



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: **Bc. Tomáš Kocourek**

Title: **Unmanned Warfare: How Liberal Democracy Legitimizes Drone Attacks and Killings Abroad**

Programme/year: **2017**

Author of Evaluation (external assessor):

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Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	8
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	35
<i>Total</i>		80	68
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	10
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	19
TOTAL		100	87



Evaluation

Major criteria:

The research significantly contributes to the debates surrounding the legitimization of unmanned aerial vehicles in extrajudicial killings in the context of President Obama's Administration. The thesis puts forward an impressive number of original insights into the United States' drone programme. Its main contribution is that it opens up for investigation the legitimizing discursive strategies used to normalize drones strikes, by offering a rich discourse analysis into the construction of the 'enemy', how threats are enframed, the instrumentalization of expert authority, symbolic power, and the narrative around legality. They represent the strongest parts of the thesis that involve the thorough analysis of the ways in which the 'official' discourse resorts to manipulative discursive tactics so as to push forward an agenda favouring drone strikes. My concern relates to the relatively disjointed exposition of the theoretical framework, which leaves the impression of cataloguing. More theoretical insights could have been drawn from the Foucauldian concept of 'regime of truth', so as to substantively engage with the performative power of discourse, discourse as a strategic field, and the power effects of the Obama Administration's legitimizing formulae on drone strikes. This would have shed further light on the hors-text/outside-text and the security dispositifs of liberal democratic societies, the puzzle residing in the legitimization of illiberal acts (such as targeted extrajudicial drone killings) by liberal democracies. The research could have also benefited from a critical assessment of drone technology as site of struggle, speaking to the transformation of contemporary warfare. In relation to this, the research could have also been aided by an in-depth literature review of the existing scholarship dedicated to the United States' drone programme.

Minor criteria:

The thesis is well written and offers a balanced theoretical and empirical examination of the subject matter, which demonstrates a good handle of scholarly craft. However, the discourse analysis tends to proceed at certain points by assertion and illustration, thus failing to make full use of the rich discursive material it is based on. Symptomatically, the 'Legitimization of Drone Strikes in Official U.S. Discourse' section underuses the insights from the Obama Administration's discourses in favour of relying on quotations, thus making the argument less analytically compelling.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis presents a rich and deep analysis of the Obama Administration's drone programme. The dissertation is based on a comprehensive understanding of legitimization techniques and typologies in discourse analysis, making use of a wealth of discursive material about the Administration's positive narrative on drone strikes.

Suggested grade: **1**

Signature: Raluca Csernatoni, PhD

Prague, 30 May 2017