



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Jiří Schwarzer

Title: Russia's strategic goals in the African and Middle Eastern shatterbelts: a competition with the West

Programme/year: 2022/2023

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/second reader): doc. Mgr. Martin Riegl, Ph.D.

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	10
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	30
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	37
<i>Total</i>		80	76
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	8
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	18
TOTAL		100	95



Evaluation

The latest military-led coup against democratically elected president Bazoum and the outbreak of major violence in Sudan underscore the importance of the Sahel region. A series of coups often led by local special forces attracted Western strategists' and scholarly attention to the strategic importance of the Sahara–Sahel region which is inevitably interlinked with Europe. The same can be said about the Middle East region, which has been witnessing a profound change in the geopolitical equilibrium driven by a combination of internal and external geopolitical forces. One can also notice the emerging body of literature dealing with the heightened geopolitical competition between Russia and the West along so-called new African geopolitical frontiers, both geographically and functionally defined. This trend was further triggered by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, and the Global South became (again) a theatre of fierce diplomatic, economic, or military competition. However, a deeper geopolitical analysis framed within geopolitical theories and concepts is missing allowing us to better understand the long-term effects of a geopolitical structure. For this reason, I highly appreciate the paper's theoretical framing based on S. Cohen's concept of the shatter belt which he defined as a zone of contacts between realms (geostrategic regions) whose internal fragmentation is intensified by pressures of major powers from competing realms (Cohen 2015: 37, 40). This makes it distinctive from other types of geopolitical regions, notably zone of convergence or compression zone (smaller atomized areas that lie within or between geopolitical regions). The concept of shatter-belt is correctly and systematically applied throughout the paper.

The author's goal is to analyze Russia's strategic goals in Africa and the Middle. Often, the media describe the Kremlin (both covert and open) as a Cold War 2.0. The author questions this and explains the differences between Soviet and Russian geostrategic goals and tools. The research question and hypotheses are clearly defined so are the methodology and case study selection. The overall structure of the paper is clear, following an introduction to the theoretical concept of the shatter-belt, an excursion into the history of Soviet engagement in both restive regions (shatter-belts). Case studies of the Central African Republic and Syria, which are strongholds of Russian presence in both regions offer an informed insight into Moscow's operandi in several fields. Both case studies are discussed within a broader regional development and most importantly set in the context of overall changing geopolitical structure which both shatter-belts are part of. To conclude, the paper is an informed geopolitical analysis framed within S. Cohen's concept of distinctive geopolitical regions.



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Charles University

Minor criteria:

The thesis meets all formal criteria as required by the Faculty of Social Science. The quality of the presentation is good, the language allows a fluent reading. The author has managed a solid amount of relevant, both primary and theoretical resources. I have not identified any major deficiencies.

Assessment of plagiarism:

The thesis was checked by URKUND software and there is no indication of rules violation.

Overall evaluation:

What I appraise the most is not only the way the author managed to link and apply this highly relevant concept on two (especially for Europe) strategically relevant regions, but also his own assessment of Russia's long-term impact on the status of these shatter belts and a low chance for them to develop into zone of convergence or gateway regions. Sometimes an analysis could have been more detailed, but this is also due to the limited scope of such papers. Nevertheless, the submitted paper meets the defined goals.

Suggested grade: A

Signature: