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RIVALRY OR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY? WHAT DETERMINES PROXY INTERVENTION IN CONFLICTS

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Abstract

After the 2011 NATO-led military intervention in Libya, requiring the coordinated effort of three Great Powers to pass a once-in-a-decade UN Security Council Resolution, states seeking to influence the outcome of civil wars in the MENA region, favoured the use of proxy forces instead of military interventions. Despite this turn in foreign policy, studies of conflicts explain this recent trend primarily on bilateral rivalry. Indeed, bilateral rivalry can explain a state's foreign policy of intervention when its rival is involved in the civil war, but how much can rivalry in the MENA region influence the foreign policy choice of forging a sponsorship relationship with a proxy? I compare recent civil wars in the MENA region and use a novel approach, Comparative Case Analysis, to examine the foreign policy decision of states. The results showcase that merely the presence of a rival in the civil war cannot lead to proxy support. Powerful regional actors search for opportunity structures combined with rivalry to support a proxy. Autocracies, on the other hand, with low military effectiveness search for opportunity structures to support a proxy.

Keywords: state sponsorship, foreign policy, civil war, proxy war, Qualitative Comparative Analysis

Introduction

States revel in influencing other state's preferences. Manipulating the behaviour of a third state so that it serves a specific interest or, better yet, gaining an amenable ally that is willing to fight for a common cause are not just desirable results that Great Powers especially strive for, but rather a recurring instance in international politics with many historical applications (Rauta 2018; Marshall 2016; Phillips 2022). For example, Russia aspired to lure Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and other states back into Moscow's sphere of influence to secure partnerships. Influence is thus in high demand, but the way to achieve this varies greatly (Brown 2016). Cunningham and Lemke argue that states that have interests in civil wars are more likely to intervene in civil wars (Cunningham and Lemke 2013). Proxy war is deadly, long, and costly, why then, states recur to that policy option more than direct intervention?

After 2016, the research on proxy wars changed considerably how we understand the phenomenon of internationalized intrastate conflicts.[1] Mumford along with Hughes reintroduced proxy wars to the field of external intervention (Mumford 2013; Hughes 2016; 2014). Rauta drove provided the theoretical framework on what constitutes a proxy and connected the external intervention field with the study of proxy war (Rauta 2021b; 2018; 2021a). San-Akca presented explanations of state support to Violent Non – State Actors (VNSAs) relying on international relations theory relying on bilateral rivalry (San-Akca 2009; 2017). Scholars of conflict have studied the phenomenon of external states intervening in civil wars through different perspective (Gould and Stel 2022; Demmers and Gould 2018; Carson 2018; Krieg and Rickli 2019). Proxy war can explain the foreign policy of states in the MENA region and this article builds on the existing literature of case studies of modern proxy wars in the MENA (Thornton 2015; Phillips and Valbjorn 2018; Sozer 2016; Hansen and Henningsen 2022).

[1] In this article, I consider as a sponsor the state actor which actively provides support to a third actor, a proxy. A proxy is a local actor which is present in a civil war and receives support from a sponsor. A proxy could be any of the warring sides of a civil war, either the government or the violent non-state actor. A proxy war is considered here as a civil war where both warring sides receive external support from external states.

Proxy war scholarship has paid considerable attention to the rivalry of dyads like Saudi Arabia and Iran or India and Pakistan and their proxy wars (Mabon 2013; Martin 2013; Ladwig 2007). In the meantime, cases like Afghanistan, which are important for US policymaking, have received scholarly attention pointing toward the instrumental presence of rivals in these proxy wars (Rashid 1996; Rubin 1997; Hager 1998; Prunier 2004; McFarland 2010). Likewise, Maoz and San Akca and San Akca examine cases of states seeking to alter the balance of power by supporting non-state armed groups acting on their rivalry with entities in the regional system (Maoz and San-Akca 2012; San-Akca 2009). Drawing more attention to the possibility of states joining in a civil war because their rivals are present as well, Vasquez understands that states that do not have a 'contiguous' rivalry most likely will join in a war rather than initiate it (Vasquez 1996). And this will happen because their rivals were also drawn into the war by other states. So, a rivalry is important for proxy war. Still, the question remains, which rivalry is the one that triggers a proxy war? The one that connects the external states with the state in civil war or the one between two external states that manifest in a civil war of a third country.

In other words, even though the Cold war is over, proxy wars are still waged today. While states can challenge their enemies directly, they can also enable a proxy to fight their wars. Delegating a perilous task to a third party, avoiding the potential costs and failures of a direct intervention, is what states often chose to do by engaging indirectly in wars through proxies. This article asks under what conditions do states forge a sponsorship relationship with a warring actor in a civil war?

This article develops into three parts. First, I discuss my theoretical framework relying on existing literature on civil wars and proxy wars. In doing so, I indicate the conditions that are presented in this article as opportunity structures, that are primarily economic interests, rivalry, and the military effectiveness of states. Once the theoretical framework is laid out, I move on to the second section which is the method and data section where I present the results of the set-theoretic analysis. Third, I explore the empirical pathways of the analysis and discuss their connection with existing literature.

Proxy wars as a political phenomenon in the post-Cold War

Third-party external support in civil wars is an empirical phenomenon closely related to a proxy war (Rauta 2021b). External support describes a state's decision to directly influence a civil war, putting the specific civil strife as the focal point of the analysis where the agent –the intervening state- interferes in a conflict, whereas proxy war describes the decision of a state to indirectly engage in a conflict through a proxy. Most significantly while both concepts, exclude forms of interventions that look at mediation or peacekeeping – a form of influence that aims at halting civil violence- external support includes as a way of assisting one of the warring parties the 'direct participation of military and security personnel' in a conflict (Karlen 2016). In contrast proxy war does not account for the presence of boots on the ground since this trigger a direct intervention. So, external support does not have the idea that a state aims at another state, that might be a rival or not, but rather concerns only the act of a state to support a group in a conflict while proxy war has the intention to cause damage against another state.

I use the concept of proxy war and not third-parties external support, for two reasons. Proxy war rather highlights the actor's preferences, that is, the state supporting one of the warring parties and, on this level, the analysis would be fruitful to understand why states delegate a dangerous task to a third party, avoiding the potential costs and failures of direct intervention. Second, although proxy war remains relevant and increasingly recurrent in today's world affairs. Examples are abundant during the Cold War where proxy wars were waged in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola, El Salvador (Mearsheimer 2003, xi).

Conditions for the emergence of sponsorship relationship

I. Rivalry

Rivalry has a crucial role in the formation of a foreign policy, and that is evident by how often it is mentioned as the causal factor for explaining states'

behaviour. This trend is consistent in both periods of research on proxy war. During the Cold War, the rivalry of the Superpowers drove the proxy war strategies in the regional theatres of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America. It so dominated the explanation of a bipolar system that understood the world in spheres of influence and constant competition, that it was almost impossible to present a persuasive alternative explanation to the Superpower rivalry as the causal factor of the outcome.

Current scholarship understands rivalry as a pertinent aspect of specific dyadic relationships, notably Saudi Arabia's and Iran's as well as Eritrea's and Ethiopia's, where every foreign policy in their respective region is analysed squarely on their rivalry. In addition, San Akca provided an alternative take on the strategic rivalry where states support VNSAs because these actors are fighting against the state's rival (San-Akca 2017). By presenting a triangle of a relationship between the external state and the state in a civil war that is a rival, she explained the behaviour of the external state to become the sponsor of the warring side that fights the government in a civil war. These explanations of rivalry significantly influenced the study of proxy war and brought forward patterns of relationships and behaviours that were instrumental in analysing the foreign policy of states in sponsorship relationships.

In my theoretical framework, I look at the interstate rivalry between the state sponsors that are external to the ongoing conflict. In this way, I differentiate from the existing literature on external intervention as well that looks at the dyadic rivalry between the intervening state and the government in conflict, which is like the strategic rivalry that San Akca has contributed to the field of proxy war. My approach to developing this theory has been broad in scope, emphasizing the international aspects of the proxy war and considering the rivalry that connects the interveners. Because rivalry looks at the historical aspects of the relationship, it is sensitive to changes in the relationship in case states decide to have more amicable relations, or on the contrary, pursue a more competitive relationship. This theory follows existing research that understand rivalry on a continuous scale, allowing for some rivalries to consider intense, some less intense, and some neutral relations (Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos 2019; Neads 2021)

II. Opportunity structures (lootable resources and trade)

Recent research has unearthed the causal factors that can describe the conditions for ethnic conflict to occur (Bara 2014). In proxy war, opportunities, and incentives, broadly perceived as the interests of states in a specific proxy war, have been central to many analyses (Byman et al. 2001). Economic interest is the most fitting in the case of proxy war strategies. This kind of interest encapsulates the opportunity that states might have in a proxy war to protect or exploit, and the incentive to do so by means that are not too risky and costly. This is true during the initiation and decision-making process of a proxy war.

This theory argues that opportunity relates to the economic aspect of interest so, I propose that an opportunity structure based on this kind of interest can capture the condition better (Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010). That is the reason why I look at two different types of economic interests, bilateral trade and lootable resources. First, bilateral trade as a flow between the external state and the state in civil war. Second, as greed is understood as a strong preference to consider, especially for autocratic regimes, I look at the conflict to search if there are lootable resources that can be part of the opportunity structure (Findley and Marineau 2015; Klosek 2020).

The presence of opportunity structures is connected to the assumption that there are structures that usually push a state to consider the possibility of intervening in the internal affairs of a state, notably with a proxy war strategy. As a state falls into a civil war, it opens an opportunity for external actors to interfere. Therefore, this condition connects more to realism as a theory as it perceives states searching for ways to influence the behaviour of other states.

III. Military cooperation

Alliance theories work on the same principle of proxy wars, but with a shorter time frame and limited goals. When calculating costs and risks when considering the dilemma of intervention or non-intervention, states often turn to their allies to discuss how far they are willing to support them. This tendency was illustrated most recently at the beginning of the US intervention in Iraq,

where the US president and the UK prime minister established and reinforced their strategic partnership.

In proxy war, alliances have numerous ways of influencing the behaviour of states. In the first scenario, research has shown that the existence of allies in a region or outside of a state's region, bolsters its willingness to pursue foreign policies that challenge its enemies. Following that reasoning, a state that has a Great Power as an ally carries a considerable standing in the region, especially if the alliance is publicly reinforced with the good relationships of leaders as well as legally binding with bilateral military agreements. A military cooperation between two states is seen as an active relationship that might create conditions for a sponsorship relationship to emerge (Maoz and San-Akca 2012).

My theoretical framework pays more attention to the relationships of Great Powers with regional actors that are usually not regulated and depend on other factors such as the relationships among leaders. States have allies derived from common interests. In this case, we have the alignment of the interests of a regional or small state with a Great Power. In a sense, this leans more toward the idea that Great Powers like the US have a specific strategy for every region. Even if this strategy changes or adapts to developments, it still outlines the interests of the Great Power. It is equal to Russia's idea of a periphery and what belongs to its periphery, or China's idea of the Asian sea. The actors align their interests with those of the Great Power, in a bid to receive support from the Great Power and become their allies in the region. This condition works to inform the means that the state will be able to throw into a proxy war.

IV. Low military effectiveness

In the study of international relations, no foreign policy does not consider the military power of a state, and this article is not an exception. Theories that derive from realism position military power at the epicentre of their argument, while theories that oppose realism, such as constructivism and Marxism still consider military power as a factor that explains the foreign policy of a state. Moreso, this article contributes to the research of proxy war strategies that are closely connected with the military power of states.

However, this article departs from the established perspective of analysing states' foreign policies based solely on material aspects, measured as the raw numbers of army personnel and cumulative air, naval, and territory power. This is based on a major issue: understanding military power as a quality that only powerful states have brings a very static hierarchy that is less sensitive to change and does not include states in the system that are not among the top 10. This perspective, if adopted for the analysis of proxy war, poses an issue on how it will predict the relations between small states and Great Powers. Of course, small states want to avoid inadvertent escalation and might use proxy war as their preferred policy, but that does not mean that powerful states will only use their military power to intervene in a conflict. Furthermore, as previous scholars have mentioned, measuring military power based on basic resources (human capital, industrial base, technology, GNP), and military capabilities as the default explanatory variable presents a limited picture of how powerful a state is. It also impedes the analysis that compares military capabilities without considering the relation with other states in the international system. For example, the way that the US military power is understood differs when compared with China or France's military power.

Answering the question 'how vulnerable the armed forces of a state are?' allows for my approach to provide a nuanced explanation of why states prefer a proxy war instead of sending their armed forces into battle. This slightly alternative method, based on existing literature and findings that concern the military effectiveness of a state, allows me to get a better picture of the factors that states take into consideration when they are analysing their strategic environment and potential constraints for them from intervening with their armed forces (Pilster and Böhmelt 2011; Brown, Fariss, and McMahon 2016; Hertog 2011; Quinlivan 1999).

I approach this specific condition from its negative pole, which is low military effectiveness. My theoretical framework departs from previous studies as I make an analytical distinction between military capabilities and military effectiveness. High military capabilities coupled with high military effectiveness provide an ideal strategic environment for states to use their armed forces, while low military effectiveness describes the environment where states search for. I am confident

that this condition can capture regional settings, crucial for my analysis, and not focus only on the international setting.

Method and Data

The purpose of this article is to explain why states decide to follow one policy rather than another. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) allows me to examine a complex combination of possible explanations following my ontological assumption that there is no monocausal explanation that impacts my outcome (Schneider and Wagemann 2010). The specific case studies will be used because they provide high levels of constructive validity and the opportunity to discuss and accommodate complex causal relations (George and Bennett 2005; Beach and Pedersen 2016).

In complete contrast to the external intervention literature, proxy war literature received predominantly qualitative analyses. Inevitably, some conflicts draw more attention than others, especially in the case of external support cases, where international actors are well-known participants. In these cases, they are more likely to get most of the attention compared to cases where only regional actors participate. For instance, Myanmar's civil war cannot produce the volume of research that the Syrian civil war does. In the research field of conflict studies, set-method approaches have recently started to wield empirical results that can provide theoretical contributions to the study of conflicts (Bara 2014; Nassauer 2019; Bretthauer 2015; Mello 2014; Basedau and Richter 2013; Metelits 2009) as conflict is more likely the result of a complex interaction of both. The fact is, however, that there is little generalized knowledge about these interactions. This study aims to fill this gap and applies crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA. My analysis bridges the novelty of set-theory approaches and detailed case studies to analyse changes in states' foreign policy.

In this article, I chose to follow the fuzzy sets instead of crisp sets for reasons that relate to my theoretical framework. The reason why I follow this procedure is that they allow for the researcher's theoretical knowledge to work with empirical anchors meaning that they can use their knowledge of a case to calibrate the conditions accordingly working with a coding scheme that applies to all cases. In this way, fuzzy sets introduced a 'graded set membership' that differs from crisp

sets as it is up to the researcher to set the empirical anchors and set the 'point of maximum ambiguity,' the score of 0.5, according to the cases that are specifically linked to the study (Schneider and Wagemann 2010; Rihoux and Ragin 2009; Mello 2022). In essence, it is up to the researcher to solve the dilemma of when we know that there is a difference-maker in a concept and flag one case that is out if it misses specific characteristics from the concept. In this article, I base my knowledge on the cases of proxy war and my theoretical framework's concept to derive the calibration procedures.

The data collection may be challenging since the empirical part of QCA demands equal treatment of all the cases involved. The contribution to the empirical research of proxy war is a necessary step to systematically analyse the phenomenon. The sources on which my argument is based is be provided by online editions of newspapers, conflict reports, war and conflict databases, public statements of decision-makers, statements from those who benefited in the international press, and special reports from the academic literature.

I. Outcome: Support

In qualitative terms, the question of how much external support constitutes a proxy war has received few empirical or theoretical answers. Researchers usually study cases where the support is high. This begs the question as to what characteristics we see in the concept of support. How does this connect with the established understanding of external support in the literature?

I approach this question by creating a fuzzy measurement of support (above four types of support are recognized as sufficient to be in the outcome). For example, states that want to have *intense support* will provide abundant support (up to seven types of support). In the opposite scenario, when states want to have *low* support then they will use only from their arsenal and not send any support to display limited support. This is what fuzzy sets can contribute to measuring a concept with a gradual measurement that varies from intense support to low support and can take all the different forms of support.

II. Explanatory conditions

As I mentioned, I understand *rivalry* as a state dyad participating on opposite warring sides. Of course, I focus on the specific timeframe of the proxy war. I employ the peace scale by Diehl, Goertz, and Bagallos, for two reasons: (i) operationalization of the concept and (ii) recent update (Diehl, Goertz, and Gallegos 2019). The existing prevalent datasets on rivalry are geared towards analysing the relationship between states that have experienced conflict history thus creating the preconditions of rivalry. However, the peace scale focuses on measuring how amicable or not state relationships are and this is a great benefit for my research as it allows me to look at not only the negative side of the concept but also the positive. In this way, I avoid any issues with having a concept that leads to interstate war being present in all cases and still not leading to interstate war but rather to proxy war. Additionally, this dataset contains more recent dyads and covers my cases which end in 2016.

Turning to measurement, as I mentioned, I look at dyads on opposite sides (table 1). For example, in the case of Ukraine where I only have two states as supporters, the US and Russia, I look at their relationship and the measurement they receive in the peace scale for the years between 2014 to 2016. In this case, their rivalry is above my cross-over point and they both receive the same score in the dataset. Now, usually, there are more external states, and this process is not that straightforward. For example, it may be that there is more than one supporter for the government side and multiple supporters for the VNSA side as well. In this case, I take the most relevant actor for each state and study if their rivalry was present in this proxy war. For the cases that are omitted, I turn to secondary literature or as a last resort check on the dataset for any previous coding of this dyad. So, rivalry is a continuous measure that can take any value between 0 (states that are in warm peace with all the opposing states in a proxy war) and 1 (states that are in severe rivalry with at least one opposing state, or in lesser rivalry with at least two opposing states).

Opportunity structure is a concept that has a hybrid meaning that can be understood through different characteristics (Uzonyi and Rider 2017; Rooney 2018; Rider and Owsiak 2015). In this article, I measure opportunity structure as it is highlighted in the existing literature and bear a theoretical direction towards the decision of supporting a proxy in a conflict: (i) *trade* flows between the two states and (ii) *lootable resources*. To measure the trade flows, I rely on the dataset of the Correlates of War project (Palmer et al. 2022). There, I code for the duration of the civil war either the increase of the trade between the two states, the decrease or remain stagnant.

Now, for the *military cooperation*. Alliances between Great Powers and regional actors, even if they change over time, tend to be perceived as a given in the international system. Again, even if this changes eventually, the alliances are quite strong. However, we have another form of military cooperation that tends to be less formal. In this sense alliances that do not share such a historical aspect, or they are even not part of official alliances, either through the participation in an IO or any other way. These alliances according to existing research they are based on mostly the military aspect as they can bring security in a region (Jones and Linebarger 2021; Kathman 2011; Gleditsch 2007; Aydin 2010; Aydin and Regan 2012). I measure this military cooperation according to the Defence Cooperation Dataset (DNCA) that looks if there is a bilateral agreement covering the military cooperation (Kinne 2020).

Low military effectiveness relates to the coup-proofing activities that states, usually under an autocratic regime, will follow (Narang and Talmadge 2018). I use a relatively simple approach to measure this condition by creating two indicators: (i) the presence of an autocratic regime and (ii) coup-proofing activities. These are in line with existing literature on military effectiveness, specifically how autocratic regimes usually have low military effectiveness (Millett and Murray 2010; Reiter and Wagstaff 2018; Brown, Fariss, and McMahon 2016; Pilster and Böhmelt 2011; Petersohn 2017; Talmadge 2011; Sullivan and Koch 2009).

Table 1. Fuzzy set calibration of outcome and conditions

Condition	Code	Data	Fully Out	Cross-Over	Fully In
Support (Outcome)	SP	UCDP/PRIO external support & manual coding	1 type of support (0.14)	4 types of support (0.6)	7 types of support (1)
Rivalry	RV	Diehl & Goertz	Peace (1)	Warm peace (0,75)	Intense rivalry (0)
Trade (Opportunity structure)	TR	Correlates of War Trade v.4	Flow is close to zero (0)	Non-changeable and close to zero (0,25)	Flow increases (1)
Lootable resources (Opportunity structure)	LR	(Michael G. Findley and Josiah F. Marineau, 2015)no. 5 (1 November 2015	No lootable resources (0)	Lootable resource but not in the conflict area (1)	Lootable resources in the conflict area (3)
Military Cooperation	MC	Defence Cooperation Dataset	No bilateral cooperation (0)	Agreement only research cooperation (0,2)	Agreement on military cooperation (1)
Low Military Effectiveness	ML	(Narang and Talmadge, 2018)	No military governance or purge (0)	No military governance but purge (1)	Military governance and purge (2)

III. Case selection

The dataset analysed in this article includes all proxy wars fought between 1990 and 2016 in the MENA region (table 2). These criteria resulted in the selection of the proxy wars of Afghanistan (1996 – 2001), Azerbaijan (1991 – 1994), Pakistan (2004 – 2014) in Baluchistan, Syria (2011 – 2014), and Yemen (2004 – 2014).

Notably, I use the definition of civil war from Fearon and Laitin (2003) and their list of civil wars to identify all the civil wars that have a start date after 1990, the end of the Cold War. As Fearon and Laitin present a list of civil wars that do not include low-intensity conflicts but only conflicts that meet the criteria of a civil war, their list of civil wars fits with my research aims to investigate only civil wars. As I cross-reference the list from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset to minimize concerns over heterogeneity of cases, I produced a list of proxy wars that do not include instances of low-intensity intrastate conflicts, for example, coups, and not include cases where there was military intervention, either biased or non-biased, from the start of the civil war.

This selection of proxy wars has thirty-two (32) cases of sponsorship relationships.[2] The units of analysis are the states. The selection includes Great Powers and regional actors and while their position in the international system is not included in the dataset, the implications of their status will be discussed in the interpretation of the results. It is important to mention that not all cases are positive as it is necessary to have negatives in the dataset (Mahoney and Goertz 2004).

[2] To recognize a civil war Fearon & Laitin set three criteria: 'They involved fighting between agents of (or claimants to) a state and organized group who sought either to take control of a government, take power in a region, or use violence to bring about a change in government policies. 2. The conflict killed or has killed at least 1000 over its course. 3. At least 100 of the dead are on the side of the government (including civilians attacked by rebels). This last condition is intended to rule out state-led massacres where there is no real organized or effective rebel opposition.' Fearon, J., & Laitin, D. (2003). Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War. American Political Science Review, 97(01), 75–90.

Table 2. Proxy war support and calibrated fuzzy set values

Case/ Conflict_Supporter_Proxy	Rivalry	Lootable Resources	Trade	Military Cooperation	Low Military Effectiveness	Support (Outcome)
Afghanistan_CHI_Gov	0.18	0.95	0.35	0.89	0.18	0.18
Afghanistan_FRA_Gov	0.05	0.95	0.81	0.05	0.18	0.11
Afghanistan_IRN_Gov	0.81	0.95	0.95	0.60	0.18	0.95
Afghanistan_PAK_Taliban	0.81	0.95	0.05	0.95	0.70	0.95
Afghanistan_RUS_Gov	0.18	0.95	0.35	0.77	0.81	0.81
Afghanistan_SAU_Taliban	0.42	0.95	0.81	0.05	0.18	0.70
Afghanistan_TAJ_Gov	0.18	0.95	0.64	0.95	0.81	0.70
Afghanistan_UZV_Gov	0.18	0.95	0.18	0.05	0.81	0.70
Azerbaijan_ARM_NKR	0.81	0.81	0.95	0.60	0.81	0.95
Azerbaijan_IRN_Gov	0.18	0.81	0.81	0.05	0.81	0.11
Azerbaijan_RUS_NKR	0.18	0.81	0.81	0.60	0.18	0.81
Azerbaijan_TURK_Gov	0.18	0.81	0.81	0.89	0.81	0.70
Pakistan_AFG_Baluchistan	0.18	0.18	0.81	0.05	0.81	0.70
Pakistan_IND_Baluchistan	0.05	0.18	0.81	0.27	0.81	0.81
Pakistan_IRN_Gov	0.70	0.18	0.81	0.05	0.18	0.81
Pakistan_UK_Gov	0.70	0.18	0.64	0.05	0.18	0.81
Pakistan_US_Baluchistan	0.81	0.18	0.81	0.95	0.81	0.70
Syria_IRN_Gov	0.81	0.81	0.95	0.05	0.81	0.95
Syria_RUS_Gov	0.81	0.81	0.35	0.77	0.18	0.95

Case/ Conflict_Supporter_Proxy	Rivalry	Lootable Resources	Trade	Military Cooperation	Low Military Effectiveness	Support (Outcome)
Syria_SAU_SyrianInsurgents	0.81	0.81	0.35	0.27	0.05	0.88
Syria_TURK_SyrianInsurgents	0.81	0.81	0.35	0.05	0.05	0.81
Syria_US_SyrianInsurgents	0.81	0.81	0.64	0.05	0.05	0.81
Yemen_IRN_Al_Houthi	0.70	0.18	0.64	0.05	0.05	0.70
Yemen_JOR_Gov	0.05	0.18	0.18	0.05	0.05	0.11
Yemen_SAU_Gov	0.95	0.18	0.81	0.77	0.18	0.95
Yemen_US_Gov	0.81	0.18	0.64	0.05	0.05	0.70

Note: AFG = Afghanistan, ARM = Armenia, CHI = China, FRA = France, Gov = Government side, IND = India, IRN = Iran, JOR = Jordan, PAK = Pakistan, RUS = Russia, SAU = Saudi Arabia, TAJ = Tajikistan, TURK = Turkmenistan, NKR = Nagorno – Karabakh Republic UZV = Uzbekistan, UK = United Kingdom, US = United States of America

It is often the case that datasets that focus on state support look only at sources that mention that support while not checking for support that might be mentioned in the case of a Violent Non-state Actor (VNSA). For that reason, I select cases (i) from established databases that mention external support such as Mapping Militant Groups and the Global Terrorist Dataset, (ii) secondary literature, (iii) NGOs reports, and (iv) archival news wires. These two steps allowed me to fine grain my case selection. The threshold that I used is that the support to happen during the proxy war and not before or afterward. So, I avoided selecting cases that related to civil war during the Cold War but were no longer active in the proxy war. The last step was to look at the governments that receive support and acted as proxies for the proxy war.

Set-theoretic analysis

I. Necessary conditions analysis

Under which conditions states sponsor a proxy? To interpret the results that lead to a sponsorship relationship, I begin with the analysis of necessary conditions. My findings suggest that neither the presence of single nor joint conditions is necessary for state support in a proxy war. The highest consistency condition reaches the score of 0.76 which is well below the commonly accepted 0.9 threshold. To find the necessary condition, the threshold of consistency is set to 0.95 for all the sponsorship relationships in my dataset. I look at whether there is a necessary condition that can describe 95% of the cases. In the proxy war dataset, I find no condition that fulfils this criterion. This is an interesting finding as rivalry in the MENA region is understood in the literature review as a necessary condition for a sponsorship relationship to occur. I measure rivalry at the bilateral level of the states that are external to the conflict, meaning that in the case of Syria's proxy war I measure the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran that external actors in the proxy war and not between Saudi Arabia and Syria or Iran and Syria. So, in my analysis rivalry is not a specific enabling condition but it is plausible that the combination of other conditions could lead to the occurrence of a sponsorship relationship.

Table 3. Analysis of necessary conditions (outcome support)

	Presence of Condition			Absence of Condition		
Condition	Consistency	Coverage	Relevance	Consistency	Coverage	Relevance
Rivalry	0.701	0.980	0.983	0.535	0.643	0.706
Lootable Resources	0.740	0.698	0.605	0.429	0.878	0.947
Trade	0.761	0.806	0.767	0.481	0.797	0.885
Military cooperation	0.460	0.812	0.902	0.658	0.671	0.637
Low Military Effectiveness	0.546	0.811	0.873	0.647	0.740	0.748

II. Sufficient conditions analysis

Moving on with the sufficient conditions for support in proxy wars. To arrive at this result, I use the truth table (Table 4) in its logically minimized format where it can show me which cases fall according to their membership in each condition set. As consistency scores are key in QCA, I use the threshold of 0.80, which returns the truth table with all the rows that are equal or have a higher consistency and are considered sufficient for sponsorship relationships to emerge. The sufficiency test is focused on identifying configurations of conditions that are quasi-sufficient for support in proxy wars. We can observe thirty-two logically possible combinations of conditions for support, nineteen are empirically observable, while the remaining are considered logically possible, but they do not contain any empirical case, so they are empirically unobservable. These are considered the logical remainders of the truth table. Also, from the empirically observable combinations, twenty-three are above the consistency threshold of 0.80.

Table 4. Truth table for the outcome sponsorship relationship

Conditions					Outcome				
RV	LR	TR	MC	ML	OUT	*N*	Consistency	PRI	Cases
0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	**Russia in Afghanistan**
1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	**Saudi Arabia in Yemen**
1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	**Russia in Syria**
1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	**Pakistan in Afghanistan**
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	**Iran in Afghanistan**
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	**Armenia in Azerbaijan**
1	0	1	0	0	1	4	0.98	0.96	**Iran in Yemen, US in Yemen, Iran in Pakistan, UK in Pakistan**
1	1	0	0	0	1	2	0.98	0.95	**Turkey in Syria, Saudi Arabia in Syria**
1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0.98	0.96	**US in Syria**
1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.98	0.95	**Iran in Syria**
0	1	1	1	1	1	2	0.97	0.92	**Tajikistan in Afghanistan, Turkey in Azerbaijan**
1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0.96	0.88	**US in Pakistan**
0	0	1	0	1	1	2	0.95	0.88	**Afghanistan in Pakistan, India in Pakistan**
0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.95	0.84	**Russia in Azerbaijan**
0	1	0	0	1	1	2	0.91	0.70	**India in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan in Afghanistan**

Conditions					Outcome				
RV	LR	TR	MC	ML	OUT	*N*	Consistency	PRI	Cases
0	1	1	0	1	0	3	0.70	0.24	Iran in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan in Afghanistan, Jordan in Syria
0	1	0	1	0	0	2	0.74	0.24	China in Afghanistan, Turkmenistan in Afghanistan
0	1	1	0	0	0	3	0.78	0.42	France in Afghanistan, US in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan
0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.82	0.28	Jordan in Yemen

Note: RV = Rivalry, LR = Lootable Resources, TR = Trade, MC = Military Cooperation, ML = Low Military Effectiveness, bold cases hold membership >0.50 in the outcome, logical remainder rows are omitted for presentational purposes.

My theoretical model sufficiently explains support for a proxy war. Overall, with a consistency of 0.94, the five sufficient patterns have a powerful explanatory power for sponsorship relationships. In connection to the additional measurement PRI (proportional reduction in inconsistency) the result is about the standard consistency threshold of 0.75. In addition, this solution has a coverage score of 0.89, being able to explain twenty-nine of the thirty-two cases. Table 4 shows in bold the positive cases where there was the formation of a sponsorship relationship where the solution has the negative cases in which case there was no sponsorship relationship. There is a deviant case, Saudi Arabia supporting the Taliban in the Afghanistan's civil war during 1993 to 1996. This case is deviant in coverage as despite being a positive case it is not cover by the solution.

Last, to derive on the intermediate solution, I followed the steps to the minimization of the truth table (Oana, Schneider, and Thomann 2021)users, and teachers of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA; Ragin, 1987, 2000, 2008b. In essence, I decided logical remainders that contain only one condition, except rivalry. In this case, I recognize as a plausible counterfactual the scenario where only the presence of rivalry would be enough to create a sponsorship relationship while in all other cases, at least two conditions needed to be present. So, I excluded two logical remainders rows from the minimization of the truth table.

Now, the solution presented in Table 5 offers the best combination of consistency, coverage, and parsimony. As QCA works with equifinality and conjunction of conditions that can explain sponsorship relationships, I connect the results with my theoretical framework. That is the reason why I set directional expectations on all the five conditions, namely I expect trade, military cooperation, lootable resources, and military effectiveness to be present while I expect the absence of rivalry.

The solution presents five alternative paths to the sponsorship relationship (Table 5). There is an empirical overall between path 1 and path 2 as well between path 4 and path 5. These overlaps allow me to create three general patterns that may lead to a sponsorship relationship.

Table 5. Solution for the outcome support

	Intermediate Solution Term				
	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3	Path 4	Path 5
Rivalry	●	●			
Lootable Resources (Opportunity Structure)	●		●	❍	●
Trade flows (Opportunity Structure)		●		●	❍
Military cooperation			●	●	
Military effectiveness					●
Consistency	0.993	0.984	0.949	0.945	0.924
PRI	0.988	0.973	0.916	0.875	0.812
Raw Coverage	0.532	0.557	0.359	0.246	0.323
Un. Coverage	0.089	0.096	0.061	0.053	0.064
Uniquely Covered Cases	**Syria's** Proxy War (Turkey and Saudi Arabia)	**Yemen's** Proxy War (Iran), **Pakistan's** Proxy War (Iran and the UK) **Afghanistan's** Proxy War (Russia)	**Azerbaijan's** Proxy war (Russia)	**Pakistan's** Proxy War (Afghanistan and India)	**Afghanistan's** Proxy War (India and Uzbekistan)
Solution					
Consistency	0.946				
PRI	0.923				
Coverage	0.891				
Model (Total)	M1 (1)				

Note: Blank circles indicate the presence of a condition, crossed – out circles its absence

III. Discussion

The intermediate solution is the result of the researcher's input choosing the logical remainders rows that can be explained by theoretical knowledge as counterfactuals. Paths 1 and 2 entail the combination of rivalry with either lootable resources available in the conflict country or trade relationships between the sponsor state and the county in conflict. The cases that are uniquely covered by rivalry with lootable resources are Saudi Arabia and Turkey in the case of Syria where they both supported the Free Syrian Army as their proxy in the Syria's civil war.

As for the rivalry with trade relationships the cases that are uniquely covered are Iran in Yemen's civil war supporting the Al-Houthi and United States supporting the Yemeni government, Iran and United Kingdom in Pakistan's civil war supporting the government against the Baluch. In all cases, we had the presence of rivalry with the combination of an opportunity, either lootable resources or trade relationships, that pushed the foreign policy of the state to support a proxy in the civil war. Important to mention here is that all these cases refer to Great Powers or powerful regional players that often have high levels of rivalry with other powerful players. This empirical result provides an insight on the foreign policy analysis of powerful states that want to compete against their rivals, however, they also perceive an opportunity in their economic interests to act.

Path 3 contains the trade relationship with the military cooperation to establish a sponsorship relationship. This path uniquely covers the Turkey in Azerbaijan's civil supporting the government and Russia supporting the Nagorno-Karabakh VNSA, and Tajikistan in Afghanistan's civil war supporting the government. This presence of economic interests in the form of a trade relationship as well as the presence of a military interests in the form of military cooperation are indicative of the close connection usually sponsors states have their proxies. Both Turkey and in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan in Afghanistan supported the government, something that it is more expected from this path. Russia's support to VNSA instead of the government is puzzling, however, in the period of 1991 when the Azerbaijan civil war started, both Armenia and Azerbaijan had military cooperation with Russia as it was a way for the former superpower to reduce its presence in the region. All in all, path 3 highlights a combination of active

economic and military connections between the sponsor and the proxy that can explain the occurrence of a sponsorship relationship.

Last, paths 4 and 5 cover the solution of a state with low military effectiveness with the combination of either trade relations or the presence of lootable resources in the civil war. Path 4 covers uniquely the cases of India and Afghanistan in the case of Pakistan's civil war against the Baluch. As for the other path, the cases that are covered uniquely are India, Russia, and Uzbekistan's support to the Afghan government during the Afghan civil war in 1993-1996. It is intriguing to observe the constellation of these two paths as they potentially highlight the alternative strategy of a state that does not posses' military effectiveness the alternative ways it can pursue its economic interests if the opportunity arises. In comparison with paths 1 and 2 where rivalry was connected to economic interests, paths 4 and 5 are identical except of the presence of rivalry. So, instead of having rivalry with economic interests as a great power or a powerful regional player, this analysis suggests that in the case of regional players with low military effectiveness following the same economic interests will also create sponsorship relationships in proxy wars.

The set-theoretic analysis points to two findings. First, as the reviewed literature predicted rivalry is an important condition that led to sponsorship relationships and that this condition will be most prevalent for Great Powers acting in regional settings or powerful regional players. Still, in the case of the MENA region, it seems that the combination of rivalry and economic interests need to occur for states to form sponsorship relationships.

Second, following the theoretical section, opportunity structures seen as economic interests play an important role in forging sponsorship relationships, especially for regional states that do not possess high military effectiveness. The empirical paths 4 and 5 show that economic relations, in the form of trade or selfish interests, in the form of access to lootable resources, can entail a sponsorship relationship. These two configurations describe the scenario when there is an opportunity structure and the state has low military effectiveness, indicating that the venture foreign policy of the state might come with a cost, but it is based on its perception of low risk with a high potential of gains. As it is with opportunistic goals, this end is not meant to drive the supporter to an

open conflict. In contrast, it stands as a complementary strategy in which states seek influence, but they do not desire control, and as such, they rarely lead to an escalation. For instance, Turkey's opportunistic support to the government of Azerbaijan from 1992 to 1994 was aimed to signal Turkey's willingness, especially to Russia and Iran, that Turkey wanted to be involved in the regional affairs. Last, my theoretical expectation that the presence of any kind of active relation either economic or military may lead to a sponsorship relationship is evident in path 3.

Conclusion

In this article, I explored the foreign policy of support in a proxy war as a strategy that states chose to have in a proxy war. The analysis was based on an original dataset, which was compiled for this article to offer insight on how conditions that describe rivalry, economic interests, military cooperation and low military effectiveness can affect the formation of foreign policy of states that support proxies in a civil war. I followed a configurational analysis of fuzzy – set QCA that allowed me to study this foreign policy decision which I described here as a sponsorship relationship between an external state (sponsor) with a local actor (proxy) that is active in civil war. Focusing on the MENA region, I could analyse the foreign policy priorities that regional states such as Pakistan, as well as Great Powers, such as the US and China had to weight on when they decide to wage a proxy war in the post-Cold War international system.

My main contribution to the literature of proxy war is how much the presence of one external actor as a sponsor in a civil war can be explained by the presence of other external actors who also support proxies in the same civil war. Current explanations of proxy war scholarships have primarily explained the simultaneous presence of external actors in a civil war supporting opposing sides based on rivalry. A classic example is the Saudi Arabia – Iran rivalry in the MENA region with both states supporting a variety of proxies due to their regional rivalry. However, this article with the introduction of other conditions, such as economic interests and the strategic setting of a state, together with rivalry allows us to see how they interact and better understand how states take the decision to support a proxy in civil war. It is precise because these conditions take

into consideration the competitive strategic settings in which proxy wars happen, that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the reasons why regional and international states might decide to support a proxy.

The findings of this research can be summarized as such: First, Great Powers and powerful regional actors engage in proxy warfare because their rivals might already be present in the conflict but also because they consider economic interests to be present in that civil war. Second, economic interests and a military cooperation with a Great power is also a strong explanation of conditions that can lead to a sponsorship relationship mainly for regional actors that want to challenge the regional status quo. Third, when regional actors are relatively weak in military terms in comparison to their neighbours, and they simultaneously perceived a transnational threat to their security decided to support a proxy in an effort to respond to this security threat without relying on their own military power. Lastly, to a lesser extent, some states used despite being relatively weak in military terms they decided to support a proxy in a conflict because they perceived that it might lead to an economic profit, especially access to lootable resources. These combinations of different interests provide a powerful explanatory model, which can be used to analyse the decisions of states to support a proxy in a conflict in other regions such as in Africa.

This article demonstrated that proxy war, contrary to conventional analysis, is not only a strategy of the Cold War but it clearly influences the post-Cold war conflicts. In fact, it is a foreign policy that states use to achieve their goals. In proxy war, actors have political goals that they pursue in connection with the behaviour of other actors in the international system. States go to proxy war, not only because is the least expensive option in comparison to intervening in another state's war but also because supporting a proxy also serves a combination of state interests.

Future research can look at different reasons why states decide to support a proxy in a civil war, allowing for a more detailed analysis of sponsorship decisions for a specific region. As opportunity structures were used to explain the proxy wars in the MENA region, future research could apply these findings to civil wars in Asia where proxy wars are also a frequent phenomenon. This article focused on proxies which were actively engaged in the fighting however recent technological

developments show that states forge sponsorship relationships with actors that use digital means to influence a civil war, such as cyber actors, either through disinformation campaigns or through attacking critical infrastructure. Future research could also use the findings of this article to explore when states forge sponsorship relationships with cyber proxies.

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