

REPORT

By Member of the Dissertation Committee on the Dissertation of

Roman S. VYKHODETS on the theme:

**“Information and Psychological Security Policy in the Area of
Responsibility of the Collective Security Treaty Organization”**

**Submitted in conformity with the requirements for the doctor degree in
Political Sciences**

Specialisation 5.5.4 – International Relations, Global and Regional Studies

Having read the doctoral dissertation of Roman S. Vykhodets in the English-language version, I am ready to offer a series of observations and draw conclusions concerning the academic quality of the work. The thesis concerns the analysis of the theoretical and practical approaches to information and psychological security policy among the various members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The topic is at the intersection of several different academic disciplines, which includes among others international relations, psychology, politics, national and transnational policymaking, artificial intelligence, security and organised persuasive communication. This thesis is very informative, easy to follow and the text written in an easy to digest format. A very rich set of data from academic and official sources are used to illustrate the logic of the governments' and organization's approach to the potential risks and threats in the evolving and transforming information space and in the digital/cyber space especially.

The thesis consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and bibliography. The format and order of the constituent parts of the thesis is in a clear, consistent and logical order. In the flow of the appearance of topics and subjects, knowledge and information is appearing in a manner that assists the reader in digesting the evaluations, observations and conclusions of the work in an incremental manner. The academic and practical relevance of the topic are clear as are the purpose and objectives of the thesis. An excellent background and context to Artificial Intelligence (AI) is given through a comprehensive global overview of academic thinking, politics, legal aspects, economics and research and development. There is also evident, a highly consistent and systematic approach to ordering and presenting data, which facilitates enables a comparability perspective for the reader. A remarkably impressive array of various kinds of literature has been consulted and worked into the framework of the

thesis. The work is largely very well researched, written and argued. Observations, interpretations, evaluations and conclusions are well justified and convincing.

In spite of the obvious and many merits of this thesis, there are a number of academic points that should have been considered for inclusion in the work to further strengthen it. These points are relatively minor and should be understood within the spirit of being friendly advice on strengthening an already remarkable example of academic endeavour. The first point to consider is a more clearly elaborated delineation of the information space, which is essential given the central point it occupies in the work. The information space is delineated in the same manner as the physical space – strategic, operational and tactical. It would have been useful to make this distinction early in the work, especially given the discussions that have followed. In connection with this is the need to define and express the realms of human existence – physical, informational and cognitive. Where the tangible elements are present in the physical realm, and the intangible elements present in the informational and cognitive realms. There was mention of Information Operations (IO), but no mention of the Western concept of IOIA (Information Operations and Influence Activity). This is a key concept in Western political and military circles, given their role in political warfare and subversion in Post-Soviet space, it is something that should have been included.

There also seems to be somewhat of a dilemma in using Measure of Activity (MOA) versus Measure of Effect (MOE), which is a standard global conundrum in IOIA. Because MOA does not necessarily translate equally into MOE, for various reasons. How do you define and operationalise MOE in this present thesis? There are a number of observations made, and from this there are some suggestions and argumentations. One of these relates to the origins of some concepts and theories, for example the origins and purpose of ‘conspiracy theory’ from page 562. An alternative explanation that has been given is that it is a deliberate construct of the federal US government that was intended to discredit an inconvenient message or messenger without engaging in a logical debate on the pros and cons as this may undermine the official narrative.

On page 502 there is a discussion on the issue of propaganda. I would point out that the 20th century masters of propaganda (especially the first half of the 20th century) were not the Americans, but rather the British. This is evidenced by the fact that Adolf Hitler dedicated a chapter in his book, *Mein Kampf*, on the ‘wonders’ of the highly effective British propaganda of the First World War.

On page 548 the components of information and psychological security are listed – ideological, media and cognitive. I would strongly argue for a different categorisation than

media and use informational instead. The underlying motivation for this being media as a subset in the information space, i.e., a lower order category that excludes such components as media outlets and institutional structures. Another point to consider, which appears on page 566, concerning the term 'proxy media'. It is my strong recommendation to broaden the definition of this term of proxy media, which is an influence operation with plausible deniability by the owner of the message. Where media outlets can be operationalised for the purpose of being a front (covert) or lobby (overt) tool for an actor seeking influence.

A rather relatively minor point for the candidate, although it does detract from the quality of the reading experience, are the various minor English language errors and issues that are evident throughout the thesis, such as typos. It is understood that this is the result of the work done on the translation, but it is still something to keep in mind.

Several aspects that the candidate could or should have considered adding to the thesis work include the following points, in no particular given order of appearance. What are the main constraints of the study? It would be helpful to acknowledge and list these points, and an assessment of their possible/potential impact on the study (if any). Furthermore, in the course of research one often uncovers new questions and lines of research from the information and new knowledge that has been created. Therefore, what future research agenda was identified because of your study and research process? A final point that would be worth considering, especially given this is an academic study first and foremost, the need to describe succinctly how the thesis contributes to the existing state of the art knowledge on the subject and the academic discipline(s). Does it challenge the existing; build upon the existing; or create new knowledge and ways of thinking about it?

In summary, the thesis covers an emerging field of academic study in the 21st century, and how this topic is perceived and acted upon theoretically as an object of study and practically through policy. The strengths of the work far outweigh the few minor weaknesses uncovered in the thesis. One of the consistent themes concerning choices refers to the informational and cognitive dilemmas faced by academics and policymakers that require ethical and yet effective pragmatic choices. This work contributes to a deeper conceptual and empirical understanding of the nature and practice of information and psychological security interpretations and representations, the theoretical concepts, political processes and the outcomes.

The dissertation meets the basic requirements established by Order No. 11181/1 of 19 November 2021, "On the Procedure for Awarding Academic Degrees at Saint Petersburg State University," the candidate Roman S. VYKHODETS deserves the award of the scientific

degree of Doctor of Political Sciences in the speciality 5.5.4. – International Relations, Global and Regional Studies. Clause 11 of the aforementioned Order by the author of the thesis is not broken.

11.10.2023

Member of the Dissertation Council



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