

Adéla Literáková

Mgr. Dissertation Evaluation

2020

Sino-US-Russia Relations during the Second Term of the Presidency of Barack Obama

Adéla Literáková has opted to write her Mgr. Dissertation on the relations between China, the United States, and Russia during Barack Obama's second term as U.S. president. The work, which is 45 pages in length, consists of an Introduction, five main chapters, and a Conclusion. I will evaluate each part of the treatise in the ensuing paragraphs.

In the Introduction, Adéla spells out the goal of the dissertation and provides some historical background on the topic. Offensive realism, the theory of the triangle, institutional liberalism, and interdependence theory are stated to be most applicable to the topic. I think that the Introduction is satisfactory and leads smoothly into the first chapter.

In Chapter 1, the issue of methodology is discussed in detail. Adéla mentions some of the major scholars, who have written on realism and liberalism. In the dissertation, she evaluates four major issues, namely trade, counterterrorism, the South China Sea, and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense. The theory of the "strategic triangle" is defined in accordance with the scholarship of Lowell Dittmer. Two objective conditions are stipulated. The first is that all actors must be "aware of the influence and prominence of the triangle." Second, "the actors must be accepted by each other as legitimate and autonomous players in the triangle." Adéla then proceeds to describe the types of interactions between the three actors, which she places in two categories, namely the comparative type (stable marriage, romantic triangle, unit-veto) and the cooperative type (ménage a trois). Dittmer's scholarship is analyzed well. In the next section of the chapter, she recalls the different types of realism as defined by Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer. Waltz

coined the term “defensive realism” and Mearsheimer put forward the concept of “offensive realism” as a response to Waltz’s theory. As defensive realism is used in the dissertation, Adéla delves into the defensive realism theory’s five major assumptions. She explains each assumption well differentiates the respective emphases of each type of realism. In the following section, Adéla discusses Robert Keohane’s “neoliberal institutionalism”, which is also utilized in the treatise. “Economic interdependence” theory is elucidated in the first chapter’s final section. I think that Adéla has done an impeccable job characterizing the theories relevant to her work.

Chapter 2 tackles the issue of trade. The trading relationships between the United States and Russia, as well as the United States and China are scrutinized in great detail. The same holds true for the trading ties between China and Russia. In her findings, Adéla labels the Sino-U.S.-Russia trading relationship as a “romantic triangle” in which China plays the role of pivot.” This chapter is clear and aptly written in my view.

In Chapter 3, Adéla addresses the issue of counterterrorism. First, she tackles the U.S.-Russia relationship. While both countries concurred in the second term of the Obama Administration that the Islamic State needed to be defeated, “the interactions were influenced by the geopolitical interests and “double standards” which caused uncertainties in the mutual relations.” Insofar as the U.S.-China relationship is concerned, Adéla explains the evolution of the terror threat faced by China thanks to its “Belt and Road Initiative.” Two areas of cooperation are exchanges of information concerning the Islamic State and dialogue with Pakistan and the Afghan government to promote stability in Afghanistan. Likewise, Adéla’s interpretation of Sino-Russia relations is interesting. The chapter concludes with the triangle concerning counterterrorism as “ménage a trois” or “stable marriage.” I have no problem with this chapter.

Chapter 4 deals with the problem of the South China Sea. From the point of view of U.S.-Russia relations, the U.S. containment was welcomed, but Russia also felt it needed China to balance U.S. power. Sino-U.S. relations were affected by a growing American involvement in the South China Sea reflecting President Obama's "pivot to East Asia" strategy. The Chinese became more aggressive in the area and the United States stood by other countries in their refusal to recognize Chinese claims. The South China Sea issue is characterized as belonging to American rebalance strategy aiming to contain Chinese power and maintain U.S. dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. With regard to Sino-Russia relations, Adéla points out Russia's desire to be a power in the Asia-Pacific region. Russia's stance on the South China Sea issue is described as neutral. Russia values its relations with China based on mutual interests, but also values relations with other countries in the region and has no desire to damage relations with the United States. Offensive realism best characterizes the U.S.-China relationship. The Sino-Russia relationship and the U.S.-Russia relationship indicate the possibility of coordination (neoliberal institutionalism). The triangle can best be described as a "romantic triangle" with the possibility of developing into a "stable marriage." Again, the chapter is well written.

In Chapter 5, Adéla addresses the matter of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system possessed by the United States. The THAAD system is meticulously explained. U.S.-Russia relations regarding the THAAD system are characterized as negative. In response to the system, Russia has beefed up its nuclear submarine fleet and strengthened cooperation with China. The Sino-U.S. relationship has been negatively impacted by the THAAD system, which China considers to pose a threat to Chinese national security. Sino-Russia relations, on the other hand, have been enhanced by both countries'

opposition to the THAAD system. The triangle here is described as a “stable marriage.” I like this chapter.

In the Conclusion, Adéla states that “the triangle of Sino-U.S.-Russia is dynamic and still evolving” during Obama’s second term as president. Moreover, the three powers “can balance and restrict each other because none of them has embraced the absolute supremacy and become the hegemon.” I think that Adéla has clearly argued her case.

My overall impression of the dissertation is positive. However, there are some grammatical errors. I recommend a classification of **A** or **B** depending on the quality of Adéla’s oral defense.

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