

## REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

GPS – Geopolitical Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of the Russian Annexation of Crimea in 2014
<b>Author of the thesis:</b>	Zenko Synczyszyn
<b>Referee (incl. titles):</b>	Nuno Morgado, Ph.D.

**Remark:** It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

### **SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED** (for details, see below):

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	20
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	20
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	17
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	18
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	20
<b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)</b>	<b>A</b>

**Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).**

#### **1) Theoretical background:**

Zenko holds a very good knowledge of the debates in IR theory, and of the three types of neoclassical realism, particularly Type III that he efficaciously applied in this work. Therefore, he is very comfortable in dealing with the neoclassical realist model, its concepts, and predictions.

#### **2) Contribution:**

The application of the theory was executed under the correct assessment that not all the variables have the same weight in all the cases. Zenko perfectly understood the necessity of a plastic control between the application of the theory at stake and the case in which the theory itself is applied.

In this way, beyond applying the theory, he also tested it validly concluding, for example, that the intervening variables "leader images" and "strategic culture" were more relevant than the other two intervening variables of the theory.

#### **3) Methods:**

My only criticism with respect to the methodological apparatus (which I mentioned Zenko several times) is the inexistence of at least one hypothesis to be rejected or disproved by the theory and its application. That would have strengthened the work.

Apart from that, I assess the methodological structure of the thesis as "excellent", inscribed in the logic of careful soft positivism.

A special note to the thick geohistorical approach to the studied problem, which was successfully accomplished. That allows the reader to get acquainted with a series of historical disputes that will

necessarily condition the present and the future. Strategic culture and the [geopolitical agent's] foreign policy executive's perceptions are both influenced by the historical path.

#### **4) Literature:**

Once again, Zenko has a deep knowledge of the cornerstone source of the thesis: Ripsman *at al. Neoclassical Realism*.

The other sources were appropriate and carefully chosen, namely biographies that, in spite of its controversial statements, can provide the researcher with crucial information about the agent's intentions, beliefs, and perceptions; in the case of this MA thesis, Putin's.

The choice of Byman and Pollack as a theoretical fundamental for going down through the operationalization of neoclassical realism was also a good one. I just missed Alexander George's operational code, but to some extent Dyson and Parent's study substituted it.

#### **5) Manuscript form:**

The structure of the work is rational and coherent, from the analysis of the literature about the subject and thick geohistorical description to the conclusions about the relevance of certain variables over others, achieved through a very well fulfilled application (and testing) of the theory.

In my view, one of the main points in any study of today's Russian politics is the continuation of agents, objectives, and modalities of action in the Russian intelligence community from the Soviet era until our days. It seems that the concentration of power on the hands of the President, which Zenko made reference to quoting one of my works and applying the concept of "center of gravity", is a result from that context.

The thesis has an excellent presentation with all due formal requirements: extensive footnotes, respective list of references. The writing style is clear, easy to follow, and thus pleasant.

Finally, I evaluate this thesis as an excellent contribution to the field of foreign policy and international politics analysis.

**DATE OF EVALUATION:** 08.06.2019



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**Referee Signature**

**The referee should give comments to the following requirements:**

**1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:** Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts omitted? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently incorporated with the topic and hypotheses tested?

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**2) CONTRIBUTION:** Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the policy implications well founded?

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**3) METHODS:** Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further verification and testing? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or irrelevant detours off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 10 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**4) LITERATURE REVIEW:** The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way and disposes with a representative bibliography. (Remark: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**). If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression.

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**5) MANUSCRIPT FORM:** The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate language and style, including academic **format** for quotations, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**.

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:**

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading
91 – 100	<b>A</b>	= excellent
81 - 90	<b>B</b>	= good
71 – 80	<b>C</b>	= satisfactory
61 - 70	<b>D</b>	= satisfactory
51 - 60	<b>E</b>	
0	<b>F</b>	= fail (not recommended for defence)