military sophistication and leadership. A fact that was not really considering the cultural realities of the personnel to which they were applying. Furthermore, the force was designed in such a way that reflected the fact that the ANA could rely on international support in a number of spheres and did not have to be therefore absolutely self-reliant. The best case is the air domain, where Afghan Air Force, was not expected to be self-sufficient until at least 2030, and after the withdrawal of on-site contract maintenance in May 2021 hampered the logistical capability, and availability of operational aircraft and as a result, overall fighting capability was rendered almost immediately after the U.S withdrawal (SIGAR,2023).

7. Analytical section

7.1.1 – Indirect involvement

The indirect involvement is a characteristic of a proxy relationship that should be considered most crucial as it is a cornerstone and primary logic of these relationships. Nonetheless, this characteristic poses a significant evaluation challenge, in the context of the relationship between the United States and Afghan National Army. As referenced in previous segments, the initial stage of the conflict in Afghanistan undeniably met the criteria for a proxy war. During this phase, the United States maintained a very limited on-the-ground presence and leveraged specialized forces and operatives as intermediaries between itself and its designated proxies, represented by the Eastern and Northern Alliances while on the conventional side providing only air support.

The assessment becomes more difficult in the subsequent stage of the conflict where the United States had obviously significant presence on the ground and fought alongside the force it helped to create. According to some authors, the considerable conventional involvement on the ground would automatically disqualify the conflict from being considered a proxy war. However, as previously discussed, more nuanced theories, such as Hubert's Compound Warfare or Krieg's and Ricki's surrogate warfare, allow for alternative interpretations. Nevertheless, the challenge lies in determining the specific point at which the subordinate force can be deemed a true surrogate force versus merely a force multiplier or auxiliary force.

Taking into the consideration entire time frame when the United States was involved in Afghanistan, rather than observing the Afghan forces as an unchanging entity, it can be said that the classification would depend on the period. It is undeniable that the United States campaign in Afghanistan started out as a form of proxy war, however, the conventional military presence on the ground in the following stages of the conflict was reaching such an extent that it would be hard to make a case for indirect involvement of the United States. By the end of the conflict when the United States decide to significantly reduce its presence and the primary factor of its support for the Afghan forces was in the form of airstrikes, in this stage, the involvement could be considered mostly indirect. After the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the shift towards a proxy-patron relationship becomes evident without a doubt.

Based on the stated discourse when ANA was being established, it is evident that during the inception stage underlying intent was to utilize it as and instrument that would allow the United States to be

engaged only indirectly. As it was stated in the background section, there was the present realization that while it might be easier for the U.S military to conduct military operations by itself, it was better to utilize the local force in order to circumnavigate backlash from the local population (U.S Dept. of the Army 2007, p 47). However, as the campaign developed the mere financial, logistical, and training support proved to be not enough to reach set out goals and defeat the insurgents completely.

For the abovementioned reasons, it is not easy to say if the indicator of indirect involvement in a proxy relationship could be considered as fulfilled or not. The stated intent would follow the proxy logic, the initial and final stages of the campaign could be considered a proxy relationship as well. But for the majority of the conflict, the United States had a significant military presence in the country and it itself took on the bulk of the fighting. When considering the significant losses that the United States endured, it would be difficult to say that the aspect of circumnavigation was entirely fulfilled. While the significant reliance on contractors who endured bigger losses than the conventional military could be considered as a form of delegating to a form surrogate and the entire campaign, as was marked by the utilization of multiple types of delegations and usage of irregular forces, this analysis focuses purely on the relationship between ANA and the United States. In this partnership, the involvement of the regular US forces was so significant that it based on the work of most authors, does not fulfill the criteria of proxy warfare, but it could be considered as a very specific form of compound warfare.

7.1.2 – Control

At least some level of control over the proxy is required in order for it to be considered this proxy and client relationship. The high degree of control over the proxy and ability to influence its decision-making is considered a crucial aspect in a campaign where the client, alongside the proxy, is trying to successfully combat an insurgency – which is an obvious case in Afghanistan -, and it is an area where the United States in the past had significant issues (Ladwig III. 2017, 53). The experience in Afghanistan, though, shows that the United States was able to avoid this problem in the case of Afghanistan and exhibit high levels of control over the Afghan Army.

United States exerted significant control over the ANA, especially in the early stages of its development. This control was seen in training, the provision of resources as well as the strategic planning of operations. The case between ANA and U.S. military is especially noteworthy that the army creation was initiated by the United States, and therefore the mechanism of direct control was included in it by its very design and nature. As was stated, the very nature of the Army was being dictated by the United States, which wanted to create it as a force able to battle insurgents only and not antagonize its Pakistani allies.

Similarly, the ANA was using United States army doctrines so the very nature of the Army was dictated by its patron as well. It was noted by Giustozzi that the ANA was functioning more as a auxiliary army rather than the national army, and while the issues that were so prevalent in the ANA like the lack of discipline or training were not preventing it from completing secondary tasks proper of an auxiliary force, the nature of the army might prove fatal if it ever had to fight on its own (Giustozzi 2016, 62).

United States were able to exert a significant amount of control over the ANA not only on strategic but also operational levels. While on tactical levels, the control was not absolute, sometimes resulting in negative externalities and an inability to reach desired tactical goals, the amount was still much larger than is the case for usual proxy and patron relationships. This control was in large part ensured by embedding of the U.S personnel directly in the ANA. The nature of the ANA itself was also influenced by the patron not only de facto but also on the institutional level. The amount of control the United States exerted over the ANA led some authors to question if the ANA could be considered a national army or just an auxiliary force of the United States. The factor of the control over the force in question was, therefore, without a doubt met, and it could be said that it preceded the levels usually in the typical proxy and patron relationships.

7.1.3 – Strategic Advantage

During the initial phases of the conflict, when the United States had no conventional ground presence and was heavily reliant on local militias to achieve its strategic objectives, the relationship clearly aligned with the proxy warfare framework. United States needed a force that could manage to reach its goals while it was not, for the time being, able to do it by itself. The initial need to rely on local militias reflected the need to engage in distant hot spots following the concept of everywhere war described in the theoretical section.

However, in the subsequent relationship with ANA, the answer is less clear. During the formation of the ANA, there were declarations that its existence could potentially circumvent the need for U.S. ground presence, a notion that ultimately did not materialize. Furthermore, it was evident that the U.S., from a purely military standpoint, could have carried out most operations by itself. The sought-after advantage of gaining legitimacy of the intervention and "winning the hearts and minds" of the local population by deploying local forces instead of perceived "foreign invaders" echoed in U.S Army counterinsurgency manuals did not in the end entirely transpire.

The whole Afghan endeavor progressively became motivated more by political considerations rather than strategic ones. The substantial financial investment the U.S. committed to

maintaining the operation did not yield clear strategic returns. While the U.S. did secure some strategic benefits by leveraging the ANA, it is questionable whether these benefits effectively offset its own losses. Since supporting the ANA formed part of the broader state-building project, the sought goal and the instrument became somewhat intertwined. The United States certainly employed surrogates in the Afghan war, enabling it to operate in a hostile, foreign environment while limiting its own conventional losses.

These proxies took several forms: the initial local militias at the start of the campaign, the widespread utilization of contractors—whose casualties exceeded that of professional service members—and, as some theorists argue, technological surrogates such as extensive drone usage. However, it is challenging to determine if the ANA served as a strategic force multiplier, particularly since its creation was a strategic objective in its own right. For this reason, the indicator of strategic advantage in the case of ANA was not entirely met.

7.1.4 – Protraction and Escalation

Protraction of the conflict is something that is mentioned both as one of the defining features of proxy warfare, and one of the negative externalities that is caused by the proxy usage. The Afghan conflict has evolved into the most prolonged conflict in which the United States has been engaged. The reasons behind this extended duration, however, are multifaceted, particularly given the unique aspect of direct conventional military intervention in contrast to other proxy wars. It would be questionable, at best, to assume that the protraction of the conflict was a direct result of support for the ANA and its establishment.

Undoubtedly, the involvement of the United States instigated the protracted conflict, but the presence of conventional forces would intuitively be regarded as the primary cause for this fact. That said, it is vital to acknowledge that the active participation of the U.S. conventional military forces in combat operations has markedly diminished over the final years of the conflict, and despite this, the conflict has persisted. The institutional, financial, and training support, complemented by the provision of airstrike capabilities, were enough to maintain the Afghan regime in power. The moment the airstrike support was withdrawn, the operational balance tilted in favor of the Taliban. An argument can be made that the United States could not have sustained its presence in Afghanistan for such an extended period without an indigenous authority lending legitimacy to the invasion. However, the veracity of this assertion cannot be empirically validated. Therefore, it remains uncertain whether the support extended to the ANA resulted in the conflict's perpetuation.

Conversely, the feared negative externality of broadened escalation was not realized. Afghanistan was left in a state similar to its pre-war condition, and while a significant influx of refugees did destabilize neighboring countries, this trend persisted after the Taliban's complete takeover. Moreover, the support extended to the ANA did not contribute to further regional de-escalation, and the concerns of Pakistan were not materialized.

7.1.5 – Loose of control

As examined in the control section, it is evident that the United States maintained significant control and influence over the activities of the ANA, given the fact that the loss of control in proxy warfare refers to the cases where the agent refuses to meet tactical or operational goals because the overall strategic goals of both partners diverged to such extent compared to the time when they entered the relationship that the proxy does not feel compelled to reach the set-out goals by the patron. This deterioration of the relationship does not always have to be caused by the change in the long-term goals of the proxy but sometimes also because the proxy decides it is no longer dependent on the support of its patron, as evidenced by the high reliance not on ANA not only on the financial or logistical support but on the support in the actual engagements as well, the dependency of ANA on its patron never ended, and therefore it never had the inclination to start diverging from the strategic vision of its patron.

7.1.6 – Human Rights Abuses

The human rights abuses perpetrated by proxy forces represent a frequently observed negative externality in proxy warfare. The manifestation of this externality does not occur in all cases, but its high frequency necessitates a closer examination. The reasons for the occurrence of this externality are multifaceted. The patron might be purposefully delegating the human rights abuses to the proxy since its domestic population would find it distasteful. More commonly, however, the occurrence of these abuses originates in the limited control the patron state exerts over its proxy force. Proxies usually originate from different socio-cultural backgrounds where respect for human rights principles may not be as robust, making them more prone to violations.

Inadequate oversight and control mechanism, coupled with the strategic prioritization of the patron, often results in these transgressions being overlooked, given the fact that the accomplishment of strategic goals might supersede the commitment to human rights principles. In the event that the human rights violations committed by the proxy force contradict, at minimum, the declared principles of its patron state, it may be interpreted as an externality characteristic of proxy warfare relationships.

It is crucial to bear in mind, however, that such declared principles do not necessarily mirror the reality of practices on the ground.

The case of ANA would fit this description without much doubt since it has been mired in numerous controversies, including allegations of human rights abuses. Human Rights Watch reported that the ANA and other government security forces were involved in extrajudicial executions and forced disappearances of suspected Taliban Militants (Human Rights Watch, 2016.) According to this report, the abuses were largely unchecked, indicating a significant lack of accountability within the ANA and Afghan forces in general. A similar lack of accountability can be seen with the indiscrete use of force in civilian-dense areas, causing a soar in civilian casualties due to the mortar and rocket fire. In these cases, the Afghan forces would restrict journalists from traveling into the affected areas on time to adequately reports on the casualties (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Further, the Afghan forces, despite the law signed by the Afghan government criminalizing the recruitment of soldiers less than 18 years old, were reported to continue recruiting children, especially in the case of local police (UNAMA 2019, 24). While given the institutionalization of the ANA same reports were not found in the case of the army the pro-government militia cooperating with the army oftentimes did so (Humans Right Watch, 2016).

Further evidence of human rights abuses comes from reports of torturous conditions in Afghan detention facilities. These accounts suggest that around one-third of detainees have suffered torture (UNAMA, 2015). Distressingly, these cases of torture were not isolated but reflected a systemic issue within these facilities. The fact that no individuals who committed these acts faced prosecution reflected a lack of accountability from the government's side (UNAMA, 2015).

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) also noted in its 2019 report that while the majority of civilian casualties were caused by anti-government elements, notably the Taliban and ISIS-K, there were instances of civilians being killed and injured by Pro-Government Forces, which includes the ANA (UNAMA, 2019). One of the primary concerns, according to UNAMA, was the disproportionate amount of victims caused by the governmental forces airstrikes, which killed 1,045 civilians in 2019 alone (UNAMA 2019. 53).

Given the aforementioned findings, it is evident that human rights abuses, an indicator typically associated with proxy warfare, were indeed present. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that certain cited issues, such as collateral damage resulting from airstrikes, cannot be directly attributed to the relationship between the U.S. and the Afghan Forces. Collateral damage is, regrettably, a frequent factor in a majority of conventional conflicts. That said, the backing of the

United States, including the provision of ammunition and other resources, can be construed as factors that facilitated the Afghan forces in their engagement in these acts with relative ease.

7.1.7 Interpretation

An analysis of the aggregated characteristics presents a rather complex picture. When contrasted with the United States' interactions with the militias during the initial stages of conflict, the relationship between the U.S. and the ANA can't be succinctly defined as a proxy conflict. Despite fulfilling certain conditions, others remain unmet.

Upon considering the perspectives of four different authors, we find a similarly convoluted outcome. The substantial on-the-ground participation of the patron negates the potential to label the conflict as a proxy war, according to the views of Bar-Siman Tov and even in the more lenient interpretations of Mumford the conventional presence reached such levels that the conflict could not be considered as proxy as well. However, broader redefinitions proposed by Rauta and the Surrogate Warfare concept of Krieg and Rickli might permit the relationship to be categorized as a specific kind of proxy connection. Hubert's concept of compound warfare, which Krieg and Rickli perceive as a subtype of surrogacy, seems to fit the description most accurately. Nonetheless, this concept is quite specific. The author of this thesis contends that it may overstep its boundaries, transitioning into a more auxiliary type of relationship.

Despite the inconclusive findings, there is enough of the characteristics meet that the conflict should be considered in the wider study of proxy warfare, and the lessons from the conflict should be taken into consideration in possible future conflicts. The high degree of control the United States had over its supposed agent was larger than in many of the typical proxy relationships and can serve as the blueprint for the formation of previously non-existent agents in the conflicts. Similarly, the experiences from doctrine implementation are also fitting typical proxy relationships. While the branding of the entire conflict as a proxy one is therefore difficult, it is clear that the atomic aspects of this relationship fit the relationship between the agent and patron and should be considered in studies focusing on relationships between proxy and patron. Primarily in the cases where the patron and the agent combat insurgent forces the lessons from Afghanistan should be considered.

7.2 Client or Patron as the root cause of the failure?

Proxy warfare theory often addresses the question of responsibility for the success or failure of a military campaign. Did the patron offer sufficient training, logistical support, and operational

guidance, but the surrogate failed to fully capitalize on this support due to internal conflicts, ideological shifts, and other factors? Alternatively, were the patron's miscalculations or inconsistent strategic objectives and policies responsible for the surrogate's lack of continuity? Did insufficient or prematurely withdrawn support from the patron prevent the surrogate from successfully implementing the campaign? The same questions arose in the context of the Afghan conflict. Could this conflict have ever been won? Did the United States ensnare itself in an unwinnable conflict by relying on tribalistic personnel with vastly different strategic cultures who would not with any kind of support be able to defeat Talib insurgents? Or was it the patron's miscalculations and wrong steps taken that obstructed the surrogate's ability to convert the provided support into a successful campaign?

Based on the findings of the previous sections, it becomes apparent that there were significant errors made on the patron side from the very beginning. The army was already in its origin despite the stated intentions conceptualized as an auxiliary force. Concerns that it would not be ever able to function independently were raised early on, as noted by Giustozzi already in 2006. The doctrines implemented, designed for the United States forces, failed to not adequately consider the cultural realities of Afghan society, there was no continuous policy approach from the side of the patron, and last but not least the continuous military presence and operations of the foreign invaders were making it harder to win hearts and minds of the local population.

It should be said therefore that the issue was on the side of the patron, who clearly could not decide if it is creating an auxiliary force alongside which it wants to fight, a proxy that will be able to function with very limited support, or a fully independent national army. This inconsistency and frequent policy changes resulted in a lack of a clear, continuous plan, including fluctuating goals for the size and composition of the ANA. This lack of a clear, sustained goal that would be consistently aimed for resulted in the ANA's disarray. It can be inferred that a substantial number of the ANA's shortcomings could have been avoided if it was entirely designed as a surrogate force controlled by the United States, or the opposite should have been chosen and ANA should have been created as a truly independent force. However, the foundational doctrines guiding the operations of the ANA, inherently assumed that either their American counterparts would actively participate in the combat engagements alongside them, or that there would exist, at a bare minimum, the assurance of aerial strike support provided by the U.S Air Force. When this support was withdrawn, the ANA immediately collapsed. This vacillation between two approaches, and failure to fully commit to either one of them, was a primary reason the ANA was destined to fail from the start. It can be therefore said that the issue was clearly on the side of the patron who had no consistent plan on what fighting force it wanted to create.

Another contributing factor to the failure was the inconsistency in training and doctrinal implementation. The ANA project was overly politicized, and heavily based on burden sharing. The inclusion of as many partners as possible was more politically than militarily motivated. As mentioned in the training section, this created situations where non-commissioned officers, commissioned officers, and soldiers might receive training from different nations' armies with varying approaches. This necessitated additional time for NCOs to synchronize with the soldiers they were supposed to lead, further delaying the recruitment and training process. While the doctrines of NATO armies involved in the training process are not vastly divergent, it is still undesirable for one force to be trained by several different armies, making it impossible to create a truly uniform force.

7.3 Lessons learned

One of the principal lessons that the United States military must internalize from the conflict in Afghanistan concerns the importance of decisiveness in strategic planning. The decision needs to be made upfront whether the force being supported in the conflicted theater will function as a fully independent army or a proxy force. Trying to balance between these two approaches is unlikely to lead to a successful outcome. Moreover, a greater level of continuity is required across different administrations. Long-term strategic plans should transcend the tenure of individual presidents to ensure consistent application of policies and strategies. Although this may appear self-evident, the premature withdrawal from Afghanistan, prior to the realization of the strategic goal of fostering an independently operational Afghan National Army, underscores the criticality of this principle. It is noteworthy that, at the time of withdrawal, the goal for the Afghan Air Force to attain independent operational status was projected for 2030, a clear indicator that the transition to an autonomous ANA had not even been close to realization. In light of these observations, it becomes clear that an effective approach to proxy warfare requires a clear strategic vision that is followed consistently, regardless of political changes or the passage of time.

A substantial portion of the failure in Afghanistan can be also attributed to the influence of domestic political campaigns on strategic and operational decisions within the theatre of war. History has consistently proven that when political interests overshadow military strategy, the results tend to be catastrophic. This was clearly demonstrated during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was largely driven by political reasons and found itself trapped by the same considerations when seeking a route to withdraw. The same ended up happening in the case of the United States.

Setting aside the motives for the initial invasion, it became glaringly evident that as more resources were committed, extricating itself from the situation became increasingly complicated. Decisions regarding the U.S.'s ground presence, as well as the shift towards reliance on airstrikes, were significantly influenced by domestic political dynamics. For instance, the Doha agreement between the United States and the Taliban, which marked a significant shift in the campaign against the Taliban, was more motivated by the campaign promises of then-President Donald Trump than by strategic logic. Similarly, the abrupt withdrawal of troops at the beginning of Joe Biden's administration, which turned a gradually declining success rate in the campaign against the Taliban into a catastrophe, was also heavily influenced by politics. The ANA was left ill-prepared and alone to face the advancing Taliban. Since the ANA was designed by its patron, the U.S., to be heavily reliant on external operational support, the sudden withdrawal made it impossible for the ANA to effectively repel the Taliban.

Furthermore, the United States fell into the same pitfalls as the Soviets did repeatedly during the Cold War when they were implementing doctrines tailored for their own armies on the Arab armies. The culture of the Arab armies proved to be absolutely incompatible with the culture and different mindset of the combatants who were supposed to adhere to them. Considering the extensive precedents from the Cold War era, it is somewhat perplexing that the United States would succumb to similar strategic missteps. While the implementations were less catastrophic than it was in some cases with Egyptian or Syrian armies implementing Soviet doctrines, similar issues still occurred. Also, it is very likely that these issues did not reach the same levels only because the United States' presence in Afghanistan was so extensive, and the Western military instructors were directly embedded in the ANA, and as mentioned the control over the Afghan force was much more significant than it was the case between Soviet and Arab armies of the Cold War.

The lack of knowledge of local realities, the culture of social fabric before the invasion, and sadly after the invasion also was one of the reasons why the entire campaign went the way it went but that's not the primary focus of this thesis. That said in some cases the lack of knowledge of these realities penetrated into the army building itself as evidenced by the mentioned case of effort to limit Northern Alliance coalition influence in the newly created ANA by introducing a cap on Tajik officers which was based on the misunderstanding of the ethnic composition of the militia force and cause the opposite effect in the newly created force.

In conclusion, the primary lessons that can be drawn from the U.S. experience in Afghanistan underscore the need for clear strategic objectives, the dangers of allowing domestic politics to drive military decisions, and the importance of understanding and respecting local cultural norms when attempting to build a foreign military force. The ANA's challenges highlight the dangers of an ill-

defined mission and the pitfalls of failing to fully comprehend the local cultural realities. Future proxy warfare engagements must heed these lessons to avoid similar pitfalls and to enhance the chances of success.

Conclusion

This thesis endeavored to highlight the evolving dynamics of warfare, particularly pointing to a potential revival of proxy wars in a world where U.S. adversaries cannot directly challenge the world's still leading superpower through conventional methods. The case is made for extracting lessons from conflicts that are not typically viewed as instances of proxy warfare. As demonstrated, the downfall of the Afghan National Army offers a rich array of insights into proxy warfare theory.

After the experience from the initial stages of invasion, where the relationship between the U.S.A and local militias, as demonstrated, fitted perfectly into the proxy-patron framework, the lessons from this relationship were applied during the formation of the new national professional army force. While trying to avoid the externalities that occurred during a proxy stage of the conflict, the patron as demonstrated, did a number of mistakes, oftentimes stemming from a misunderstanding of the local realities. As this thesis demonstrates, the cornerstone of the issues and the main reason for the inadequacy of the ANA project was the lack of a clear conception in to what it is supposed to be. ANA was not functioning either as a fully independent force or neither as a fully subservient agent. Given the lack of consistency and constant policy changes from the side of the United States, there was no clear vision that would be followed over the long term. The goal was being constantly changed, and despite the length of the conflict, the Afghan Army was not even close to being an independent force by the time the United States suddenly withdrew.

While an examination using aggregated characteristics of proxy warfare suggests that the conflict cannot be wholly classified as proxy warfare, specific elements offer crucial lessons on the dynamics between a proxy and its patron. Despite not entirely aligning with traditional definitions of proxy warfare dynamic, the lessons derived from this relationship warrant their inclusion in the broader study of such conflicts, especially in the cases where the patron and agent are together embroiled in fighting an insurgency rather than contesting different state actor, or state actor supported proxy as was more typical during a Cold War.

On the matter of attributing failure, findings suggest that the responsibility predominantly falls on the side of the patron – The United States. From the onset, the U.S. demonstrated a lack of clarity and consistency in defining the role and capacity of the ANA. For this reason, it is posited that the failure in Afghanistan largely emanates from the patron's inconsistencies and strategic errors

rather than the agent's inadequacies. Key lessons from the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan underscore the importance of clear, unwavering strategic planning. The U.S. military must discern whether a force is to function as a fully independent army or a proxy force early in the engagement and follow this aim throughout the engagement. Finally, political interference in military strategy only serves to complicate matters and often leads to catastrophic outcomes, as evidenced by the abrupt U.S. troop withdrawal.

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