

IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	Glasgow 2337908 DCU 17116309 Charles 17237383
Dissertation Title	Responding to Hybrid Warfare: The Case of the Attempted Assassination of Sergey Skripal

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

Reviewer 1 Initial Grade <i>For internal use only</i>	Reviewer 2 Initial Grade <i>For internal use only</i>	Late Submission Penalty <i>no penalty</i>
Word Count Penalty (1 UofG grade point per 500 words below/above the min/max word limit +/- 10%) Word Count: 23626 Suggested Penalty: no penalty		

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark. (Following correspondence reviewers should list the agreed final internal grade taking before and after any penalties to be applied).

Before Penalty: B1 [17] **After Penalty:** B1 [17]

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
A. Structure and Development of Answer	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Very Good
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Good
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Very Good
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Very Good
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Good
B. Use of Source Material	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Very Good
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Excellent
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Excellent
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Excellent
C. Academic Style	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Very Good
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Good
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Very Good
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	Not required
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

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ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This is an interesting dissertation that engages with a vast amount of literature and relevant sources and makes a attempt at contributing to the literature on hybrid warfare by focusing on crisis response elements. The dissertation is clearly and coherently structured and very well organised.

The effort to identify hypothesis and to test them in a systematic manner is excellent. However, there are some key weaknesses in the design, specifically the dissertation does not clearly identify a central research question that could have helped maintain and better explain the case selection and hypotheses that are formed. Specifically, how were primary and rival hypotheses formed? A multiplicity of other hypotheses could have been selected over those that were selected. That said, the hypotheses that were selected are clearly presented and tested, the results are also clearly presented. The overall argument could have been stated more clearly from the start and referred to more frequently in the body of the dissertation. The discussion of the sources is a bit short (p.29), more explanations about what types of primary sources were available and consulted would have helped further establish the originality of this work.

In chapter 1, the student offers a very competent overview of the literature on hybrid warfare, the main concept used to frame the analysis of the Skripal case. The literature review effectively identifies key problems with this literature and the student clearly identifies a gap in the literature on crisis management response to "hybrid warfare". However, the student is a bit quick to discard the existing literature on responding to hybrid threats. The student adopts a very broad definition of hybrid warfare to push the boundaries of the debate. This is useful to attempt to make an original contribution but it also makes the concept so broad that literally anything below war could qualify as hybrid warfare. In this context, justifying case selection is very difficult.

The student does make a fair attempt at justifying the focus on the Skripal case (pp.27-28). This is presented as a single case study to help develop the theory of hybrid warfare further, but in practice a second case is also used. There are two main issues with this case selection and approach. The Skripal case does not fit particularly well with the notion of hybrid warfare. The student does not sufficiently explain how this case fits the definition of hybrid warfare presented in the study ("a strategy of a subtle employment of a variety of coercive tools"). A single case of an "active measure" (to use the Russian terminology) or covert operation (to use Western terminology) hardly constitutes a set of coercive tools but, at best, a single tool. This single tool is not a strategy in itself. Here key terms like strategy, warfare and tactics should have been defined more clearly.

The omission of the literature on active measures/covert action, including analyses of the Skripal poisoning using this literature (e.g. by David Gioe), as well as the broader debate about the forms and uses of covert action (see Cormac and Aldrich and many others on "plausible deniability", Carson, Poznansky, etc. on covert action and signaling), is really problematic. This concept would have provided, in the opinion of this reviewer, a much more suitable basis to contribute to existing academic and policy debates on responding to the Skripal poisoning. A number of similar cases of poisoning and assassination are discussed in this literature dating back to at least the assassination of Leon Trotsky. This is a missed opportunity and a significant oversight. Similarly the literature on crisis management response would also have provided a lot of material to strengthen the findings on strategic communication, and possibly tie all of it back to the debate on "hybrid warfare". Because these other concepts are overlooked, the student does not convincingly explain why scholars and practitioners would need the concept of "hybrid warfare", which is presented as "a new modality of war" (p.24)? What does the concept allow that these other concepts do not allow? Why should the debate on "hybrid warfare" keep expanding? Exploring this point could also have helped explain how key hypotheses were formulated.

The core of the analysis (chapters 2 and 3) is very systematic and detailed. The student should be praised here for adopting a very thorough approach. Despite issues with the design of the study, the analysis itself is convincing and generally well supported by available evidence.

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Language is generally clear despite some minor errors including missing "the" and the use of colloquialism like "snowflake".

Despite these issues, the dissertation clearly demonstrates that the student has achieved all the intended learning outcomes for the dissertation. The dissertation engages with a wide range of supporting evidence and literature, which is used to make a set of coherent and articulated points. The student does manage to expand some of the debate on hybrid warfare by underlining the importance of crisis response management. The effort shows a good but limited depth of understanding due to the absence of engagement with at least two highly relevant streams of research on covert action and crisis management response.

This dissertation is well anchored at the B level. The effort to structure the approach and range of material used is excellent but the analysis is limited by the conceptual framework.

Reviewer 2

This dissertation engages in a timely and interesting research project, underpinned by a fine command--and representation--of the appropriate literature. It benefits from an appropriate and clearly outlined research structure. The methodology/theoretical framework is apt, but nonetheless suffers from a lack of depth and justification as to why it has been applied: it is mostly descriptive in form, which is a missed opportunity and quite essential for a study of this scope. This is particularly the case when there are so many factors to be considered re. the suitability and application of process tracing; indeed, there is a substantial literature on this topic alone, which is conspicuous by its relative absence.

That said, chapter 1 is underpinned by perhaps the best aspect of the dissertation, which is the literature review. The student should be commended for combining scope with clear direction and its relation to the overall question, and they succeed in providing a very solid primer on key aspects of hybrid warfare. The main chapters (2&3) are meticulous, as is fitting with a process tracing ethos and the research design shines through; similarly, the conclusion chapter neatly wraps up the study, while making a veritable claim as to its contribution to the literature.

Overall, I found this to be an engaging, very well-researched dissertation, which benefitted from meticulous application. The theoretical framework/methodology is a little underdeveloped, but otherwise, a very solid effort