Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Bc. Tomáš Zrůst

Title: Saudi-Iranian rivalry through cooperation with non-state actors: Balance of power theory and alliance-making in changing Middle East dynamics

Programme/year: Security Studies/2019

Author of Evaluation (external assessor): PhDr. Zdeněk Ludvík, Ph.D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Criteria</td>
<td>Research question, definition of objectives</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Theoretical/conceptual framework</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>Methodology, analysis, argument</td>
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<td>Minor Criteria</td>
<td>Sources</td>
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Evaluation

Major criteria:

The author has worked out a relevant and up-to-date paper. Research questions and definitions of objectives are formulated logically and comprehensibly. The strength of the argument line is convincing, the author skillfully derives from the theoretical literature principal items he consistently follows in the case studies. At the end of the text, he presents his research findings in a transparent manner, thereby fulfilling his research design accordingly.

I have only several comments on the paper:
- the research methodology is very vague defined (p. 22);
- at least a short historical overview of the use of VNSA as proxy warriors is missing;
- the RQ2 has been already largely answered in literature;
- the role of VNSA in the realist theory (p. 66) has been also discussed in literature;
- if the author has arrived at the findings that hard balancing are combined with behaviour close to softer approach, such as financial and political support or sustaining ideological links (p. 59), he should have introduced also (besides Walt's) Schweller's concept of balance of capabilities and interests, or constructivist concept of balance of identities (or other concepts) that would have better explained the power-security processes that take place in the areas under research;
- the three examined cases are not sufficient for the author's general assertion about the characteristics of the whole system, i.e. (t)he post-Cold war environment thus seems to be more sensible to threats, and actors are thus willing to balance against threats which are not direct to their independence or survival, but position in specific conflicts, related to possible benefits from preferred scenario, or stronger position against adversary in the area or region in general (p. 62);
- the above mentionned problems may be due, at least to some extent, to the fact that the author does not work with distinctive specific literature such as on neorealist approach to VNSA (Vinci 2008; 2009), on VNSA alliance formation (Christia 2012; Bacon 2018), on regional security complexes (Buzan – Wæver 2003) and on use of VNSA by states in proxy conflicts (Mumford 2013).
Minor criteria:

Theoretical literature could definitely be richer, methodological literature is
definitely poor; relatively limited data sources. The paper meets the formal
requirements and style of a diploma thesis.

Overall evaluation:

The author has chosen a very interesting and up-to-date topic for his
research. The paper is logically and clearly structured. Although the resulting
text is not in any way too innovative, it is obvious that the author deeply
studied the issue in terms of both theoretical and empirical aspects. Despite
all the partial imperfections, the author has demonstrated sufficient ability to
conceive a relatively high-quality academic text. I recommend the paper for
defense.

Suggested grade:
C

Signature:
Zd. Ludvík, m.p.