MASTER´S EXAMINER REPORT

GPS – Geopolitical Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	Developing SpaceX's Grand Strategy Amidst A New Cold War
Name of Student:	**Christopher Tigmo**
Referee (*incl. titles*)**:**	**Bohumil Doboš**
Report Due Date:	**19.8.2023**

Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the four numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).

1) Contribution and argument:
The thesis picks a very relevant and important topic of utilizing New Space companies, in this case SpaceX, as a geoeconomic tool in the context of increased tensions between the US and China in international politics. Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts to rewrite the thesis, it is from my point of view still below the minimal defendable level for numerous reasons. The main reason is that the work is not a well-established analysis but rather a stream-of-thoughts type of text. This is evident in numerous occasions from the general introduction to the case studies. The text does not develop a coherent methodological approach that would guide the study. Majority of the work than presents issues unrelated to the topic which are often ill-documented.

It is not systematically developed what SpaceX needs and seeks in non-US territories. It is nowhere specified whether SpaceX has troubles with accessing natural resources and why is this issue so heavily highlighted throughout the text. Also, a discussion over a role of the company in the US foreign policy is completely missing. Each case study is focusing on different aspects, following no clear methodological approach to their development.

The general context of "Europe" does not discuss the European space efforts at all. This seems like a weird choice for the topic of the thesis, especially given the complexity of the European space institutional framework. The conclusions made are then rooted more on thoughts of the author than data. The idea that Europe uses R-7 rockets (p. 57), the type that was used to launch first Soviet satellites in the 1950s (!!!) is simply wrong. The source next to the claim is not listed in bibliography so it´s impossible to verify what was meant by it. ESA was using just one type of the Russian rocket (Soyuz) out of the three models used (next to Vega and Ariane). This ended with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The selection of the cases – states that are highlighted as having the largest potential to be targeted by enhanced SpaceX strategy – then seems also. It mixes more "peripheral" space agencies with core ones like Italy and non-EU/ESA Ukraine. In case of Sweden, to give just one example, the marginal issue of natural resources is discussed rather than a more clearly space-related goal of utilization its space infrastructure in the high north (Kiruna) or providing Starlink connection in the remote regions of the country.

The general context of "Asia", once again, totally omits the space sector. The same goes for the case studies – they lack a discussion over a state of space efforts in these. The main line of critique then clearly follows the one on Europe. In case of Indonesia, for example, its geographic position on the Equator might be discussed.

Some other specific comments include:
p. 30 – US were not losing qualitative competition to Russia prior to SpaceX´s development as the Russian technology did not mature post-Cold War.

p. 31 – based on what data does the author assumes that SpaceX "stands above most state agencies"? Which specifically are excluded from this list?

p. 31 – based on what data is the origin of SpaceX tied to the security needs of the US. Was the beginning of pivot to Asia really motivated primarily by NK and not China?

p. 43 – what does post-Soviet EU development mean?

p. 78 – calling Australia "relatively developed" seems imprecise as Australia is one of the richest societies in the world.

2) Theoretical and methodological framework: Theory of the thesis might have made use of theoretical approaches that already attempt to bridge realism and liberalism – in geopolitics these, for example, include neorealist approaches or systemic geopolitics. The thesis works with geoeconomics and specifically utilization of private companies in foreign policy yet does not develop geoeconomics in the theoretical section at all. It is thus unclear, how are the selected variables picked. Furthermore, the thesis claims to work with three different works on geopolitics – Mahan, Spykman and Brzezinski – with limited value for the topic. There is a lack of methodology to the work. The factors analysed seem random, incoherent and often disconnected from the space arena.

3) Sources and literature: Important segments remain uncited. There is some issue with sources used in the text than lacking in the bibliography. Citation norm is otherwise followed.

4) Manuscript form and structure: There are formatting issues already present in the formal opening part of the thesis before the text itself. The text holds numerous formal issues mainly with headings. Often the text looks like a stream of thoughts rather than thought-through analysis.

5) Quality of presentation: The text contains too long paragraphs. Term "Cold War" is used rather freely to describe two different historical periods (US-Soviet of the 20th century and US-Chinese contest nowadays). Abbreviations are not explained. The text often uses very informal language. For some reason MEINA is used instead of MENA.

CATEGORY		POINTS
Contribution (research quality, analysis, and conclusions)	*(max. 40 points)*	10
Theoretical and methodological framework	*(max. 25 points)*	10
Sources and literature	*(max. 10 points)*	8
Manuscript form and structure	*(max. 15 points)*	9
Quality of presentation (grammar, style, coherence)	*(max. 10 points)*	7
TOTAL POINTS	*(max. 100 points)*	**44**
The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)		**F**

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I do not recommend the thesis for final defence.

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Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.