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Charles University

Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Louis Benhamou

Title: Challenges to the Weberian State: Hybrid State and Non-State Actors in Iraq

Programme/year: International Security Studies (ISSA) 2021

Author of Evaluation (~~supervisor~~/external assessor): Mgr. Vojtěch Bahenský

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	**10**	4
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	**30**	20
	Methodology, analysis, argument	**40**	20
Total		***80***	44
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	**10**	8
	Style	**5**	4
	Formal requirements	**5**	4
Total		***20***	16
TOTAL		***100***	60

Evaluation

Major criteria:

The thesis is plagued by a number of problems, ranging from quite major to minor. One of the major is the issue with the research question, which is stated on page 9. It has very little to do with any of subsequent contents (which does not evaluate effectiveness of PMFs as strategic choice by Iraqi state and definitely not in areas suggested by question) and the thesis also comes nowhere close to answering this question in its conclusion. The theoretical framework is among relatively stronger parts of the thesis. It is well written but it possibly introduces few too many concepts, which seem to have limited relevance for the subsequent analysis (or the link is at least not made explicitly). It also does not address question of compatibility of introduced theoretical frameworks and the presented understanding of the Principal-Agent model seems to be decidedly non-standard, not discussing at all informational asymmetry (traditionally one of the key concepts of the model, which would also be interesting for the topic at hand) and suggest only single possible reason for delegation (which incidentally does not seem to be in synch with subsequent analysis).

One of the more glaring problems shared by the theoretical and the empirical/analytical parts of the thesis is common reliance on the same source. When the major part of the theory and data are sourced from the same work, question marks inevitable rise about the original contribution of the research beyond some sort of 'replication' (incidentally, the dominant source also appears to be mistakenly cited – see below, and as to my best knowledge is not a peer-reviewed source, which could have been addressed in the thesis...).

The analysis itself is often quite unpersuasive and read more like series of personal observations rather than rigorous analysis of the data through the chosen conceptual and theoretical lenses. Especially pages 28-32 read as personal notes taken before writing the actual text. What might be accounting for this is lack of any methodological framework for the analysis (discounting a single claim of "qualitative approach" and a single mention of "testing hybridity" – both in a single paragraph on page 10). Discussion of methodological issues, such as scope of the analysis, might have helped in identifying some of the problems of the analysis, such as lack of analytical differentiation of the 'hybridity' of the PMFs over time, as the situation (as the thesis acknowledges) changed.

Minor criteria:

As with major criteria, the thesis suffers from a mix of larger and smaller problems in areas of minor criteria. The most concerning problem (which might also belong to major criteria from certain perspectives) is the very liberal use of often quite lengthy direct quotes from used sources.

Large swaths of text likened to a single source (repeating occurrence) leading to 30 % similarity reported by Turnitin system (which actually even missed a number of citations). Specifically, Boeg et al. 2008 was reported by Theses system to have 7 % similarity with the thesis. It should be stressed that I did not detect any transgressions in form of not recognizing direct quotes.

But the liberal use of direct quotes remains a concern, especially given the fact, that the thesis only barely fulfilled the minimum required length of 50 pages (90 000 characters) by roughly 300 characters and even that only if everything from the title page to the last source in the bibliography is counted, which would be very charitable approach to establishing the length of the thesis. The suspicion that the thesis was 'padded' by quotes to reach minimum length is somewhat reinforced by absence of required reporting of the length of the thesis in it (as provided by the form). The bibliographical note for the thesis also quite mistakenly reports length of 97 pages which is almost double the actual length of the thesis (49 pages).

The author of the thesis also took quite strange decisions regarding the style, including part of text listed in points (pages 28-32) some of which literally several words with no explanation of meaning, analysis or sources (page 32). I am inclined to believe, that this was given by the lack of time rather than being a conscious decision, but it has to be said that the incriminated part does not read like a master thesis but as rough notes on ideas of the author that were never transformed into actual analysis and arguments.

Some comparatively minor problems are also noteworthy. Often cited Mansour et al, 2019 should actually be Cambanis et al. 2019 (Mansour is listed as the last of six authors). The publication also doesn't appear to be peer-reviewed, which is somewhat unfortunate given its prominence as a primary or only source of much of the empirical material. It should have been at least recognized by the author and this dominant reliance on this source is explained in the text. In contrast to few sources cited profusely throughout the text, three sources from the bibliography never appear cited anywhere in the text, one more source is listed in the bibliography twice.

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Overall evaluation:

The thesis reads like a rushed and unfinished draft of a potentially very interesting and successful master thesis, where at points (especially in the theoretical part), the author actually shows his potential. Unfortunately, much of the thesis is simply far from original intent (which I assume based on disparity between research question and the content), too short, too unfinished, too unpolished and generally over-relying on few sources and direct quotes of their authors. In this condition, the thesis cannot be graded any better than rather charitable D, assuming that the length of the thesis will be deemed sufficient.

Suggested grade: D

Signature: