sciendo

Sodobni vojaški izzivi, oktober-november 2023 – 25/št. 3-4
Contemporary Military Challenges, October-November 2023 – 25/No. 3-4

Mihály Boda

DOI: 10.2478/cmc-2023-0019

POSREDNA VOJNA: NJENA FILOZOFIJA IN ETIKA

PROXY WAR: ITS PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

Povzetek

Po drugi svetovni vojni je posredna vojna postala ena izmed najbolj razširjenih oblik vojne. Nedavni primer je vojna Ukrajine in njenih podpornikov proti Rusiji, ki poteka v neposredni bližini Evrope. Čeprav so bile teoretične značilnosti posredne vojne v zadnjih desetletjih na splošno raziskane, se je njen značaj od takrat spremenil, zaradi česar je treba te značilnosti ponovno preučiti. Članek s pomočjo vojaškofilozofskega in vojaškoetičnega raziskovanja preuči koncept posredne vojne ter etične in zlasti s pravičnostjo povezane posledice tega koncepta ter ugotavlja, da novi slog posrednega razmerja vsebuje hkratno zadovoljevanje interesov podpornika in podprtega, kar pa lahko ovira konsolidacijo konflikta in doseganje trajnega miru.

Ključne besede

Posredna vojna, teorija pravične vojne, državni interes.

Abstract

Since the Second World War, proxy war has become one of the most widespread forms of war. One recent example, the war of Ukraine and its supporters against Russia, is being fought close to Europe. Although the theoretical features of proxy war in general have been researched in recent decades, the character of proxy war has changed since that time, which makes it necessary to study these features again. This article examines the concept of proxy war, and the ethical and particularly the justice-related implications of that concept, with the help of military philosophical and military ethical enquiry, and finds that the new style proxy relationship contains the satisfaction of the interests of the supporter and the supported at the same time, which, however, can hamper the consolidation of the conflict and reaching a lasting peace.

Key words

Proxy war, just war theory, state interest.

Introduction

Proxy war has been one of the typical forms of warfare since the second half of the 20th century and into the beginning of the 21st century (Boda, 2023). Although some authors trace the origin of proxy war back to earlier (e.g. back to the 30 Years War in the 17th century when Catholic Spain and Protestant France supported opposing German parties in a religious conflict (Mumford, 2013a, p 11); or the war of independence of the American colonies against the British Empire in the 18th century, when France backed the colonies (Brown, 2016, p 244); or even much earlier, back to the 3rd century BC, when Rome supported the Mamertine mercenaries who governed the city of Messene and fought the Carthaginians (Pfaff, 2017, p 305)), proxy wars have become an important instrument of conflicts only in the 20th and 21st centuries. It was a comfortable means of rivalry of the great powers in the Cold War, and a useful strategy in the war on terror at the beginning of the 21st century. Thereafter, proxy war achieved a new significance as the weapon of the greater powers of the world. Its 21st century examples include the Syrian conflict (2011), the Libyan conflict (2011), the Mali conflict (2013), the Yemen conflict (2014), the interventions of the Wagner group in the Central African Republic, and the Russian-Ukrainian (and the US) conflict (in 2014, and from 2022) (Kozera et al., 2020, pp 80-90).

From these the Ukraine conflict emerges because of its length, the consideration it has received from the greater powers, and the relatively new structure of the proxy relationship which it contains. It was initiated using hybrid warfare on the side of the Russians, and Western states (especially the US) helped Ukraine as a proxy state with advisors and instructors. So, from the beginning it was a conflict of these methods, the methods of hybrid warfare and proxy warfare. The conflict has become a direct war since 2022, but it is still showing hybrid elements, such as information warfare including hacker activity, disinformation campaigns and propaganda, on both sides. Besides this, the Western states (the US, the European Union (EU), and other European states) and Ukraine have established a new style proxy relationship, with the help of which they are attempting to defend Ukraine and satisfy the political, economic, and strategic interests of the US, the EU, and the European states all at the same time. However, the aims of the supporting states differ slightly, because while the EU, including, for example, Poland, is supporting Ukraine in its own self-defence, the US is helping it in order to satisfy its own political, economic, and strategic interests. Under these conditions, even supposing the success of Ukraine, the divergent interests of the engaged states (including Ukraine) will presumably hamper its consolidation.

Proxy war, like wars waged with conventional weapons, causes serious harm and demands significant financial input. For this reason, the warring parties must justify their war. Wars can be justified in different ways, for example from the perspective of justice, which is conceptually connected to the interests of all the engaged parties or the interests of a particular engaged state. This article analyses the concept of proxy war with the help of a military philosophical and ethical analysis, and offers a philosophical definition and a justice-based ethics for it.

1 THE MILITARY PHILOSOPHY OF PROXY WAR

Military philosophy deals with developing definitions based on conceptual analysis and theoretical arguments. In this section I use the history of the concept of proxy war in presenting my definition of it, and then indicate the conceptual implications of this definition, such as the divergence of interests of the supporter and the supported.

1.1 Definitions of proxy war

Several definitions of proxy war can be found in the literature. Three of them deserve particular attention because they link to different models of international relations.

1.1.1 Proxy wars in bipolar, unipolar and polyarchic international relations

To begin with, Karl W. Deutsch defined proxy war in 1964, as "an international conflict between two foreign powers, fought out on the soil of a third country; disguised as conflict over an internal issue of that country; and using some or all of that country's manpower, resources, and territory as means for achieving preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies" (Deutsch, 1964, p 102). This definition was produced during the Cold War, when proxy war was a possible option to avoid nuclear war during the contest of the two great powers. In the bipolar world order, the US and the Soviet Union took advantage of the resources of third countries to fight each other, including the territories and the internal conflicts of third countries.

The second approach comes from Tyron L. Groh in 2010 (Groh, 2010)[1] (which, however, represents earlier conditions) and presents a different world order and a different function of proxy wars. Groh defined a "proxy war as directing the use of force by a politically motivated, local actor to indirectly influence political affairs in the target state" (Groh, 2019, p 29). One significant feature of Groh's definition is that it narrows the scope of proxy war to those (Latin-American, African, Asian, Middle Eastern) states which have been coming through a particular social development due to their social and international conditions. These states did not have to concern themselves with interstate dangers because of the support of one or the other of the great powers, so they could concentrate solely on internal affairs, and they did not need a professional army. Instead, paramilitary groups – militias – with political, tribal, or other ideological motivation came into existence, and the violence was not monopolized by the state, but scattered among the militias. The institutional structure and working mechanism of these militias were different from those of professional armies. The appearance of militias was facilitated if the state in question had been a colony and had liberated itself by revolution, not negotiation. In this case the successor state did not inherit the professional military culture of the former mother state (Ahram, 2011, pp 8-20).

External states (and also the state itself) can easily support these militias in order to influence the internal political matters of the state. One prominent aim of having

[1] *The dissertation was published as a book (Groh, 2019). In the following text, I refer to the book.*

influence is to fight terrorist organizations in their local conditions (Kozera, 2018, p 10), in the territory of the so-called Gap-countries (see below). According to Thomas P. M. Barnett, the US had to adopt a new strategy after the Cold War which better suited the changed structure of international relations. After the Cold War the US remained alone as a superpower. This, however, did not imply perfect security, as the terror attack in 2011 indicated. The leading role of the US in the unipolar world was the result of its chief role in the globalization of capitalist economics, liberal-democratic politics, and human rights ethics, which was the export of the social structures of the US itself (and in which other countries, such as those of Western Europe, Japan Australia, China, Russia and India, assisted). Barnett calls these countries Core-countries, and those countries which refused globalization Gap-countries. The latter includes the countries of the Middle East, South Asia, South-East Asia, and Africa. According to Barnett, terrorist organizations came into existence and grew strong in the Gap-countries, from where they jeopardize the Core-countries, including the US. The 'proper strategy' for the US should be that it fights terrorism in the Gap-countries as 'the firefighter of the world' and 'the policeman of the world', intervenes indirectly in the internal politics of these countries, and employs local militias (Barnett, 2004). Another important feature of Groh's definition is that it presents proxy war in the same way as Deutsch's definition, as an instrumental relationship, with the help of which the intervener state exploits local militias.

Finally, Andrew Mumford gave a broader definition of proxy war than Groh, in 2013. According to this definition, proxy wars are "conflicts in which a third party intervenes indirectly in order to influence the strategic outcome in favor of its preferred faction", and furthermore "proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare" (Mumford, 2013b, p 40).

In all three of these definitions proxy war is linked to indirect intervention. One significant difference in Mumford's definition is that, according to it, the supporter can be a state and even a nonstate actor (e.g. an international organization), and the supported party can also be a nonstate actor (e g. a militia) and even a state. The specific relationship of the supporter and the supported parties has importance, which Mumford calls the relationship of the benefactor and the proxy. Under this relationship the benefactor provides weapons, training, and financial support to the proxy, who in turn aims at his and the benefactor's strategic purpose. So, according to this definition, the aims of the proxy also have weight, and they are not exploited by the benefactor.

Mumford's definition reflects the new – polyarchic – structure of international relations. An essential feature of the unipolar, the bipolar, and even the multipolar world is that one, two or many powers endeavor to exert influence on the rest of the world. In contrast, in the polyarchic world several greater powers coexist, which cannot keep the smaller states on their bandwagon, but all the states, both greater and smaller, establish temporary alliances with other states and nonstate actors (local

groups and transnational organizations) or change cooperators in pursuing their own goals. The consequence of this behaviour of the international actors is the polyarchic – a net-like, decentralized, economic, technological, and political – dependence of the actors on each other (Brown, 2016, pp 24-246).

According to John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, the polyarchic world needs a new strategy from the US: in place of policing the world, the US must encourage other states and nonstate actors to control the rising powers in their locality, and intervene itself only when it is necessary and as far as necessary. The significant territories from the perspective of the US are Europe, North-East Asia, and the Persian Gulf, where the US must strive to maintain a balance (between Europe and Russia, and North-East Asia and China), or to avoid the strengthening and becoming a local hegemon of a new state (in the case of the Persian Gulf) (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2011, pp 11-13). Not only does the US have the strategy of proxy war in the polyarchic world, but so do other states as well, so Russia, China, and even Iran make attempts to act under similar conditions (Watts et al., 2023, pp 55-126).

1.1.2 The concept of proxy war

Keeping in mind the above definitions, I suggest the following complex concept of proxy war: a proxy war is the relationship between the supporter and the supported, contracted one-sidedly by the supporter, partly or wholly clandestine, an indirect military intervention into a (developing or ongoing) conflict by supporting one politically interested party of the conflict with money, weapons, training, and advice in order to reach the short-term goal of influence over the conflict and the overlapping long-range goals of the supporter and the supported.

Let us explore the details of this definition. Proxy war is basically a relationship between the supporter and the supported (and the enemy), which can also occur between nonstate actors and states (however, I am concerned here only with the situations in which a state is the supporter). The supporter has a much greater part in establishing this relationship than the supported, because it is first and foremost up to the supporter to help or exploit the supported. This relationship differs from alliances, because in the latter both parties have similar roles. We can say, for this reason, that proxy war is an intervention into the political matters, the conflict, and the war of the supported. Proxy war is an indirect intervention, however, in which the supporter does not deploy their own (army or secret services) personnel like in a direct war, but they provide money, weapons, advice, and training. For this reason, covert actions of national security services are not proxy war (Mumford, 2013a, pp 21-26). The supporter can intervene in a developing or an ongoing conflict; in both cases the supported must present their commitment to fight before the intervention. This supposes that the essential interests of the supported are at stake in the conflict. The supported must decide to undertake the conflict; the supporter only intervenes in the conflict. The decision must be a political one, hence, for example, deploying private military companies or private hackers are not examples of proxy wars. The supporter attempts to influence the conflict by their intervention, which makes the

proxy relationship a hierarchical one (Groh, 2019, pp 28-29). For this reason another type of indirect intervention, for example, weapons trade, is not proxy war, if it only involves the transfer of weapons for money. The influence and the hierarchical relationship do not mean the full elimination of the autonomy of the supported, but only that the supported fights directly, and the supporter indirectly, for their long-term goals. These goals overlap each other but they are not identical, because the supporter expects benefits for their support which are not necessarily benefits for the supported. One of these benefits is to acquire long-term regional influence, another is to acquire local influence in the supported country by taking part in the rebuilding of that country (after its proxy war of self-defence).

1.2 Taking the option of proxy war: benefits and drawbacks

Proxy war demands relatively little financial expenditure, commitment, and social and international assistance from the supporter. They, on the other hand, can acquire by the proxy relationship authentic local knowledge (e.g. cultural and linguistic knowledge), and locally potent associates, with the help of whom they can influence the conflict and reach their long-term goals at the same time (Mumford, 2013b, p 41; Kozera et al., 2020, p 79; Groh, 2019, p 26).

In a proxy war the supporter does not participate with their army and secret agents, but trades weapons, provides financial sources, and gives advice, including information, so they save their most developed weapons and the lives of their soldiers. They show their interest in the outcome of the conflict by the fact of the intervention; however, the indirect nature of the intervention means that the conflict does not link to their essential interests (e.g. to the security of their territory and their political life). In fact, the supporter does not apply violence; instead, they facilitate the supported to apply violence. Further, the supporter can run their indirect intervention partly or wholly secretly, which helps them avoid the risk of losing their home political popularity and a potential international condemnation for intervening in the internal affairs of another state. Naturally, a supporter engaged in a proxy war needs to have some material resources and must take some risks, but exerting influence and the satisfaction of their nonessential interests provide a worthy payback.

However, there are at least two drawbacks connected to being engaged in a proxy war in the literature: the escalation problem, and the problem of diverging interests. The assessment of the escalation problem in the literature is controversial. According to the opinions of some authors, proxy war essentially tends to escalate (Pfaff, 2017, p 338; Pattison, 2015, pp 458-460); but others claim that proxy war is one way to avoid the escalation of a conflict (Mumford, 2013a, p 42; Groh, 2019, p 26). If we additionally consider that escalation is an internal law of war (Gallie, 1991, pp 54-55), direct or indirect, then we must say that the escalation problem is not a particular problem of proxy war.

The problem of diverging interests, however, seems to be a more serious disadvantage (Pfaff, 2017, pp 336-337; Kozera et al., 2020, p 15; Brown, 2016, p 247). In a proxy

war the goals and interests of the supporter and the supported have equal significance. At the same time, the supporter has influence in the relationship over the supported and over the conflict, but the essential interests which are at stake in the conflict are on the side of the supported; on the supporter's side, only their nonessential interests are in jeopardy. This can generate some divergence in the goals and interests of the two parties. Further, the fighting motivation of the supported can be appropriate, too low, or too high. If the supported do not commit themselves sufficiently, then they tend to give up the struggle easily; on the other hand, if they are engaged profoundly in the conflict (for historical, ethnic or religious reasons), then they do not incline towards fighting in the just way that the supporter requires, or cease the fight, but they try to involve the supporter in the conflict as much as possible to enforce their interests (Pattison, 2015, pp 457-458). This also can generate divergence in the goals and interests of the parties. The interests of the supporter and the supported can (significantly) overlap each other at the beginning of the proxy war, but with the march of time and changes in the conditions of the conflict these interests can radically alter, and their harmony cannot be maintained.

In the following section I come to the ethical assessment of proxy war, to which I am applying some elements of the concept of proxy war (such as its clandestine and indirect nature, the seeking of influence, and the long-term aims of the supporter and the supported), the problem of diverging interests, and the 'just war' theory.

2 THE 'JUST WAR' PROXY WAR THEORY

The 'just war' theory is concerned with the rules of a just war. War can be initiated, waged, or abandoned in a just way if these rules are respected. The justice of the war and the implied demand of justification is an important way to motivate one's own soldiers, to establish and keep alliances, to calm down neutral states, and to some extent to demotivate enemy soldiers and civilians.

2.1 The just war theory

Warfare justice has been seen as important in every age and every society; however, it has not had the same content in all ages and societies. The form of warfare justice which has significance in this article is the conventional theory of Michael Walzer, and its extensions. According to this theory the rules of just warfare are the rules of initiating the war (a just cause, a legitimate authority, the right intention, a last resort, reasonable success, proportionality, and a public declaration) (*ius ad bellum*); the rules of waging war (of discrimination) (*ius in bello*); and the rules of ending the war (a just cause, lasting peace, punishment, and rehabilitation) (*ius post bellum*).

Just causes of war include violations of the right to territorial integrity and the right to political sovereignty of the state, and human rights. These causes link to just aims of war: the protections of these rights. Hence, a just war can be self-defence and the defence of another state; a direct intervention with the goal of supporting the secession

of a community; supporting one party in a civil war in the case where a third state has already supported the other party, and humanitarian intervention. Such wars are permitted to be started by an entitled person (the president of the state) or a political institution (the parliament), who/which has legitimate authority. The intention of starting the war must principally overlap the content of the just cause; it must be supported by public opinion; and it must be publicly declared. Starting a war can be just if there is no longer any peaceful way to reach its just aim, if there is a reasonable chance of reaching its just aim, and if the moral significance of the predictable harm is lower than the moral significance of the just cause (proportionality). The one waging the war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, and only the former are permitted to target and attack. A just war is permitted to be waged until the just aim is reached. After this point one must strive to create a more just (more peaceful) condition than existed before the war. Punishing war criminals, seeking compensation, and the rehabilitation of the society of the defeated aggressor are the instruments of this intentionally lasting peace.

Proxy war is not a war of self-defence on the side of the supporter because the essential interests of the supporter are not at stake; neither is it a direct intervention for the purpose of protecting the rights of another state or political community. Proxy war has its own conceptual features which determine its ethical characteristics. These features are the indirectness of the intervention, the search for influence, and the long-term strategic interests of the supporter.

2.2 The just proxy war theory

We can distinguish between the justice of initiating, waging and ending a war in the just proxy war theory similarly to the just war theory. All three sets of rules have features which are connected only to proxy war.

2.2.1 The justice of initiating and waging a proxy war

The most important principle in initiating a just war is the just cause (and aim). Since a proxy war is based on the relationship between the supporter and the supported (and the enemy), the causes of both the supporter and the supported have relevance. The cause of the supported must be just in order for them and the supporter to be able to initiate a war with just cause (Pattison, 2015, pp 462-464; Pfaff, 2017, pp 315-322). Hence, the supported must be defending themselves (or another state), or they must be fighting for human rights. The just cause of the supporter is more complex. One part of it is the just cause of the supported, because the supporter backs and helps them. The other part is the more realistic state interests of the supporter (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2016, p 73), because in exchange for the material resources they provide, they can have the just demand for some types of their state interests to be protected. State interests can be divided into at least three classes: territorial and narrow political interests (these are the essential interests); broader political, economic, and strategic interests; and cultural interests (Boda, 2023; Mumford, 2013a, pp 32-38; Watts et al.: 2023, pp 13-28). The territorial and narrow political interests are protected by the

state's rights, which are connected to the basic functioning of the state, and which are morally permitted to be secured by direct war. So, these interests are too serious for them to be protected only by an indirect (proxy) war, and their satisfaction cannot be the aim of the supporter in a proxy war. On the other hand, cultural interests are minor enough for them to be protected by conventional (direct or indirect) war, because they can be satisfied in more peaceful ways or with the help of hybrid war. Broader political, economic, and strategic interests are those which are permitted to be advanced by proxy war on the part of the supporter (which, however, can have cultural aspects) (Watts et al., 2023, p ix-x).

If the supported fought with just cause at the beginning of the proxy war, but later they alter their goals, then this change reflects on their honour and even on the supporter's honour, who is then corrupted by their support. James Pattison (2015, p 466), however, thinks that trading weapons can be just, even if the supported fights an unjust war and struggles only for power, if the supporter can thus prevent the victory of another and even more unjust side. This would mean that the supporter could have just cause to initiate a proxy war independently of the cause of the supported. Pattison's example, however, does not lead to this conclusion, only that the victory of the supported party would be a 'lesser evil'; nevertheless, it would be unjust. The justification based on the concept of 'lesser evil' is a type of justification of war, but it differs from other types of justification such as just war theory.

The initiation of a proxy war can remain partly or wholly clandestine, and for this reason it is not necessary to publicly declare it, nor does the connected intention have to represent the opinion of the public; it is enough if it overlaps the just cause.

Before the war the leaders of the supporting state must consider whether the complex, just aim is accessible, or whether a more peaceful means can be found to reach it. Although proxy war is not the final resort to satisfy state interest (this would be a direct intervention), neither is it a peaceful measure. So, political and economic sanctions, hybrid missions and weapons trade are all strategies to consider. If these measures do not work, or if they would be disproportional in reaching the just aim, then proxy war becomes a viable option. The principle of proportionality promotes proxy war, because with a proxy relationship the supported can reach their goals more proportionally than without it. The calculation of proportionality must be made at the beginning of the war, and in every period of it. So, for example, if the enemy reacts to the proxy war with their own proxy war, then this can make disproportional – and so unjust – the initially proportional proxy war.

The most important rule of waging war is to discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, and to target and attack only combatants. The application of this rule in proxy war leads the supported to consider the claim of the supporter on the supported. The content of this claim involves how the supported must wage the war from the perspective of discrimination. If the supported fights indiscriminately, then it reflects not only on themselves but also on the supporter's honour (Pfaff,

2017, p 342-349). To avoid this problem the supporter must train the soldiers of the supported to fight discriminately (besides using appropriate tactics). Ideally, this training begins before the conventional war.

2.2.2 Justice at the ending a proxy war

The main principle in the set of rules of *post bellum* is that of lasting peace. According to this principle, the victorious party must create more just (peaceful) conditions than existed before the war, under which the chance of the reappearance of the old-new conflict is lower. The principle of lasting peace can be connected to the initiation of war as the further aim of the war (the 'right intention') (Johnson, 2006, pp 168-169; May, 2014, p 16), or as the aim of the just war (the 'just cause') (Rawls, 2008, p 94); and at the same time to conduct in war as the consequence of the just fighting during the war (Rawls, 2008, p 99). Recently, however, this principle has been articulated among the other rules of ending a war (Walzer, 2006, p 121; Pfaff, 2017, p 335). Following the principle of lasting peace can be in jeopardy in a proxy war, because of the problem of the diverging interests of the supporter and the supported.

The supported can be a state or a nonstate actor. In the case of nonstate actors (such as militias) divergence of interests can come from an unclear internal political life, the cultural-professional differences between the supporter and the supported, and the problem of diffusion. Militias are parts of a complex tribal or other communal political situation, and their position in this situation has influence on their interests and aims. So, even if they have committed themselves to just causes and aims, the local conditions can overwrite their aims from time to time. Another problem can be cultural and professional differences, which can lead to an unstable relationship with the militia. The leaders of the militia expect gifts and recognition of their illegal or partially legal business. Further, they are unable to take seriously the supporter's claims to rule-based fighting, because the rules of waging a just war are the rules of a professional army, which militias are not (Pattison, 2015, p 457; Cigar, 2014, p 11; Kozera 2018, p 15). Finally, how the transferred modern weapons will be collected can also be a problem, because otherwise these weapons will remain in the hands of the members of the supported society (who will use them as their interests dictate). This is the problem of diffusion. It does not suit the supporter's interests for the weapons they provided to be used for unjust aims (Pattison, 2015, pp 460-461). Ignorance of the just aims and the rules of a just fight, as well as the problem of diffusion, can lead to a divergence of interests between the supporting state and the supported nonstate actor, which in turn hampers the creation of a more just peace at the end of the war.

What is the situation if the supported party is a state? Supposing the state is legitimate, the complexity of its internal politics does not pose a problem, because only the leaders of the legitimate state are the political actors who can identify the interests of the state and define its aims. At the same time, this feature of the supported state implies that the state has autonomous political interests, among which territorial and narrow political interests are only two. So, the supporter and the supported state

have different interests beside their identical just aims (see Mumford, 2013a, p 33). The supporter's autonomous interests are involved in their complex just cause. The supported state is interested in winning the war as far as they can with the help of the supporter, including their interest that the supporter be engaged in the war maximally, as a directly fighting ally. This, however, is not in the interests of the supporter, because they undertook an *indirect* war, and not an exaggerated direct war, for good reasons. The difference in political interests can be even more significant if the conflict has cultural (e.g. ethnic, religious) grounds. So, one version of the problem of the cultural-professional difference occurs here, since the supported are fighting for their essential interests, which in the case of a culturally laden conflict involve cultural interests, besides the rights for territorial integrity and political sovereignty. This in turn can lead to the ignorance of the rules of the just fight in a war against a culturally different enemy. Finally, the problem of diffusion here is not so serious, because the state and the professional army can be disarmed more easily, but nevertheless cannot be ignored (Pattison, 2015, pp 461-462; Pfaff, 2017, pp 341-342).

To sum up, since the supporter, acting for their nonessential interests, provides weapons and other materials and information in order to influence the conflict in which the essential interests of the supported nonstate or state actor are at stake, a divergence of interests tend to occur between them.

How can the just proxy war theory explain away this problem? According to other authors, the problem of diverging interests raises a proportionality problem, and for this reason a just proxy war should only be launched for humanitarian aims (Pattison, 2015, pp 461-462); or it is only a moral hazard, which can be managed and which does not have direct influence on the list of just aims or the justice of proxy war (Pfaff, 2017, p 335). These two stances seem to be too extreme; on the one hand, tightening the list of just aims and omitting wars of self and other defence seems to be a too excessive reaction to the problem, while on the other, understanding it only as a moral hazard which does not have consequences undervalues it. I believe the truth can be found somewhere between them.

I claim that the problem of diverging interests can be understood in just proxy war theory with the help of the principle of lasting peace. This rule is basically a *post bellum* rule, but it also relates to the initiation of war and to the fight. This is important because the problem of diverging interests is related to all three stages of war. A proxy war can be initiated in the case of wars of self and other defence and, of course, for humanitarian aims, but only if the conflict can be terminated with a foreseeably more just peace than the previous one. Obviously, it is not an easy job to tell at the beginning of the war whether the conflict will be ended in such a way. However, there is at least one condition which hampers radically establishing a more just peace; this condition is the cultural (ethnical or religious) character of the conflict, which implies that almost all means of terminating the conflict involve the possibility of the renewal of hostility. In this case, from the perspective of the rule of lasting peace, the proxy war cannot be said to be just if the supporter intervenes in a culturally based conflict.

The research goal of military philosophy and military ethics is to describe the different forms and conceptual elements of warfare in order to better understand them. This article presented the military philosophical and military ethical analysis of proxy war.

Conclusion

From the perspective of military ethics, justness justice has the role of granting justification for initiating a war, for fighting it, and for ending it. The concept of the state's interests, for example, not only the concept of justice, can also provide justification. However, since justification is about convincing others of the rightness of an action, and the concept of justice is basically linked to the interests of all the engaged parties, and not only to the interests of the involved state, the concept of justice grants stronger justification than the concept of the state's interest. In this article I examined the features of a just proxy war, with the help of military philosophy and military ethics.

According to its definition, a proxy war is the relationship between a supporter and a supported party, which is contracted one-sidedly by the supporter, partly or wholly clandestinely, involving indirect military intervention in a (developing or ongoing) conflict by supporting one politically interested party to the conflict with money, weapons, training, and advice in order to reach the short-term goal of influencing the conflict, and the overlapping long-range goals of the supporter and the supported. Some elements of this definition (such as its clandestine and indirect nature, the seeking of influence, and the long-term aims of the supporter and the supported), and additionally the special problem of diverging interests and the just war theory, have particular significance in the ethical analysis.

The supported party possesses a just cause and aim if they are pursuing self or other defence or are fighting for human rights. The just aim of the supporter is complex, involving the supported party's just aims and additionally some of the broad political, economic, and strategic interests of the supporter, in exchange for their efforts to back and help the supported party. A proxy war is a partly or wholly clandestine enterprise which does not necessarily have to be publicly declared. Nor does it have to mirror the opinion of the public of the supporter state; it is enough if it overlaps the just cause. Proxy war is not a last resort to solve a conflict (this would be a direct intervention), but neither is it a peaceful instrument. More peaceful ways of settling the conflict must be considered (such political and economic sanctions, a hybrid war, and weapons trade) before launching a proxy war. From the perspective of proportionality, the just aim of the supported can be implemented more proportionally by a proxy war than without it (calculating at the beginning of the war). During the fight the supported must follow the influence and demands of the supporter with regard to fighting discriminatively. Finally, because of the influence of the supporter, the problem of diverging interests can appear between the supported and the supporter, which radically hampers the establishment of a more just peace after a culturally laden conflict. For all these reasons, initiating a proxy war to intervene in a culturally laden conflict is unjust.

References

1. *Ahram, A. I., 2011. Proxy Wars: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias. Stanford--California: Stanford University Press.*
2. *Barnett, T. P. M., 2004. The Pentagon's New Map. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.*
3. *Boda, M., 2023. Hybrid War: Theory and Ethics. AARMS – Academic and Applied Research in Military and Public Management Science, 22(4), (forthcoming).*
4. *Brown, S., 2016. Purposes and pitfalls of war by proxy: A systemic analysis. Small Wars and Insurgencies, 27(2), pp 243-257.*
5. *Cigar, N. Jr., 2014. Tribal Militias: An Effective Tool to Counter Al-Quida and Its Affiliates? Carlisle Barrack: U.S. Army War College Press.*
6. *Deutsch, K. W., 1964. External Involvement in Internal War. In: Eckstein, H., (Ed.) Internal War, Problems and Approaches. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, pp 100-110.*
7. *Gallie, W. B., 1991. Understanding War. London and New York: Routledge.*
8. *Groh, T. L., 2010. War on the Cheap? Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Proxy War. Dissertation. Washington DC. Available at: https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/553084/grohTyrone.pdf (Accessed: 10 May 2023).*
9. *Groh, T. L., 2019. Proxy War. Stanford-California: Stanford University Press.*
10. *Johnson, J. T., 2006. Just War Idea: The State of the Question. Social Philosophy and Policy, 23(1), pp 167-195.*
11. *Kozera, C. A., 2018. The Use of Local Non-State Armed Groups in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism – Examining the Case of Mali. In: Besenyő, J., Marsai, V., (Eds.) The Dynamics of Conflicts in Africa in the Early 21st Century. Budapest: Dialóg Campus, pp 9-22.*
12. *Kozera, C. A., et al., 2020. Game of Proxies – Towards a New Model of Warfare: Experiences from the CAR, Libya, Mali, Syria, and Ukraine. Security and Defense, 31(4), pp 77-97.*
13. *May, L., 2014. Jus Post Bellum, Grotius, and Meionexia. In: Stahn, C., Easterday, J. S., Iverson, J., (Eds.) Jus Post Bellum. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 15-25.*
14. *Mearsheimer, J. J., and Walt, S. M., 2016. The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U. S. Grand Strategy. Foreign Affairs, 95 (July-August), pp 70-83.*
15. *Mumford, A., 2013a. Proxy Wars. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.*
16. *Mumford, A., 2013b. Proxy warfare and the future of conflict. RUSI Journal, 158(2), pp 40-46.*
17. *Pattison, J., 2015. The Ethics of Arming Rebels. Ethics and International Affairs, 29(4), pp 455-471.*
18. *Pfaff, T., 2017. Proxy War Ethics. Journal of National Security Law and Policy, 9(2), pp 305-353.*
19. *Rawls, J., 2008. The Law of Peoples. Cambridge-Massachusetts and London-England: Harvard University Press.*
20. *Walzer, M., 2006. Just and Unjust Wars. New York: Basic Books.*
21. *Watts, S., et al., 2023. Proxy Warfare in Strategic Competition State Motivations and Future Trends. Santa Monica: RAND.*

email: boda.mihaly@uni-nke.hu

ORCID: 0000-0003-3037-3644

e-mail: boda.mihaly@uni-nke.hu

Dr. Mihály Boda je profesor vojaške etike in predstojnik Oddelka za vojaško zgodovino, filozofijo in kulturno zgodovino na Narodni univerzi za javni sektor v Budimpešti na Madžarskem. Je tudi član upravnega odbora EuroISME. Ukvarja se predvsem s tematiko vojne etike, vojskovanja in vojaških ideologij, vključno s teorijo pravične vojne, tako zgodovinsko kot sodobno. Ukvarja se tudi z vprašanji, kot so vojaške vrline in moralne sposobnosti.

Mihály Boda, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Military Ethics, and the chair of the Department of Military History, Philosophy and Cultural History at the National University of Public Service, in Budapest, Hungary. He also the member of the Board of Directors of EuroISME. He has worked mainly on the topic of the ethics of war, warfare, and military ideologies, including just war theory, both historical and contemporary. He has also worked on issues such as military virtues and moral abilities.

ORCID: 0000-0003-3037-3644