

Opponent Review of the Habilitation Thesis by Mgr. Josef Kraus, PhD.

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Habilitation Thesis Title: *Early Warning Systems in the Context of Pre-Conflict Analysis*

The submitted habilitation thesis takes the form of a series of individual studies published in peer-reviewed academic journals, all interconnected through the central concept of early warning systems (EWS) within the framework of armed conflict prevention. This work lies at the intersection of political science, international relations, security and strategic studies, and conflict studies, which in the Anglo-Saxon academic environment could be collectively termed as political sciences. Additionally, elements of military science, as well as cultural and social anthropology, can be identified in the work, particularly highlighting the author's extensive knowledge of Iran.

Topicality and Importance of the Research

The topic is highly topical, especially as geopolitical tensions have evidently increased in recent years, with the frequency of armed conflicts not decreasing—on the contrary, some of these conflicts have exhibited high intensity (e.g., the Syrian civil war, the subsequent Russia-Ukraine war, the conflict in Gaza, etc.). Many armed conflicts bear the characteristics of proxy wars, where the objective in several cases is nothing less than to change the international order.

It is undoubtedly the task of academic experts to provide conceptual and methodological tools, as well as empirical analysis of these phenomena, which, among other things, can assist in the timely identification of problems and their prevention. In this regard, Kraus's work must be considered both relevant and significant.

Methodological Dimension of the Thesis

The first part of the habilitation thesis is characterized by a comprehensive literature review, in which the author critically evaluates the current state of conflict analysis and the proposals for early warning systems. He identifies key gaps in existing methodological concepts and proposes innovative adjustments to established models, such as the conflict tree and the pillars of conflict. These adjustments include a timeline for tracking the evolution of conflict causes, the influence of external factors, and the integration of various perspectives to capture hidden causes of conflicts.

The second part of the work offers detailed case studies supported by long-term field research, which provides invaluable insights into local factors and cultural dynamics that often escape desk-based research removed from any conflicts or problematic environments. The provided case studies cover a wide range of conflicts, including those motivated by ethnic, politico-religious causes, or through proxy wars of regional powers.

Key Findings

The thesis presents several crucial contributions to the field of conflict analysis. The author identifies a comprehensive set of risk indicators and warning signals that can be used to predict conflict escalation. His work highlights the strengths and weaknesses of existing quantitative models and provides a solid foundation for future research and refinement of these approaches. One of the most significant findings of the research is the ability to adapt early warning methodologies to various types of conflicts, even in the stages preceding armed clashes. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the author ensures that the proposed systems are flexible and applicable in different geopolitical and cultural contexts. However, he also emphasizes the importance of deep knowledge of local conditions and issues to tailor each tool to its specific context. This adaptability is crucial in a rapidly changing global environment, where conflicts can arise from complex and often highly dynamic interactions of political, social, economic, and cultural factors.

Practical Implications and Contribution to the Field

The submitted habilitation thesis not only expands purely academic knowledge but can also be practically applied to policy-making and the work of security professionals. The research provides policymakers and security practitioners with a robust methodological framework for designing and implementing early warning systems tailored to specific types of conflicts, such as ethno-political conflicts, military coups, and religious extremism. These systems are not only theoretically grounded but are also designed with practical application in mind, ensuring their relevance and usefulness in real-world situations.

One of the key contributions of the work is its emphasis on the adaptability of early warning system models to various geopolitical and culturally-regional contexts. The author argues that these systems must be contextualized within the local realities they are meant to monitor. By considering historical, cultural, and political dynamics, his framework avoids the limitations of a universal approach, which has often been a weakness of traditional conflict prediction models. This adaptability is particularly important in regions with complex and unique conflict factors, such as the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. Furthermore, the critical assessment of existing quantitative models, such as CAST and the Pre-Conflict Management Tools Program, underscores the author's ability to identify and propose improvements to existing early warning systems.

Policy Recommendations and Strategic Applications

Josef Kraus's research leads to innovative and actionable policy recommendations. He proposes a series of strategies that can be used by governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations to prevent conflicts or mitigate their impacts. These recommendations are based on his extensive case studies, which provide detailed insights into the specific causes and dynamics of various conflicts. By offering concrete examples of how early warning systems can be applied in different contexts, the author confirms that his recommendations are not only theoretically grounded but also practically feasible.

For instance, his analysis of religious extremism as a cause of conflicts and the associated warning indicators offers valuable guidance for policymakers seeking to prevent radicalization and its violent consequences. Similarly, his case study on military coups provides a clear set of indicators that can be monitored to anticipate and prevent such events, which often destabilize

and have far-reaching consequences for regional and global security. Early warning systems in general are designed to improve the ability of international actors to anticipate and respond to emerging conflicts before they escalate into full-blown violence. This proactive approach is crucial in a world where conflicts are increasingly complex and multi-layered, often involving multiple state and non-state actors with conflicting interests. By providing a framework for early detection and prevention, Josef Kraus's research contributes to the broader goals of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. His work aligns with the priorities of international organizations like the UN and the EU, which emphasize the importance of early warning mechanisms and rapid response in their peace and security strategies. The practical tools and methodologies developed in this work can be directly applied to enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

Shortcomings of the Research

Josef Kraus's work can be criticized for reflecting very little of the scholarly discussion on the topic that occurs in other linguistic environments than English and Czech. Although it is indisputable that English functions as the lingua franca of the academic world, a deep insight into such topics requires not ignoring debates conducted in other significant languages (Russian, French, Spanish, German, and in the case of the Czech Republic, perhaps also Polish).

Another shortcoming may be the fact that, in terms of case studies, the work appears somewhat inconsistent. The selection of case studies lacks any traceable logic and clear continuity. However, in the case of a habilitation thesis composed of a selection of articles, such a thing can be somewhat expected. It is also worth noting that the theoretical concept maintains elementary logical coherence.

The final critique is directed toward the theoretical concept itself. Although some phenomena that disrupt the classic Clausewitzian concept of war—such as warlordism or marauding—are outlined, the author does not introduce or work with them in detail. In this context, it can be suggested that to complete the research, which justifiably may continue further, the theoretical concept with the ambition to improve conflict prevention should also include these dimensions of armed conflict and the non-state actors involved.

Final Evaluation

In light of the findings that Josef Kraus's work brings to both the academic sphere and practice, his work deserves attention and support for a successful defense. This work not only addresses important gaps in current methodologies of conflict analysis but also offers innovative solutions that are theoretically robust and practically applicable. Through his theoretical framing and series of case studies, the author has demonstrated analytical abilities, a deep understanding of complex geopolitical and regional dynamics, and the capacity to advance the fields of political science and security studies. His research is not only relevant and timely but also essential in today's security environment, where the ability to predict and prevent conflicts is more critical than ever. The interdisciplinary nature of his work, combined with its practical implications, makes this work a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners.

In conclusion, Josef Kraus's habilitation thesis represents a significant contribution to the field of security and strategic studies. It is a work that not only expands theoretical knowledge but also provides practical tools that can be used to improve global security. For these reasons, I

am pleased to recommend the continuation of Josef Kraus's habilitation procedure and fully support his work for a successful defense.

Questions for the Author and Discussion before the Committee:

1. Utilization of New Technologies:

- Have you considered integrating new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, into early warning systems? What do you see as the advantages and limitations of these technologies in conflict prediction?
- How could new technologies be used to monitor and analyze dynamic factors, such as changes in political alliances or sudden socio-economic crises?

2. Long-Term Impact and Sustainability:

- How should the proposed early warning systems be maintained and updated over time to remain relevant in the face of changing global threats?

Rajhrad, August 12, 2024

Tomáš Šmíd