

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

Title of the thesis:	Russia's Role and Drivers in the Syrian Conflict: An Analysis from a Classical Geopolitical Perspective
Author of the thesis:	Denise Knorr
Referee (incl. titles):	Mgr. Bohumil Doboš

Remark: It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	18
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	12
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	10
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	10
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)	62
The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)	2

You can even use a decimal point (e.g. giving the grade of 2.5 for 60 points).

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Theoretical background:

The author selects a theoretical background rooted in classical geopolitics with focus on maritime/land division and a role of shatter belts in the great power politics. The authors for this part are well selected, the only missing segment is a larger discussion over Russian geopolitics that is promised in the previous text and would be useful for the following analysis.

2) Contribution:

The thesis attempts to help readers to better understand the Russian influence in Syria, its motivations and impact. The largest contribution is in in-depth analysis of primary (even though only English-written) documents that is done in a clear manner. This analysis, nevertheless, has its limitations and the issues with the lack of use of secondary sources as well as limitations over the use of Russian-language sources decrease the potential contribution to the field.

3) Methods:

Author uses a combination of discursive analysis and foreign policy analysis. This methodology is suitable for the aims of the work. The methodology should be clearer and should be followed more thoroughly, especially the implementation of Cohen's framework and understanding of Russia as a first-tier power is unclearly argued and rather problematic.

4) Literature:

The thesis uses range of primary sources, however lacks a large segment of analyses presented on the topic either by academic journals like *Survival*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* or *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, or by think-tanks like the Institute for the Study of War or Counter-Extremism Project. Use of this literature would strengthen the argument and make the analysis more precise.

5) Manuscript form:

The manuscript holds many formal issues. There are several language problems in many parts of the text. Also the spacing is unclear and irregular. The fourth chapter should not be a separate chapter

and would be better included a sub-chapter in the following one. Discussion over the limitations of the work (mainly language limitations) should be placed in the introduction rather than conclusions.

DATE OF EVALUATION: 14.8.2017

Referee Signature

The referee should give comments to the following requirements:

1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts omitted? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently incorporated with the topic and hypotheses tested?

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

2) CONTRIBUTION: Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the policy implications well founded?

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

3) METHODS: Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further verification and testing? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or irrelevant detours off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 10 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**).

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

4) LITERATURE REVIEW: The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way and disposes with a representative bibliography. (Remark: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**). If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

5) MANUSCRIPT FORM: The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate language and style, including academic **format** for quotations, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**.

Strong Average Weak
20 10 0 points

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading	US grading
81 – 100	1	= excellent	= A
61 – 80	2	= good	= B
51 – 60	3	= satisfactory	= C
41 – 50	3	= satisfactory	= D
0 – 40	4	= fail	= not recommended for defence