Abstract

This diploma thesis is focusing on applying balance of power theory on case of regional competition in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran and its reflection in three particular proxy conflicts – Syrian civil war, conflict over influence in Lebanese political system and conflict over stability of Bahraini regime. Assumptions about decreasing relevance of the theoretical background in more complex contemporary settings are challenged by concentrating on evolution of the theory and mainly role of non-state actors in these conflicts and balancing. The primary aim is to challenge the originally strictly state-centric theory, indicate ways to broaden its applicability and make contribution to the discipline by evaluating overall role of non-state in balancing and balance of power theory in general. The thesis firstly examines each case study separately, with focus on perception of threat and balancing behaviour of both regional powers and perspective of ties with respective non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, Shia majority in Bahrain and opposition in Syria, including their position and influence in the conflict, in context of regional competition and balancing in general. The work then uses a comparative approach with emphasis on contrast of context to identify key findings, which helps to make conclusions about actual role of non-state actors from both empirical and theoretical perspective and identify consequences on the state of the theory and possible ways forward. The thesis aims to show that the realist theory is able to adapt to rising role of non-state actors not only in terms of a balancing tool, but also a regular actor of the whole regional competition and regional balancing, who can influence not only dynamics of significant proxy conflicts, but also competition between regional powers.