



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Dalibor Belohlavek

Title: 2021 Taliban Takeover: Defeat of the Afghan National Security Forces through the lens of proxy warfare theory

Programme/year: Security Studies, 2024

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Emil Aslan

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	25
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	35
<i>Total</i>		80	67
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	7
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	12
TOTAL		100	79



Evaluation

Major criteria: The author seeks to apply what he calls the “proxy war theory” into the US military/political engagement in Afghanistan to explain the US failure and Taliban’s takeover of the country in 2021.

I have mixed feelings about this piece of research. First, defining US two decade-long engagement in Afghanistan as a proxy warfare seems to be a conceptual overstretch; if Washington (and Coalition forces which shouldn’t be forgotten about) got engaged in Afghanistan in the early 2000s up to 2021, was it merely a part of America’s proxy warfare against the Taliban? Was the Afghan National Army a proxy army – or should we acknowledge agency behind its operating – an agency that was based in Kabul rather than in Washington? While the author does his best to define US engagement in Afghanistan as an integral part of proxy warfare, I’m not really convinced. To follow the author’s logic, did the military engagement of multinational Coalition forces form part of America’s proxy war against the Taliban, as well? To continue this point, would the author consider US engagement in terms of supporting Ukraine’s military effort part of US proxy warfare against Russia, with Ukrainian army being a proxy force? If not, how is the Ukraine case structurally different from the Afghanistan case?

As for the „proxy war theory“, I’m not convinced there is such theory, either. Proxy warfare is a political/military modus operandi, while the literature dealing with proxy warfare constitutes a vast subfield in insurgency/military studies as it encompasses a wide range of meso/micro-theoretical angles. In a way, what the author terms as dimensions of proxy warfare correspond with the branch of literature on indigenous forces, and to extent also with pro-government militia, and so on, which rather proves the point of proxy warfare being an angle rather than a theory per se.

This having been said, I still appreciate the author’s focus, clarity, and analytical skills. While the fundamental premise of the thesis appears to be somewhat dislocated, the text – within its own merits – is well-structured, well-presented, well-analysed, and well-written. I like the structure of the thesis which is straightforward and with the accents put on the right places.

Minor criteria:

The literature on the “proxy war theory” is very basic to say the least. With the “theory” being in fact a subfield, dozens of important pieces of literature are missing. A better focus on an actual (theoretical) problem might have enabled the author to identify the relevant body of research and carry out a proper literature review.



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Assessment of plagiarism: None detected.

Overall evaluation: While – in my opinion – the thesis is conceptually dislocated and evolved around a wrong premise, I still consider it a fairly well-presented and well-executed piece of work. There are structural weaknesses in the thesis, yet given it's a Master's thesis and the author has done substantial work in terms of gathering conceptual (not theoretical) and empirical data – and making sense out of them – I still tend to consider this thesis a success.

Suggested grade: C

Signature: *Emil Aslan*