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Palacky University
Olomouc
Faculty of Arts
Habilitation committee
chair
Professor Jiří Lach, M.A.,
Ph.D.

Item: Review of the habilitation thesis

Topic: ***Early Warning Systems in the Context of Pre-Conflict Analysis***
Author: Josef Kraus, Ph.D., Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno

Based on the approval of the dean of Faculty of Art of Palacky University in Olomouc dated 5 JUN 2024 and request of the chairmen of the habilitation committee dated the 22 JUN 2024, I reviewed the above mentioned habilitation thesis of Dr. Kraus with following result.

Research topicality and relevance

The research in this particular area is highly relevant for political sciences especially the security and strategic studies. Despite improving our intelligence and available situational awareness there is still significant gap in our knowledge and methodology of conflict causes analysis and reliable conflict prediction and prevention. Additionally, the rapid deterioration of strategic environment and sharply rising competition among global powers bring the potential of military confrontations and proxy wars as well. The research plays important role to monitor potentially even prevent those negative developments by providing contextual knowledge, methodological innovation and sound policy recommendations.

Methodology

The first part of the habilitation thesis is based on a comprehensive literature review and author critical assessment of the state of art on conflict analysis. This part also provides insightful and well supported findings on design of Early Warning System. The research allows him to assess gaps in our knowledge, limitations of concepts and terminology, potential of scientific methods and analytical techniques (conflict trees, onion layers model, pillars of conflict, ...).

In the second part, the author outlines case studies which elaboration was supported by the primary resources and research in the field. He examines conflicts "first-hand," and gained a deeper understanding of local factors and cultural specifics that play a key role in conflicts.

This approach allowed a detailed understanding of local political and security dynamics, context, interactions among various actors, and identifying specific causes of conflicts.

Research outcome, findings

The thesis offers in-depth insight in to multidisciplinary research of variety of political, social, economic, historical, military, environmental, and cultural factors leading to the outbreak of armed conflicts. Moreover, the research outcome embraces key risks identification and warning signs that may presage possible tension escalation and lead to the conflict.
The research enhances both scientific knowledge in political sciences and provide sound methodological framework for formulation of effective strategies in conflict prevention, security policy, and international relations.

From conceptual point of view the author offers - in the first part of his habilitation thesis - a modification of the conflict tree model including a timeline for tracking the evolution of conflict causes, the influence of external factors, and the inclusion of different perspectives for various effects. The ice break approach in this model depicts the hidden nature of conflict causes. s.15. Moreover, based on his research he modifies model of pillars of conflict s. 18.

The author puts under scrutiny some of the quantitative models with the potential to provide early warning function. Namely, the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) used by a wide range of governmental and non-governmental agencies for regional assessment and planning. The CAST model predicts the risk of state failure. Additionally, the author critically assesses the Pre-Conflict Management Tools Program with the possibility to determine the probability of an impending state failure, as the main cause of armed conflicts in the 21st century.

In the second part of the habilitation, the author offers well elaborated and differently focused case studies embracing ethnic driven conflict, politico-religious conflicts, proxy war and military coup in different political, economic, historical, ideological, religious, ethnical, geographical context. These studies provide valuable insights into the complex nature of conflicts and emphasize the necessity of a thorough and multidisciplinary approach addressing various security aspects of armed conflicts reflecting the diversity of reasons and conditions for their occurrence, type of conflicts, different stakeholders. All five texts were published in peer reviewed journals and underwent rigorous editorial process.

Two texts (Religious Extremism as a Cause of Armed Conflicts: Indicators and Early Warning Systems. *Vojenské rozhledy*. 2019, 28 (3), 016-025. ISSN 1210-3292 and Early Warning Signals of Military Coups: A Case Study of Montenegro. *Obrana a strategie* 20 (1): 25–38. ISSN 1802-7199) deal directly with the topic of habilitation thesis and prove the author scientific contribution to the theory and policy as well.

One text is related to the conceptualization of state terrorism and its adaptive and flexible application via the Islamic Rep. of Iran (The Concept of State Terrorism in Relation to Iran. *Slovenská politologická revue* 16 (1): 35–59. ISSN 1335-9096).

One text outlines a sound research on the development of the proxy war concept after the end of the Cold War and applies it to the current events in the Middle East with special attention to civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the main role of regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran

and their intelligence services within these conflicts (Proxy Wars and Role of Intelligence Services in the Current Middle-East. *Vojenské rozhledy*. 2018, 27 (3), 37-46. ISSN 1210-3292).

Last study (A Failed Comeback? Understanding Iranian Policies in the South Caucasus, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18:5, 448-464, DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2016.11960a) re-evaluates Iran's foreign policy towards the South Caucasian republics. It focuses on key issues of Iranian strategy towards Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia and its interests embracing the energy and military security aspects, transportation, and economics reflecting long historical developments. It clearly demonstrates the potential and causes of military conflicts in this disputed region.

New knowledge and contribution for the scientific filed, sociatel relevance

The research and habilitation thesis enhance both knowledge in political sciences and provide sound methodological framework for formulation of effective strategies in conflict prevention, security policy, and international relations.

The author created a methodological framework for an early warning system (EWS) design applicable mainly for the forecasting of a political-ethnic conflict, military coup and religious kind of conflict. However, the outcome has a universal application potential after its adaptation to the specific contextual conditions embracing local or regional realities with support of detail information and expert knowledge.

Questions

1. How the unfair emphasis on Western experiences in conflict research, highlighting the need to include a wider range of geographical and cultural contexts in conflict studies has impacted your research and your EWS elaboration? How did you mitigate this conceptual and analytical disbalance in your research?
2. You identify variety of factors and disputes conflict can involve (demands, interests, collective memory, emotions, perceptions, values, beliefs, history, culture, behavior, actions, symbols, and power). What is the weighting distribution for these elements in your EWS design or considerations?
3. You identify three main methods or models to monitor and forecast developments in countries and crisis regions: (1) the data driven model based on statistical indicators; (2) the forecasting models using expert knowledge; (3) the news-wire monitoring/analysis systems employing systematic machine coded coverage of news. Can you elaborated on its practical use (advantages, limitations, reliability) to predict full military escalation between NATO and Russia? What indicators should play the crucial role for this kind of EWS?

Conclusion

I would like to emphasize the novelty of the habilitation thesis and its added value for the political sciences especially for the security and strategic studies. Dr. Kraus's proves his scientific ability to deal with complex issues, employ strong analytical skills to deal with wicked problems and provide evidence-based results applicable for improving methodology

and policy formulation. In the sametime he demonstrates his comprehensive knowledge of the matter especially within the context of the Balkan and the Middle East political, military, societal and historical developments. I am delighted to recommend continuation of dr. Kraus's habilitation procedure.

In Brno, 17 JUL 2024

Associate Professor
Josef Prochazka, PhD