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DOCTORAL THESIS REVIEW

Doctoral candidate: Itai KOHAVI
Thesis: “Treadmill Negotiation: The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process”
Adam Mickiewicz University, 2018

1. Thesis Topic – General Remarks

The topic of the doctoral thesis – the ineffective, superficial, slow, and often interrupted and suspended peace process between Israel and the Palestinians since the year 2000, compared in the thesis title to a “treadmill negotiation”, that is, to an intentionally simulated movement without actual progress – is an issue of worldwide importance in contemporary international politics and contemporary international security, especially military security. In the introduction, the author of the doctoral thesis emphasizes, besides theoretical reasons, the national and regional practical importance of the topic – from the vintage points of the State of Israel, the Palestinians and the institutions of their emerging statehood, and the Middle East (pp. 9-11) – but his research helps to explain and predict much bigger pictures.

Positive or negative future outcomes of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process will have a powerful and widespread impact on the international peace and security in the region of the Middle East and beyond, especially affecting the relations between, on the one side, the United States of America as Israel’s closest ally and, on the other side, all or most of the Arab and Islamic states of the world. Russia also expresses an interest in the issue. A major Russian diplomatic, intelligence or military involvement is possible, probably evoking the past Soviet policies in the region and the current intervention of post-Soviet Russia in Syria, a direct neighbor of Israel. This can affect the relations between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with consequences for the whole European and Euro-Atlantic security. Also possible is an impact on the relations between Western nations and their key organizations – including both NATO and the European Union – and the global South with China (the Chinese People’s Republic) as its main leader. Inside the West itself, different approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and different visions of its resolution may weaken the transatlantic link between Europe – especially the European Union – and the United States.

If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved for a long time, it will directly and indirectly serve as justification of a regional nuclear arms race, contributing also to the proliferation of nuclear weapons – and possibly other weapons of mass destruction – in other regions of the world.

The doctoral thesis firmly proves the scientific competence of the author in political and security sciences. He has the knowledge and understanding of the relevant facts together with the ability to use diverse theoretical and practical research instruments. He does not, however, apply any comprehensive theory of national or international security (instead, many official documents are extensively quoted), or of international relations, except negotiation theory. In a large part, his thesis research borders on political sociology which makes, nevertheless, a vital contribution to the analysis of foreign and security policies and politics on both the domestic level and the international level. Questions of international law are also examined, as is the historical, demographic, and institutional background (including the major role of the United Nations Organization and the United Nations System) of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1940s. Multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity belong to the strong points of the doctoral thesis.

Precisely defined in the introduction (pp. 11-14), and observed throughout the doctoral thesis, is its research scope, with one exception: a disproportionately extensive and detailed background of Palestinian of “Palestinian Refugees, PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization], PA [Palestinian Autonomy], Hamas, Palestinian State Building” as listed in the title of Chapter 3 (pp. 49-87) in Part I. In this chapter, the acronym “PLO” is erroneously presented as standing for “Palestinian Liberation Organization”, different from the standard English language version of the name – but the correct full English name of the PLO appears, most importantly, in the list of abbreviations (p. 4).

Generally, the topic is presented and analyzed in a coherent and disciplined way. There are no digressions or loose thoughts. The author is always focused on the main objective: to prove his “core hypothesis” as provided below. This coherence also belongs to the strong points of the doctoral thesis.

2. Justification of Research

Considering the above, the doctoral thesis research is completely justified. In addition, the research contradicts and overthrows a widespread misconception – as also described below – of the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and peace process with regional and

global consequences. Thus the author implements one of the fundamental academic ideals: to serve the truth, *veritas*.

Due mainly to its major empirical discovery made in the pursuit to prove the “core hypothesis” (accompanied by several “sub-hypotheses”), the doctoral thesis has a strong explanatory power and an implied, although not openly expressed, predictive power. It does not make any specific policy recommendations based on the discovery. Nevertheless, the text will likely encourage and facilitate practical applications of the results of the research are, both within Israel and abroad – including in the United States, the European Union and the Arab and Islamic states and their organizations – where it may importantly change the image of the Israeli foreign, security, and military policies.

Absence of any policy recommendations following the major empirical discovery may be considered a lost chance and a weak point of the doctoral thesis. The author himself convincingly asserts that his “study may be of interest to policy makers, and to researchers in the fields of conflict resolution, conflict management, negotiation, security, peace building, Middle East studies, and especially those who are interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (p. 7) – policy makers being placed before scholars. Therefore, the author may reconsider the absence of policy recommendations if he follows up the dissertation research – especially in the form of a book or a journal article. His research achievement deserves to be published and well publicized.

3. Methodology and Sources

The doctoral thesis consists of eight chapters organized into three large parts (Part III, however, has only one chapter), and of lists, annexes, a bibliography, and an abstract, with a total of 321 pages, of which 260 pages of the chapters proper. This length of the text allows a thorough description and analysis of the topic. All the parts and chapters have informative and precise titles. Because the chapters (and the bibliography) are divided into sections with their own titles (the bibliography also includes numbered and named subsections), the entire organization of the text has three clear hierarchical levels and is fully adequate for the complexity of the topic and the research.

A special methodological chapter – Chapter 5, “Research Design and Methodology” – presents and justifies the empirical research methodology applied in the doctoral thesis. More methodological information appears in the introduction and throughout various chapters. However, the notion of “security paradigm” (p. 13) – apparently important for the author –

remains unspecified and unexplained, even though it may be understood in many different ways in political and security sciences, and in the science of international relations.

The most valuable and outstanding achievement of the thesis is a pioneering empirical survey, with both qualitative and quantitative components – in the form of in-depth interviews and an extensive questionnaire, respectively – conducted among a group of high level policy makers and influential policy advisers defined together as the Israeli National Security Elite, encompassing an absolute majority of its members (approximately 55 percent – p. 101, with a list of the names, military ranks, and military, intelligence or civilian governmental functions of all interviewed individuals on pp. 102-104), and yielding clear, unambiguous and convincing results.

A weak point of the model of reality used in the doctoral thesis is a restriction that “This research deals with the Israeli side of the equation. Understanding the rationale behind the Palestinian side is very important, but that is beyond the scope of this dissertation” (p. 12; a similar statement appears next to the core research question and the core hypothesis on p. 97). The restriction severely decreases the explanatory power and the predictive power of the doctoral thesis, because the outcome of a bilateral negotiation is a function of at least two independent variables, and never only one independent variable, even if one negotiating side is stronger and more active than the other side. Despite this weakness, however, the doctoral thesis succeeds in empirically detecting a hidden rationale behind the Israeli side.

Another research restriction allows only the security paradigm – as mentioned above – to be examined, whereas “Other paradigms, such as religion, history, trust, and moral rights are not part of the core subject” of the doctoral thesis (p. 98). In reality, however, these components or dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and negotiation appear in several places in the text, enhancing its explanatory and predictive powers. Near the end of the text – in Chapter 8, “Conclusions and Discussion” – this restriction is partly revisited and redefined in a justified way: “Important issues such as religion, history, and rights, are not the issue of this research, unless when they are believed to affect the national security of Israel. This redefinition, both stated and practiced, rescues the doctoral thesis from the initially present danger of excessive narrowness and incapacity to explain and predict the complex reality of the Middle East and its global context.

The choice of scientific, legal, professional and other credible sources on which the doctoral thesis is based – in addition to the original empirical survey conducted especially for it – is broad and diverse. It consists of, among others, official policy documents and legal documents, books, scientific articles, and media publications – often for public statements by

or interviews with policy makers. Items in the bibliography are not numbered but it runs for 32 pages.

Numerous and highly informative charts, diagrams, figures, maps and tables introduced into the text, a complete list of abbreviations (acronyms) used within it, and two annexes containing main documents used in an empirical survey conducted for the doctoral thesis, greatly contribute to its clarity and general high quality. The size and resolution of some of the maps, however, are insufficient for their full legibility, at least in the version printed on paper (pp. 21, 24, 29, 35).

The English language of the doctoral thesis is very fluent, lexically rich and logically precise. Language and editorial inconsistencies or errors are rare, minor and insignificant for the content and quality of the text, but they should be thoroughly corrected before its publication.

4. Structure and Contents

No hypothesis has been proven in the doctoral thesis – to the contrary, as the author himself admits: „The results of the research do not support the set of logical syllogisms that builds the core hypothesis. Furthermore, the results of the research contradict the validity of the core hypothesis” (p. 250). It is a structural error that the core research question – and the core hypothesis proving an answer to it – both appear not at the beginning but in the middle of the text (p. 97).

The core hypothesis can be briefly summarized as follows: the Israeli National Security Elite believes that a Palestinian state would create an unacceptable risk to Israel’s national security, and therefore all successive Israeli governments of the 21st century have not wanted the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations to reach a compromise on which a peace agreement could be based – instead, the Israeli governments have wanted the negotiations to be superficial and fruitless.

As revealed by the empirical survey, the majority of the Israeli National Security Elite actually believes in the contrary: **“Israel should and can take the risks involved in the formation of a Palestinian state, because any other alternative is more dangerous to the national security of Israel”** (p. 251, emphasis in the original).

This discovery changes the picture of the issue. It debunks the widespread and vocal opinion that a Palestinian state – which is already in the process of being built and internationally recognized, especially within the United Nations – is the worst possible

scenario for Israeli national security and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. This scenario is universally known as the “two states solution” – with the Jewish State of Israel coexisting peacefully with an Arab Palestinian state, both within the territory of the former British Mandate of Palestine (the border between Israel and Syria is a separate issue). The doctoral thesis quotes the results a 2015 popular survey by an independent Israeli research center: 50 percent of the Israelis believe that a Palestinian state, if formed, will be a serious threat to Israeli security (p. 10). The top military, intelligence, and civilian government professionals bearing the responsibility for the national security of Israel are confident that any threats originating from such a state can be prevented, contained or managed, while the present situation of stateless chaos is more difficult and uncertain.

The above empirical discovery constitutes a major scientific achievement of the author of the doctoral thesis.

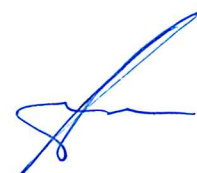
Nevertheless, some aspects of the thesis research require clarification or elaboration. I would like to ask the author to answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the current state of research in the world on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process?*
- 2. How decisive is the policy influence of the Israeli National Security Elite in a democratic system in which policy is supposed to be made by the prime minister and cabinet ministers under the supervision of the parliament?*
- 3. Considering that the main hypothesis is proven to be erroneous, what could be the correct hypothesis of the doctoral thesis?*

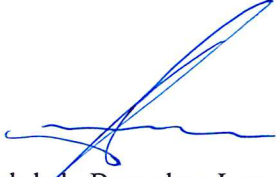
These questions do not imply any criticisms on the value of the doctoral thesis. They stem from the intellectual curiosity that motivates science.

Conclusion

The above analysis and evaluation of the doctoral thesis of Mr. Itai KOHAVI – including the balance its strengths and weaknesses – justify a conclusion that the author has met all the fundamental formal requirements pertaining to the research for and the preparation of doctoral theses. Specifically, the criteria author has fulfilled the criteria applied to the choice of the topic, the selection of methodology, the structure of the text and the research results – the doctoral thesis constitutes an original solution of a research problem.



On the basis of the comprehensive evaluation of the doctoral thesis of Mr. Itai KOHAVI and the relevant conditions established in Art. 13, Para. 1 of the Law of 14 March 2003 on the Scientific Degrees and the Scientific Title and the Degrees and the Title in the Area of Art, as amended (art. 13 ust. 1 ustawy z dnia 14 marca 2003 roku o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki, **Dz. U. Nr 65, poz. 595 z późn. zm.**), I hereby recommend that Mr. Itai KOHAVI be allowed to proceed to the next stages of the doctoral degree proceedings.



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