

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE
Fakulta sociálních věd
Institut mezinárodních studií

PROTOKOL O HODNOCENÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE
(Posudek vedoucího)

Práci předložil(a) student(ka): Petr Buriánek

Název práce: Operation Odyssey Dawn: President Obama's decision-making process

Vedoucí práce (u externích vedoucích uveďte též adresu a funkci v rámci instituce):

Jan Hornát

1. OBSAH A CÍL PRÁCE (stručná informace o práci, formulace cíle):

In his thesis, Petr Buriánek addresses the general question of why Barack Obama – who presented himself in contrast to George W. Bush as a president that will not involve the US in further foreign military engagements – made the crucial decision to commit US forces in the mission to stabilize Libya amidst the “Arab Spring”. Specifically, Petr asks “How come a politician so adamant that Iraq invasion will end as a disaster would several years later commit himself to take military action in Libya?” (p. 3) His point of perspective is not, however, the conventional rationalist view of a state acting on the basis of material national interests, but is rather interested in the bureaucratic decision-making process and the role of individuals and institutions in making decisions. For this purpose, he adopts a theoretical-methodological approach stemming from Graham Allison's Bureaucratic Politics model, which is considered “crucial to fully grasp the decision-making process that leads to the use of the military option.”(p. 4) This approach, according to the author, can “explain the Libya decision and pinpoint some potential generalizing characteristics which could possibly contribute towards future predictions.” (p. 6)

The thesis first proceeds with explaining Allison's Bureaucratic Politics model and introducing some key concepts, such as “action-channels” and “stand-sit”. Included in the Introduction are subchapters on US-Libya relations, the Arab Spring and the general foreign-policy outlooks of President Obama. The second chapter is empirical and on the background of the developments in Libya from mid-February to mid-March 2011 describes the actions and positions taken by the Obama administration. Chapter three briefly summarizes the Libyan operation itself. Chapter four challenges some of the presumptions upon which the administration's decision to get involved in Libya was taken – these presumptions were: strong regional support for the intervention, saving human lives and letting Europeans take over the mission soon. With the benefit of hindsight, Petr demonstrates that these tenets that supported the decision were partly flawed or showed to be unrealistic. The fifth empirical chapter looks into the very limited role of the US Congress in the operation; this chapter is followed by the conclusion.

2. VĚCNÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (náročnost, tvůrčí přístup, argumentace, logická struktura, teoretické a metodologické ukotvení, práce s prameny a literaturou, vhodnost příloh apod.):

The very idea behind the thesis that Petr submitted was not easily put into practice. As the aim was essentially to map and track the decision-making process of a very recent development, his resources were limited to news accounts, speeches, interviews and mainly memoirs of administration members who were “at the table” when decisions were made – of course, without access to archives and proceedings from the NSC, the account of the process may not be accurate and will likely be reassessed once archival material is available. I see this point as the main shortcoming of the thesis – nonetheless, this shortcoming is somewhat mitigated by the fact that Petr has managed to assemble a large number of first-hand accounts from the participants in the decision-making process (which may turn out to be flawed, though, once we can access archives). In this sense, the research question could be formulated more explicitly and take into consideration the given caveat. The reader is left rather with an implicit research question – i.e. “why Obama decided the way he did”.

Petr basically adopts a process-tracing method to validate Allison's Bureaucratic Politics model of decision-making in the case of Obama's decision to intervene in Libya, but the obvious lack of access to internal materials provides a more-or-less chronological description of the administration's (shifting) positions, which tell us little about the underlying causal mechanisms.

The structure of the thesis is logical, yet some parts seem a bit out of context and the reader is not really sure about their function. For example, the chapter on the “Prominent traditions of American Foreign Policy” does not connect too well with the preceding and succeeding chapters and the chapter’s findings are basically not used in the rest of the text at all. A similar note can be said of the chapter about the role of the US Congress – it would seem more logical to place this chapter at least in the beginning of the paper rather than as the last part.

The lack of transition between some chapters and subchapters is evident in the first sentence of chapter *1.1. Methodology: Three Models of Graham Allison*. Starting a new chapter with the following words seems a bit awkward: “In other words, they do not fully grasp the nuances of the decision-making process by oversimplifying it, this thesis, therefore, uses Graham Allison’s Bureaucratic Politics paradigm.” (p. 6).

Nevertheless, Petr has set himself a difficult task and, in the limits and challenges he had to face, he has managed to write a solid thesis that is thoroughly researched, works with relevant sources and does provide an interesting look into the “palace politics” of the Obama administration’s foreign policy-making processes.

3. FORMÁLNÍ A JAZYKOVÉ ZPRACOVÁNÍ (jazykový projev, správnost citace a odkazů na literaturu, grafická úprava, formální náležitosti práce apod.):

Formally, the paper meets all the criteria of a diploma thesis. Some formulations and spellings are clumsy (e.g. academical, pursuite) and a final proofreading from a native speaker would have done the job to make the text more fluent for the reader. The citation norm is consistent throughout the text.

4. STRUČNÝ KOMENTÁŘ HODNOTITELE (celkový dojem z bakalářské práce, silné a slabé stránky, originalita myšlenek, naplnění cíle apod.):

Petr’s research interest was driven by his premise that the intervention in Libya was an “apparent anomaly in the foreign policy pattern of President Obama’s administration during his two terms” (p. 3) I do not fully subscribe to this thesis, as from my perspective it corresponds with the policy outlooks of the administration – i.e. that foreign engagements legitimized by multilateral diplomacy, regional stakeholder support and overall a UNSC mandate are justifiable and just. So, for me it was not an “anomaly”, but a model case of when the Obama administration deemed it legitimate to intervene.

Also, I believe that some conclusions actually lack empirical support in the thesis – for example, the author states that: “The research has confirmed the shortcoming of the Rational Policy Model to examine the current foreign policy. The American government was fundamentally divided on approaching the Libyan crisis and in evaluating the level of threat towards American national interests it provided. The Model I, therefore, failed to explain Libyan intervention.” (p. 49) However, the Rational Policy model is not actually tested as the epistemological approach revolves mostly around individuals and their roles in the administration. The same can be said for the following claim: “The analyses also confirmed Brummer’s claim that each person’s baggage, rather than the ‘stand-sit’ proposition determine an actor’s position in the bargaining process.”

It is also not clear what the author means by the term “new emerging structures of foreign policy” – “The selection of the National Security Council as the main action-channel through the working group also confirms the palace politics perspective as a tool best describing the new emerging structure of foreign policy decision-making.” (p. 50)

Despite the caveats and shortcomings I have mentioned earlier, I consider Petr’s work to provide interesting insights into the decision-making process (the most valuable part of the thesis is the subchapter 2.5) of the Obama administration and a valid contribution to our knowledge of the presidency.

5. OTÁZKY A PŘIPOMÍNKY DOPORUČENÉ K BLIŽŠÍMU VYSVĚTLENÍ PŘI OBHAJOBĚ (jedna až tři):

1. Allison’s Bureaucratic Politics model was created nearly half a century ago – is it still a model that is applicable in the contemporary period? Are there newer approaches that could help us explain politics in a more nuanced fashion?
2. Can we say that Obama made a “good” decision to engage in the intervention in Libya?

6. DOPORUČENÍ / NEDOPORUČENÍ K OBHAJOBĚ A NAVRHOVANÁ ZNÁMKA
(A-F):

I recommend the panel to award a **B or a C**.

Datum: 8. 6. 2020

Podpis: Jan Hornát v.r.
