

IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	Glasgow 2401947 DCU 18114369 Charles 40293923
Dissertation Title	The Authoritarian Shortcut: Russia's Unorthodox Population-Centric Counterinsurgency during the Second Chechen War and Strategic Implications for Western Military Planners

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

Reviewer 1 Initial Grade <i>Select from drop down list</i>	Reviewer 2 Initial Grade <i>Select from drop down list</i>	Late Submission Penalty <i>Select from drop down list</i>
Word Count Penalty (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)		
Word Count: 28813 Suggested Penalty: <i>Select from drop down list</i>		

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark. (Following correspondence reviewers should list the agreed final internal grade taking before and after any penalties to be applied).

Before Penalty: A4 [19] **After Penalty:** Select from drop down list

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
A. Structure and Development of Answer	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Excellent
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Excellent
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Very Good
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Excellent
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Very Good
B. Use of Source Material	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Excellent
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Excellent
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Excellent
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Excellent
C. Academic Style	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Excellent
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Excellent
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Excellent

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• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Not required
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This thesis contributes to the broader COIN literature by focussing on the actions of authoritarian states primarily Russia rather than more conventional studies that look at Western powers operations. The literature review establishes this pattern, although there seems to be less consideration than is merited given to the very different context in which these counter-insurgencies occur - Iraq and Afghanistan are very different environments for the US than Chechnya is for Russia or the revolutionary forces in Syria were for Assad i.e. is the difference identified here between forms of COIN or the difference between existential wars and expeditionary wars of choice. I'm not sure either Hobbes or Locke deserve to be in that table on p.26. The theory section clarifies that the test applied is whether the authoritarian approach is successful by a clear set of criteria rather than in comparison with democratic approaches but the framing of the hypothesis suggests a more comparative purpose - it begs the question why we would expect only democratic approaches to be successful? This is particularly problematic as Popper is invoked in the research methodology section, the hypothesis as framed is difficult if not impossible to falsify because of it's ambiguous framing and in the context of a single case study. The section on interviews doesn't mention ethical approval but I assume this was received. The case is well put together and provides an excellent account of the shape of Russian coin strategy, the conclusions in relation to lessons for Western COIN approaches are less well grounded as they lack the same empirical support.

Reviewer 2

This is an excellent thesis. It is innovative, original, and ambitious. Drawing on a multitude of sources, the author illustrates the inaccuracy of the widespread belief of hearts and minds-centered COIN being superior to brutalization-centered COIN. The author shows excellent knowledge of literature, related concepts, and problems. The thesis is well-structured and written. The thesis is indicative of the author's analytical skills; it is written in a light prose, which makes it easy to follow. The organization of the thesis is logical. While I applaud the thesis - the author's ambitious to venture into a challenged topic, formulating outstanding ideas and delivering compelling results, my single critique relates to what the thesis actually claims. It doesn't offer a catch-all theory of authoritarian COIN being superior to democratic COIN approaches. What it does is showing that what the literature considers democratic COIN approaches - claiming they are more likely to bring about success in COIN - a combination of authoritative approaches may actually be superior to democratic approaches. Drawing on the case study of Chechen COIN, the author shows, albeit somewhat implicitly, that methods known generically as brutalization may be more effective in quelling rebellions than democratic, or hearts-and-minds based, approaches. This is what the thesis needs to emphasize to offer a more realistic central argument.