

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Title of the thesis:	ISIS: Terrorist State or Terrorist Organization
Author of the thesis:	Toghrul Imanov
Referee (incl. titles):	Ondrej Ditrych, MPhil. Ph.D.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background</i>	10
<i>Contribution</i>	10
<i>Methods</i>	10
<i>Literature</i>	10
<i>Manuscript form</i>	20
TOTAL POINTS	60
The proposed grade	2.5

1) Theoretical background:

The thesis summarises the definition debate on what constitutes terrorism. However, this summary does not lead to operationalisation of concepts for the purpose of the main objective of the thesis, i.e. to determine whether the ISIS fits the definition of the terrorist group or should instead be considered a terrorist state, a concept which is not defined at all. In the thesis, the only criteria of statehood are taken from the Montevideo convention and the international legal domain, however, regarding the fourth criterion, i.e. capacity to enter into relations with states, the author's argument is rather dubious.

2) Contribution:

The thesis discusses a phenomenon of theoretical and practical relevance. Yet it is far from having 'unique importance' as the author boldly claims in the discussion of findings. The author suggests that the ISIS is unlike 'classical' terrorist organisations and should more expediently be termed 'terrorist state'. The argument about fundamental novelty of the ISIS is not new, however, and while the thesis competently demonstrates that it does have features of statehood, due to the lack of conceptual clarity its theoretical contribution is limited. The empirical material summoned for the purpose is rather extensive and attempts are made to submit it to analytical inquiry; however, generally the thesis is descriptive. It is unfortunate that the author did not expand the discussion of the category of insurgency in relation to the ISIS which could have shed some light on the unprecedentedness of the ISIS as a protostate organisation. The history of ISIS' rise is comprehensive, only the importance of the former Baathists in the constitution of the group and the fundamental importance of the fall of Mosul (followed by declaration of the caliphate) ought to have been stressed. In the part dedicated to ISIS' propaganda, I miss the important moment of ISIS' seeking to reinforce its identity as state toward constituencies abroad by producing content relaying (supposedly) 'normal' and enjoyable life under its rule.

3) Methods:

The thesis has a clearly stated hypothesis which is not falsifiable in neopositivist terms but can be investigated through careful conceptual and empirical analysis. While empirical parts of the thesis are well researched, the conceptual discussion, leading to clear operationalisation and research protocol used in organising the empirical materia is the thesis' main weakness. In terms of the logic of scientific inquiry, the chapter on ISIS cannot be considered a 'case study'.

4) Literature:

The thesis makes use of sufficient amount of relevant literature. There is no literature review and reference to the existing debate on the nature of the ISIS, which would have situated the thesis' argument in the field.

5) Manuscript form:

The manuscript is competently written and generally logically structured, although the argument in favour of considering the ISIS as a 'terrorist state' could have been better organised and divided into sections, and it is not clear why there is a separate chapter dedicated to discussion of the findings from the conclusion, which is, by and large, repetitive.

DATE OF EVALUATION: June 3, 2016

Referee Signature