



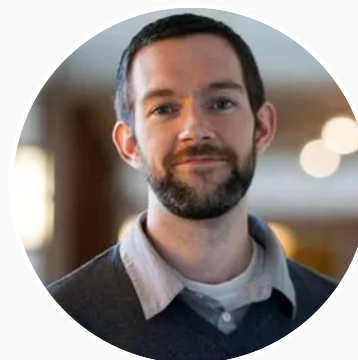
## Proxy Wars: How they end, and how relationships breakdown

While all proxy-sponsor relationships are unique, the common bond that sustains them is a shared strategic interest in mutual collaboration. These relationships endure when both sides believe they are advancing their self-interest. Proxy-sponsor interests can be coincident, such that both sides seek to advance the same strategic objective, but cooperation can also be sustained on the basis of side payments and/or coercive leverage.

Other factors, such as shared ethnicity or a common ideology, serve to strengthen the ties that bind proxies to sponsors. However, these are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for enduring proxy-sponsor relationships. Indeed, history is replete with examples of sustained partnerships between decidedly strange bedfellows—consider US support for the mujahideen in Afghanistan, for example, or the alliance between apartheid South Africa and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) in Angola. In both cases, the taproot of sustained partnership was the belief—held by both sides—that collaboration was beneficial for strategic, self-interested ends. This is common to proxy-sponsor relationships that endure.

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Just as proxy-sponsor relationships endure when both sides believe they are advancing their self-interests, so too do they break down when at least one side believes it is no longer benefiting from the collaboration. There may be a divergence in the objectives of the two sides, whether because the proxy gains a new external backer, or because the sponsor's geopolitical priorities change. In the former



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case, the proxy becomes less dependent on the sponsor's support and less susceptible to its coercive leverage; in the latter case, the sponsor becomes less dependent on the proxy to achieve its strategic ends. As the benefits of mutual collaboration decline, agency slack on the part of the proxy becomes increasingly likely. Over time, this causes the proxy-sponsor relationship to begin to break down.

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Researchers have convincingly shown that external military aid prolongs civil wars by distorting bargaining processes and by enabling domestic combatants to overcome local resource constraints. This effect is particularly pronounced in the case of proxy wars or competitive interventions, in which both government and rebel forces are supported by different third-party states. A logical corollary of this finding is that the termination of external support can eliminate bargaining distortions and temper domestic combatants' military capacity; in doing so, it encourages negotiated settlement.

Yet in the context of proxy war, terminating external support is complicated by the competition and animosity of competitive interveners. This observation has important implications for the policy and practice of conflict management: it suggests that ending civil wars that are afflicted by competitive intervention will require internal peace agreements between domestic combatants to be preceded by external agreements between the interveners. That is, peace agreements must be negotiated from the outside in.