

Proxy War

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | International relations

Why in News?

The UAE-backed Yemeni separatists have taken control of Hadramout and Al-Mahra, but this is unlikely to ease tensions, as the conflict and the UAE's role are shifting from direct fighting to proxy warfare.

- **Proxy wars** -A proxy war is a conflict in which two or more rival powers ***indirectly confront each other by supporting third parties*** (states, militias, or non-state actors).
- **Emergence**- It typically emerges when an external benefactor (state or non-state actor) supports chosen proxies with weapons, training, and funding to fight on its behalf.
- **Evolution** - It was ***once a Cold War tool of ideology***, now it persists in regionalised, multilateral forms, driven by cost efficiency, risk avoidance, and plausible deniability.
- **Key features** - Involves external support such as arms, funding, training, intelligence, or diplomatic backing.
- Fought on the territory of a ***third country***.
- Allows major powers to avoid confrontation and escalation.
- Often prolonged and destabilising for the affected region.
- **Examples**
 - **During Cold War times** (1945-1991) - US vs Soviet Union - no direct war, but battles across Cuba, Korea, Vietnam.
 - **Contemporary example** - In Yemen, tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE illustrate proxy dynamics.

Comparison between Direct War & Proxy War

Aspect	Direct War	Proxy War
Definition	States fight each other openly with their own armies.	States support third parties (proxies) to fight on their behalf.
Actors	Nation-states are directly involved.	Non-state actors, rebel groups, or allied states backed by external powers.
Visibility	Open, declared conflict.	Covert or indirect involvement, often denied.

Cost	High - economic, human, political.	Lower for sponsoring states; costs borne by proxies and civilians.
Accountability	Clear responsibility lies with the warring states.	Ambiguous; benefactors often deny involvement.
Duration	Can be shorter and decisive.	Often prolonged and unpredictable.
Examples	World Wars, India-Pakistan wars.	Cold War conflicts (Vietnam, Afghanistan), modern Syria, Yemen.

References

1. [Indian Express | What is proxy war?](#)
2. [Britannica | Proxy War](#)



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