

## IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

<b>Student Matriculation No.</b>	<b>Glasgow 2608675 DCU Charles 2596907 Trento</b>
<b>Dissertation Title</b>	<b>Implausible Deniability of Covert Actions in the Middle East</b>

### INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

<b>Reviewer 1 Initial Grade</b>	<b>Reviewer 2 Initial Grade</b>	<b>Late Submission Penalty</b> Select from drop down list
<p><b>Word Count Penalty</b> (1-15% over/under = 1gr point; 15-20% over/under = 2 gr points; 20-25% over/under = 3 gr points; more than 25% over/under = 0 fail)</p> <p><b>Word Count: 20 509 Suggested Penalty: no penalty</b></p>		

### 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

<b>Assessment Criteria</b>	<b>Rating</b>
<b>A. Structure and Development of Answer</b>	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Excellent
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Excellent
• <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>	Excellent
<b>B. Use of Source Material</b>	
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>	Excellent
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Very Good
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Excellent
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Excellent
<b>C. Academic Style</b>	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Excellent
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Excellent

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• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Excellent
• <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

### ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

#### Reviewer 1

The dissertation provides a stimulating reading on an original, relevant, and timely topic. Indeed, the last case study happened as late as May 2022. The author provides a coherent and convincing argument that implausible deniability became a sufficient, even satisfactory, outcome of covered operations.

The paper engages in a competent literature review which clearly identifies a research topic and positions this work in the literature. The author then identifies several factors that make plausible deniability no longer achievable (ICT) and implausible deniability a good enough outcome (terrorism and Middle East relations)

The author presents a coherent account based on three case studies. The case studies support the author's claim about the acceptance of implausible deniability. However, not all identified factors are sufficiently supported by the account. The role of ICT, in particular, does not seem to play a prominent role in these specific cases. Some scaling of the factors would be a desirable outcome of the analysis.

#### Reviewer 2

The paper shows your effort to research a sensitive issue in a highly sensitive region.

A comparative analysis between cases of what is still claimed to be covert actions associated to the concept of plausible deniability and those which you frame into the concept of implausible deniability would have better highlighted your point of view. From your study-cases, it seems that you have been taking into consideration just what one state or another considers to be part of their counterterrorism. However, covert operations associated to counterterrorism are not singular and had never been singular in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Besides, even these types of covert operations usually start with clandestine activities meant to identify targets, facilities etc and which can last months and even years. (Examples of such activities are Intelligence collection through SIGINT, HUMINT etc, surveillance, Intelligence recruitment, infiltration etc). These clandestine activities and their ultimate goals – in your case covert operations - bear the risk of exposure at any time, usually as a method of punishment or a way of bargain between the states involved. It should be also assumed that the identity of the state behind a covert action will become public knowledge at some point such as the CIA's orchestration of the 1953 coup in Iran.

A clear distinction between covert operations before and after 9/11 would have also highlighted your point of view. All Intelligence operations and the associated policies evolved after this episode in response to what was considered to be a new terrorist challenge. The attack highlighted, for instance, that the law enforcement and the legal systems in the USA were not as well-equipped as it seemed to be to cope with terrorism. As a consequence, the response has moved from direct intervention to dismantle terrorist infrastructure (Afghanistan, Irak) to institutional reform in order to adapt to new counterterrorism programs of building capabilities and international exchange in fighting terror. In other words, the response moved from what you correctly identified in the literature as operations of a coercive value towards or, if you want, going back to the role of influencing governments and people, in support of sponsor's own foreign policy – a traditional objective of covert operations. For sure, changes in counterterrorism have been adopted in other countries as well, especially in the Middle East, in response to the same new terrorist challenge after 9/11.



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