Abstract

The war in Afghanistan conflict represents the longest engagement the United States has ever been involved in, and despite significant resource allocation and loss of life, the nation-building effort eventually failed. The most salient representation of the entire Afghan experience was the rapid collapse of the Afghan National Army. Despite the years of training by the Western forces and the resources poured into it, after the United States withdrew it rapidly collapsed and was defeated by Taliban forces. This thesis aims to examine the relationship between the United States and the Afghan National Army within the context of proxy warfare theory, drawing lessons that can be applied to future conflicts of a similar nature. Firstly, this study delineates the evolving nature of 21st-century warfare and underlines why it is essential for the U.S. to acknowledge these changes, acquiring valuable insights to better navigate future challenges. To this end, the research scrutinizes the Afghan conflict, which is not typically perceived as a classic case of proxy warfare. Using the perspectives of four different proxy warfare theorists, each with distinctive approaches, common characteristics of proxy warfare are distilled and applied to analyze the case of the Afghan National Army and its relationship with the U.S. While this thesis concludes that the relationship between the Afghan National Army and the U.S. cannot be entirely encapsulated within a proxy-patron framework, particular elements of this relationship fit the proxy warfare theory and offer valuable lessons and insights that should be reflected in possible future proxy conflicts.