



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Ba Nguyen Nguyen

Title: Targeted Killing: How and When Intelligence Agencies Eliminate Their Targets, and the Impact of Emerging Technologies

Programme/year: MISS/2018

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Jakub Tesar

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	<u>Research question, definition</u> of objectives	10	8
	<u>Theoretical/conceptual</u> framework	30	10
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	18
<i>Total</i>		80	36
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	7
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	2
<i>Total</i>		20	14
TOTAL		100	50



Evaluation

This work evaluates the practice of targeted killing as a 'reinvented' tool of international politics. It describes some processes and important cases of targeted killing (TK) by the USA, State of Israel, and Russia. The author shows why TK could be an effective strategy in comparison to war and diplomacy and how is it becoming a 'new normal' of international politics.

Major criteria:

The main research question of the work is How and When states do eliminate their targets, seeking to explore what procedures lead to targeted killing and when these methods are actually used. It seeks to examine how states „transformed the way the world perceived their extrajudicial killing practices, softening global disapproval, and ultimately introducing new assassination norms into the international arena” (p. 2). Nevertheless, the thesis does not focus on procedures nor practices per se; it mainly describes the circumstances in which TK was used and legitimize. The reader is also unsure what is the scope of the question – should we read the thesis as a case study of a general phenomenon, or is it an analysis of three special states?

The dissertation evolves around two main concepts which are the targeted killing and international norms (possibly constraining the states from executing the former). However, the author never defines these key concepts. We can find a literature review regarding the difference between 'targeted killing' and 'assassination,' but no clear definition of TK – the main concept of the thesis; similarly, any conceptualization of 'international norms,' or 'global disapproval' is missing.

To answer the research questions, the author evaluates TK as a possibly effective strategy (using the framework of expected utility theory) in comparison to war and diplomacy. Then he illustrates his conclusion on the practice of TK in three states: USA, Israel, Russia. In the end, he discusses how the developing technologies will impact future development of TK.

The main problem of the thesis is the missing discussion of the methodology. It is unclear how the author got to the conclusions of his thesis. Why did he choose the three states and any particular incidents within these three cases? – there is no discussion of case selection. What sources did he study to get know states' (mainly secret) procedures? Should we expect his conclusion follow from the analysis of speech acts trying to legitimize TK towards the other states? Or is he imploring that the international environment has changed so that TK is only easier to legitimize?



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Minor criteria:

Both the length and the sourcing of the thesis are impressive. Unfortunately, more is not always better. The length of about 130-140 standard pages (without footnotes and sources) exceeds the required length more than twice and can be considered superfluous. Some parts of the text do not relate directly to the research question and should be erased (e.g., history of assassination in Persia and Japan, pp. 6-9; consequences of Munich agreement, p. 24; etc.). The thesis does not follow common structure (e.g., there is any theory/methodology section) and is hard to navigate.

Similarly, we can find 313 sources in work. However, only small part of this is academic sources (just about 20 academic articles), the rest consisting mainly from articles from various sources (NY Times, BBC, New Yorker, Atlantic, but also Alternet or Daily Signal) – which raises the question of validity of some conclusion (example could be a plot of KGB behind the assassination attempt on John Paul II, p. 15-16). Moreover, many claims are not supported by citation (“no rational actor would consider war before exhausting all possible diplomatic means,” p. 23), and the citation style does not meet a common standard in the field.

Overall evaluation:

The author shows his ability for analytic work but with clear limits in the methodology of the field. I recommend the thesis for defense conditioned on his ability to explain main methodological choices (conceptualization, case selection, sources).

Suggested grade: E

Signature: