



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: David Neppel

Title: Russia's Wars in the Ukraine and Georgia: A parallel case study of Russia's choice to engage in the 2014 Ukraine Crisis and 2008 Russo-Georgian War

Programme/year: International Security Studies / 2021

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Jan Ludvík, Ph.D.

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	9
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	26
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	33
<i>Total</i>		80	68
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	10
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	3
<i>Total</i>		20	17
TOTAL		100	85



Evaluation

Major criteria:

I think this is an interesting dissertation. It uses a game-theoretical approach to examine why the Russian Federation chose to engage militarily in the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. I admit I am skeptical about the benefits of the selected game-theoretical explanation (spatial model inspired by Bueno de Mesquita) in this particular setting. However, I appreciate David's attempt to use a rigorous model to explain international politics. While there is much to like about the thesis, I think some changes would have been beneficial:

- I would like to see more explanation about the selection of the models. Two case studies (Ukraine and Georgia) use different axes ('The relationship between the Ukraine and Russia' and 'The relationship between the Ukraine and the West' for Ukraine; 'Georgian Control over Breakaway regions' and 'Relationship to the West' for Georgia). Why do two case studies use different models? Are the two models comparable? What is the added value of theory when it needs to be adjusted for every case?
- I am not sure models are helpful heuristically. Values for some variables appear too detached from reality. For instance, for Georgian Control over Breakaway regions, possible values range from total control of the central government over breakaway territories to independence. Considering only values between these two poles, the thesis excludes the possibility of preferring full integration of breakaway regions into Russian, which might have been preferential for many in Russia, Osetia, and Abkhazia.
- Sometimes, the actors' preferences appear ahistorical. It seems they are occasionally based on current preferences rather than historical ones. In particular, the hostility between Russia and the West seems to be taken for granted. While this is not assumed in the model, the analysis often considers the good relationship with Russia and the West mutually exclusive. I think this is an ahistorical view. At least before 2008 and more likely before 2014, the EU believed Ukraine and Georgia could have a good relationship with both the West and Russia.
- I think it would be useful to be more explicit about how the values are set for actors' preferences. What data are used to measure the values of actors' preferences? Occasionally, it appears unconvincing why the value is X and not Y. For instance, the thesis argues Ossetia and Abkhazia preferred hostile relationships between Georgia and the West (extreme value 10 on the axis). Still, the thesis does not provide any evidence of what leaders of these territories thought and said.



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Minor criteria:

I think two improvements would have made the thesis even stronger. First, I was a bit surprised by the structure. The thesis outlines its aims before introducing its topic and describes its methods before reviewing the literature. Second, causing a bigger problem, the references are deeply problematic. The thesis draws on a good amount of sources, which is laudable. However, the thesis constantly refers to the entire source and does not provide page ranges. This is only possible when one refers to the central idea of the respective source. This is clearly not the case here and can only be described as citation malpractice, which breaches formal requirements for the style of the thesis.

Overall evaluation:

David Neppel wrote a solid thesis despite the aforementioned caveats. The thesis attempts to provide methodological rigor, which can be applauded. I am glad I can recommend the thesis for defense as a very good one.

Suggested grade: B

Signature: