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

