



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Kledian Myftari

Title: Beyond the Impasse: Prospects for Joint Cooperation between Russia and the US in Counter Cyberterrorism

Programme/year: MISS, 2020/2021

Author of Evaluation (external reviewer): Mgr. Luka Nikolić

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	20
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	22
<i>Total</i>		80	49
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	7
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	16
TOTAL		100	65



Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis deals with a relevant topic for security studies, that of how great powers can cooperate in order to mitigate the effects of cyberterrorism. The empirical focus is the failure of Russia and the US to form a counter-cyberterrorism regime. The thesis aims to locate the reasons for this failure and to offer certain recommendations for the future. Unfortunately, the thesis largely fails to deliver an adequate substantiation of the topic. Five are the major reasons for such a claim.

First, a significant portion of the text does not deal with the promised topic. Aside from the last part of chapter III and parts of chapter V, the thesis analyses ups and downs of cooperative engagements of either Russia or the US with other international actors (NATO, BRICS); cooperation between Russia and the US in the spheres other than cyberterrorism (such as permanently present, but at best marginally relevant, nuclear arms treaties); the contemporary political history of the US-Russian relations. A particularly striking example is chapter V that should have been vital for the thesis. On p.66 it is said that the purpose of the chapter is to clarify the reasons for the lack of sustained cooperation between the two great powers. However, the chapter in 95 percent of its volume deals with particular aspects of strategic cultures (relevant for the already explained issue of discrepancy in perceptions), and tackles exclusively the issue of mutual mistrust in the last couple of pages.

Second, the thesis is able to recognize the key tenets of the adopted approaches (social constructivism, strategic culture), but fails to connect them meaningfully to the empirical part. Precisely because of that miscommunication, the topic is treated in an a-theoretical, policy-making manner. Moreover, the crucial deficiency of the thesis is a complete lack of theoretical treatment of regimes and consequent inability to make analytically valid claims about regime formation and delineation between cooperation and regime.

Third, the methodological part is virtually non-existent. The thesis does not contain an overall research strategy, research approach, concrete methods within the approach, data sources, description of data collection and analysis, explanation of case selection.

Fourth, the structure of the chapters is confusing, overly compartmentalized, without proper logic. The last chapter and the conclusion are introducing concepts (characteristics of strat. culture and multi-track diplomacy) that should have been introduced much earlier.

Fifth, throughout the thesis certain notions are constantly used interchangeably without a proper explanation. For example, on p.35 and several other places, cybersecurity and cyberterrorism are used as synonyms (cybersecurity is a generic term in that relation).

Acts of cyberterrorism and usage of cybersphere by terrorist organizations are confused on p.6.



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Minor criteria:

In general, the thesis satisfies the formal requirements for this level and type of work. The citations, references, and endnotes are properly employed, academic English is used with minor deficiencies, and the text can be followed without substantial problems. However, there are significant issues with sources of literature and the redundancy of the style.

Following the policy-making treatment of the topic, a majority of the literature used is composed of grey sources, think-tank documents, workshop proceedings, governmental strategies. Even in the brief literature review, the thesis does not identify more than ten academic sources. The situation in the theoretical chapter is notably better.

The writing style is redundant at times. Whenever work is cited or referenced, the full name and surname of the author(s) are mentioned in the body of the text, demonstrating the problems with abstraction and compression of concepts and ideas. A bulk of unnecessary information makes the text harder to follow. Some of the examples are pop-culture references on p.14, a list of people participating in a workshop on p.59-60, and a list of universities organizing a project on p.37.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis tackles a promising topic that requires due academic diligence. It is ambitious both in academic and practical scope. The overall impression is that the thesis falls under the burden of the topic. The absence of methodological apparatus, very thin bridges between the theoretical and empirical part, and lose focus on the main topic, are reliable indicators that the execution of the thesis needed to be better.

Therefore, I recommend the thesis for the defense. Unfortunately, because of all the above-mentioned reasons, I cannot grade it better than "D".

Suggested grade: D

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lukaš M.'.