IMSISS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	**Glasgow** 2684954 **DCU** 21109095 **Charles** 39312151 **Trento**
Dissertation Title	Russo-African Security Cooperation and Alliance Reconfiguration In the Sahel

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

		Late Submission Penalty *no penalty*
Word Count Penalty *(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)*		
Word Count: 22 933 **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: C3 [12]   **After Penalty:** C3 [12]

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

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• *Appropriate word count*	Yes

ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This project represented a potentially fruitful area for academic investigation. The Sahel region is certainly interesting for a number of reasons, and an area that is often left out of IR theorizing – something you pick up on nicely. You were therefore able to present some useful ideas which can help understand regional developments.

However, my overriding feeling, when reading this dissertation, was exasperation. This was especially true for the empirical sections, where the reader was flooded with wave after wave of data, tabulations, and observations. It became increasingly difficult to locate your central arguments, and to see the proverbial wood from the trees.

Largely, this was the result of a rather broad set of research questions and objectives. It would have been much better to have focused more concisely on a clearer, and narrower, topic. Research questions 1 and 2 seemed too descriptive, and invited long (albeit well-informed) sections that were arduous to read.

The methodology admitted limitations in working with secondary data. However, it was also claimed that you had conducted extensive analysis of texts, even using coding to help analyse them. Evidence of this, however, was not to be seen in the empirical sections. Instead, we were presented with multiple tables with huge, and rather undigestible, amounts of data in them. Unfortunately, it was not fully explained how you created these tables and how they related to either your theoretical frameworks or your methodology. They therefore seemed to come out of nowhere.

I admit that I wasn't able to read much of them – the data was so dense, and the text so small, that it would have taken hours to grasp fully how these tables were created, and why certain issues were selected. For example, table 8 suddenly introduced concepts such as hard/soft/sharp power and subversion. These were not part of your theoretical framework.

Your framework focused mainly on neorealism and RSCT, with a few nods to debates on (de)colonialism. This was intelligently written. However, most of the references were from the 70s – early 2000's. It was a shame not to include more recent considerations. While you demonstrate good understanding of key points, it was not entirely clear how your theory mapped onto your empirical analysis. This point was demonstrated in the various tables where new concepts and factors were prioritised that were not discussed in any length.

Overall then, this dissertation demonstrated an impressive grasp of political developments in a complex, and under-researched, region. It was mostly well written, and it was clear that the author has deep knowledge of the region, and possesses considerable intelligence. In fact, I was consistently impressed by the detailed understanding of the region that you were able to display. Nevertheless, the project was not fully developed in terms of research design. Ultimately, this resulted in a confusing dissertation that was often too descriptive, and also far too broad. Judging by the number of occurrences of 'invalid source specified', this was also presumably rushed and produced under stressful conditions. If this is the case, I commend you for the exceptional detail

in this dissertation. You can probably think seriously about a career as a security analyst. However, for an academic project it fell short in a number of respects.

Reviewer 2

The reviewed thesis aims to offer an analysis of the extent to which Russian power projection driving regional alliance reconfiguration in the Sahel? Specifically, four general research objectives and three research questions have been posed after a rather lengthy contextual introduction:

RO 1. Identify the patterns of security cooperation across the Sahel and the drivers of Russian selective targeting.

RO 2. Critically evaluate and apply those frameworks relevant to Russo-African security cooperation and decision-making processes, such as power projection, balance of threat, strategic alignment and alliance formation processes.

RO 3. Assess the impact of Russian power projection on the reconfiguration of African strategic alliances.

RO 4. Highlight the implications of Russo-African security cooperation as an emergent strategic challenge by determining the influence of Russian private military and security companies (PMSCs) on regional stability and alliance configurations.

RQ 1. How is security cooperation in the Sahel regionally patterned?

RQ 2 What are the characteristics of Russian power projection in the Sahel?

RQ 3. To what extent is Russian PMSC engagement driving alliance reconfiguration through subversive behavior?

While these are all highly relevant questions/research objectives, their exhaustive answers would warrant at least three separate theses. In a single thesis, the author attempts to cover too many complex phenomena without doing justice to any of them.

Furthermore, in the methods sections, the author adds yet another set of aims: Specifically, the research goes on to compare threat perception and balancing behavior across the cases of Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Chad; and contrast the resulting individual and collective threat assessments against associated trigger events, outcome events and sources of Russian information manipulation and interference (i.e. disinformation). (p. 17)

The very broad scope is also reflected in the theory section, where four different theoretical frameworks are discussed, albeit three broadly fall under (neo-)realism. The theoretical section is rather long but mostly offers a textbook-like summary of key concepts without discussing how these concept/s will be utilized in the reviewed thesis and why. Much of the theory section is a re-written text from a single source, e.g., the entire section devoted to the Regional security complex is directly taken from Buzan and Wæver, 2003. Much of the following literature review section is also a rewrite of this publication.

When it comes to data collection, only secondary sources were considered. This is a major limitation, but at least it is explained in the thesis. When it comes to data analysis, the author claims rather vaguely that a systematic identification, coding, and categorizing of collected data was performed without specifying how exactly this was done. (p. 18) This is even more problematic for this thesis because the empirical sections contain many dense tables with lot of information without specification of the sources of this information. While this makes the thesis rich empirically, the repeated note that the information in the table was "generated by the author"

is not sufficient. Sources of information must be cited and the procedure of "generation" should be spelled out. It is also a problem that in the reviewed pdf version of the thesis, numerous citations are not visible due to some technical error, appearing as "Invalid source specified." The change of font and spacing towards the end of the thesis is also rather strange.

Overall, the reviewed thesis appears to have been rushed and it suffers from an overly broad scope. The author clearly has a unique insight into the region, but the presentation of this insight is far from ideal.