



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Nicola Fedeli

Title: **The Hybrid Nature of Jabhat Al-Nusra through the lens of its magazine Al-Risalah**

Programme/year: Secintel 2017

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor):

| Criteria | Definition | Maximum | Points |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--------|
| Major Criteria | | | |
| | Research question, definition of objectives | 10 | 10 |
| | Theoretical/conceptual framework | 30 | 26 |
| | Methodology, analysis, argument | 40 | 38 |
| Total | | 80 | 74 |
| Minor Criteria | | | |
| | Sources | 10 | 10 |
| | Style | 5 | 4 |
| | Formal requirements | 5 | 5 |
| Total | | 20 | 19 |
| | | | |
| TOTAL | | 100 | 93 |



Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis intends to analyse Jabhat Al-Nusra's English language magazine Al-Risalah to assess its approximation either to AQ or to IS jihadi pathway. The main topic of the research is indeed relevant and interesting as there has been little attention devoted to the English propaganda production coming from the local groups in the Middle East. Not only it is valuable to look at this specific source in a context of growing literature focusing on Dabiq and Inspire but it is also pertinent to investigate which of the streams appears to be more appealing. That said, it is also relevant to capture the main differences in propagandas of the two streams.

The literature review is very well done and, in fact, covers all works I am aware that analyse various aspects of the jihadi magazines. The next part covers the main goals of the jihadi "international/English" magazines. This section touches a wider radicalisation debates while I think some of the resources from the radicalisation literature could solidify the argument.

The empirical contextualisation is interesting and offers some less-known/expected insights. To my knowledge the empirical description is accurate.

The core of the thesis lies in methodologically-driven analysis based on qualitative content analysis. Before getting to the method itself I appreciate that Nicola explained its utility against the quantitative approaches whose utilisation has been growing. The method builds on a combination of inductive step preceding the coding that is followed by deductive search and categorisation. This approach is quite well-established in QCA and is also very well explained. The research is then complemented by intensity and sentiment analysis that finally allows to assess the proximity towards one of the jihadi brands.

My review is quite descriptive since I find the thesis very well-thought and elaborated. The categories seem to cover all essential structural elements of magazine propagandas and the coding allows for effective evaluation. Although the thesis is quite rich on resources (particularly give the topic) I could imagine the categories being a bit more grounded in/legitimised by the existing research. Generally, the methodological operation is above-standard. That all combined with a very interesting and under-research topic creates an excellent thesis built around the analysis of the primary data. Due to the sharp methodology and quality interpretation the thesis actually adds to the professional debates on jihadi propaganda.



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Minor criteria:

I have no critical comments as regards the minor criteria despite some minor language deficiencies.

Overall evaluation:

I very rarely get to the score above 90% but this dissertation is in my eyes outstanding. It has a very interesting, relevant and under-researched topic, it works heavily with the primary data and it utilizes relatively sophisticated, though still effective, methodological operations to get to the results.

Suggested grade:

Excellent

Signature: dr. Vít Střítecký