



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: **Marek Máka**

Title: **Targeted killings as a tool of counter-terrorism - analysis of the processes and effectiveness**

Programme/year: BS/2023

Author of Evaluation (second reader): prof. Oldřich Bureš

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	7
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	27
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	35
<i>Total</i>		80	69
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	6
	Style	5	5
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	20
TOTAL		100	85



Evaluation

Major criteria:

The reviewed thesis explores a controversial topic of targeted killings in the context of counterterrorism, with a specific focus on the killings of the leaders of two major terrorist organizations, Ahmed Abdi Godane of Al-Shabaab, and Nasir al-Wuhayshi of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

The thesis is well structured and overall well written. The formulation of the research questions is a bit awkward (“Are targeted killings an effective counter-terrorist tool, as in does the death of a leader of a terrorist organization impact the capabilities of their propriate group”. p. 2) but the objectives, as well as the time period of analysis, are clearly stated and justified. The thesis has a suitable theoretical framework (leadership decapitation theory) which is actually utilized in the empirical chapters with the case studies of the impact of the killings of Ahmed Abdi Godane and Nasir al-Wuhayshi.

One important shortcoming is that the author has not managed to find, read and incorporate all key insights from the antecedent literature on targeted killings. For some reason, a number of publications, many of which emphasize much more the normative, political and societal aspects surrounding these specific counterterrorism operations, are not part of the literature review presented in the thesis. Most importantly, these includes the following:

Carvin, Stephanie (2012). The Trouble with Targeted Killing. *Security Studies* 21 (3), pp. 529–555.

David, Steven R. (2002). Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing. *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* 51. pp. 1–26.

Gunneflo, Markus (2016). *Targeted Killing: A Legal and Political History*. Cambridge University Press.

Hajjar, Lisa (2017). A Comparative Analysis of Israeli and U.S. Targeted Killing Policies and Legal Challenges against Them. In: Parks, Lisa et al. *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*. *Duke University Press*. pp. 59–88.

Jordan, Jenna (2014). Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark: Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes. *International Security* 38 (4), 7–38.

Kirchofer, Charles (2016). Targeted Killings and Compellence: Lessons from the Campaign against Hamas in the Second Intifada. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10 (3), pp. 16–25.



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Klein, Graig R. (2022). The Leader of ISIS is Dead, but are Targeted Killings Effective? *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. 10. 2. 2022 (Available at: <https://icct.nl/publication/leader-isis-dead-targeted-killings/>, 10. 4. 2022).

Milanovic, Marko (2007). Lessons for human rights and humanitarian law in the war on terror: comparing Hamdan and the Israeli Targeted Killings case. *International Review of the Red Cross* 89 (866), pp. 373–393.

Regan, Mitt (2022). Do Targeted Strikes Work? The Lessons of Two Decades of Drone Warfare. *Modern War Institute*. (Available at: <https://mwi.usma.edu/do-targeted-strikes-work-the-lessons-of-two-decades-of-drone-warfare/>, 1. 10. 2022).

The list of references is, nonetheless, still acceptable for an MA thesis.

In terms of questions, or possible alternative interpretations of the thesis' findings, the following could be discussed during the thesis' defence:

1. Leadership figure importance. The personality of the killed leader as well as the quality of the replacements matters, and thus is likely to have a different impact on the actions of the targeted terrorist group.
2. General data problems. There are attribution issues in GTD since it flags unclaimed attacks as if they were perpetrated by the designated terrorist group based on reports of different sources. Was this factor considered in this thesis and were unclaimed attacks subjected to closer scrutiny? If the involvement of the group cannot be verified from multiple trustworthy sources, were they accounted for?
3. Characteristics of the terrorist group. History of the terrorist group, but also its size and structure may play a role when considering the impact of decapitation. How were these factors considered in the thesis?

Assessment of plagiarism:

Not detected.

Overall evaluation:

Overall, the thesis meets and often surpasses the general requirements for this type of work.

Suggested grade: B2

Signature: