

Referee report: TOWARDS THE NEW WORLD ORDER? A GEOPOLITICAL STUDY OF NEO-EURASIANISM AND MERIDIONALISM (Nuno, Morgado)

The thesis focuses on an interesting and understudied issue – that of Meridionalismo and Eurasianism. These two geopolitical concepts/doctrines/ideologies are described in depth, compared and analyzed. In addition, the author tries to (successfully) persuade that these concepts cannot be considered scientific theoretical arguments as they are rather political doctrines (ideologies) in the first place. A broader goal of the thesis is to promote and develop neoclassical geopolitics as a productive theoretical approach. It is fair to admit that as a referee I am generally sympathetic to these goals.

Focusing on weaknesses of the text, I will mention four broader problematic aspects. Firstly, while the text is – fortunately – shorter than its preliminary version, it seems to me that the thesis could have been a bit shorter and better structured. Simply put, the thesis is not reader friendly, and its style is far away from North-American standard. Some sections are connected to the key research questions rather indirectly, thus wearing down attention of any potential reader well before s/he hits the center of gravity of the text. This is not a fatal problem – especially if one considers that the author is not a native speaker – nevertheless this weakness of the text means that the author will have to rewrite the text if he wants to publish it (or its parts) in a decent journal.

Second, I wish the thesis had a (standard) methodological section explaining explicitly and concisely how the research puzzle (of the thesis) would be solved – step by step. Right now, the main part of the methodological section is rather shallow. After reading the methodological section, I gained only vague idea about specific steps to be adopted in the thesis. Given that the author formulates several hypotheses, one would expect rigorous discussion of the key variables, their measurement, quality of accessible data, sufficiency of employed method for rejecting/corroborating these hypotheses etc. While author cannot be blamed for neglecting methodological issues, he tends to focus more on some broader issues, while crucial specifics of his own research tend to be rather under elaborated.

Third, thesis still contains examples of bold and controversial statements or assumptions. Some of these are not necessary for the presented research (thus unnecessarily drawing attention of readers and referees). For example, the author refuses monocausality and mechanistic approaches etc. I really wonder if monocausal explanations can be rejected a priori – I think it is an open (empirical and pragmatic) question whether a monocausal explanation is adequate (at least at higher levels of explanations).

Fourth, thesis contains several incoherent or even contradicting statements. E.g. The methodological section contains (p. 99) sentence “The research piece will be mainly deductive, testing hypotheses, starting from a coherent theoretical set of ideas and concepts (already explained) towards facts and the material reality”, however there is quite different sentence few pages later (p. 104) “Since this thesis does not aim to test theory but, as said above, it is merely theory-application and theory-development the mentioned problem remains marginal.”

Fifth, author analysis is strongest when he describes and analyzes the two ideologies. From my perspective, these parts of the work are interesting and innovative. I think, that the thesis could have been built around its descriptive and analytical goals. As such it would have contributed significantly to our knowledge. Paradoxically, it seems to me that the attempt to apply author's

theoretical framework – and thus broaden the scope of the thesis – is much less satisfying. If nothing else, his new theoretical framework should have been rigorously discussed and empirically tested first. As it stands now we are left with new and untested theoretical framework – one wonders how analytically strong this approach is relative to its competitors.

In sum, the thesis focusses on an interesting and relevant topic. It does a good job in its more descriptive parts; less satisfactory the thesis is when it comes to other parts. I wish the thesis had better methodological section – may it be that more elaborated methodological section would have eliminated some of my doubts. My general impression is that the thesis should have been a bit narrower in its goals. The broadness and ambitiousness of the thesis creates plentiful opportunities for criticism, as it is almost impossible to make such broad and complex thesis bulletproof. Nevertheless, I would like to appreciate the author for his courage to pursue original and risky intellectual journey.

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