



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Jan Juráš

Title: End of Australia Hedging between US and China: AUKUS Security Pact

Programme/year: International Security Studies, 2024

Author of Evaluation (second reader): Tomáš Karásek

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	8
	Theoretical / conceptual framework	30	27
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	36
<i>Total</i>		80	71
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	10
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	5
<i>Total</i>		20	19
TOTAL		100	90



Evaluation

Major criteria:

Many of its aspects make this an excellent thesis. The author marries a highly relevant empirical case with an apparently suitable concept by looking at Australia's hedging strategy, or, more precisely, explaining the end of it. This is not necessarily a novel idea, as Asia-Pacific actors and their relations with China and the U.S. are habitually utilized when applying and testing the concept. Still, the author excels in formulating an analytical narrative of the evolution of Australia's strategy, with a rich and mutually complementary theoretical backing in realism and constructivism. The thesis is aptly structured and it reads extremely well.

Excellent academic texts raise questions, and the thesis is no exception: Just as Guzzini pointed out in his seminal book that the concept of power, the very heart of the realist theory, is surprisingly hollow, the same lingering suspicion should concern the concept of hedging, as its widely accepted – but somewhat bland – 'definition' as a combination of bandwagoning and balancing suggests.

The author claims that „it is also important to mention that hedging can be considered a multidimensional concept, consisting of economic, security, political, and even cultural matters and tools, but this thesis is however working with the paradigm that hedging is a security strategy that is used by states to neutralize its risk“ (p. 23). But therein lies a potential problem, especially in relation to Australia's foreign policy. Reducing hedging to security (or military-strategic) elements suggests that, for decades, Australia sought security opportunities and guarantees from both China and the U.S. That seems to be an overstretch: the security relations with China were always limited and/or symbolic while the military-strategic ties to the U.S. were strong and multiple (from the Five Eyes cooperation to Australia's participation in the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq).

Something seems to be missing from the analysis. That something, I would argue, is economic motivation. While the ubiquitous metaphor imagines hedging as fence-sitting (as in Matias Spektor's 2023 Foreign Affairs article), this picture might be misleading. Throughout the years of applying the hedging strategy, Australia never 'sat on the fence' in the sense of security (or military-strategic) preferences. But, just as a number of other actors in Asia-Pacific, it was strongly drawn to the economic opportunities provided by China's huge and growing market. While both explanations of Australia's turn away from hedging provided by the author (changing balance of threats and identitarian factors) are relevant, they neglect the economic factors which, arguably, played an important role. They, perhaps better than



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anything else, help explain not necessarily why Australia abandoned its hedging strategy but why it had opted for it in the first place.

The arguments above provide rather a stimulus for possible discussion during the thesis's defence. However, they are closely connected to a flaw in the dissertation's design that turns them into a point of critique. Despite the title of chapter 2, the thesis features no outline of its methodology (the second chapter is simply a continuation of the first, theoretical, one). This unfortunately means that the crucial concept of hedging never gets operationalized – in other words, it remains strangely disconnected from the theoretically informed analysis based on realist and constructivist concepts. This actually opens the question of what role the concept plays – is it a tool of analysis, a phenomenon to be studied, both...? While this uncertainty does not prevent the author from delivering an excellent analysis of Australia's move to closer (or more explicitly proclaimed) alignment with the U.S., it underlines one (and perhaps the only one) of the dissertation's weaknesses.

Minor criteria:

As stated above, the thesis is very well written and clearly structured. There are not many errors of writing or stylistic mistakes. Among the few: the historical period of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. competition is commonly called the "Cold War era", not "Cold Era" (p. 22); names of theoretical approaches or concepts are commonly not written with initial capital letters (hence it is "constructivism" or "hedging", not "Constructivism", "Hedging").

By the way, the thesis features one of the best abstracts I have come across for quite some time – kudos to the author for that.

Assessment of plagiarism:

The thesis does not exhibit traits of plagiarism.

Overall evaluation:

This is mostly an excellent thesis, neatly marrying theoretical concepts with empirical analysis. The methodology that would explicitly establish the connection between the two is, however, missing.



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Suggested grade: **B**

Signature: