

Petr Buriánek

Operation Odyssey Dawn: President Obama's Decision-Making Process

M.A. Dissertation Evaluation

2020

Petr Buriánek has selected the complex topic of the Obama administration's role in Operation Odyssey Dawn, which resulted in the toppling of the Libyan dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, as the topic of his M.A. dissertation. Above all, Buriánek is interested in Obama's decision-making process. He uses the "Bureaucratic Policy model" formulated by Graham Allison as the framework for his analysis. The work is divided into an Introduction (Chapter 1), four main chapters (Chapter 2-5), and a Conclusion (Chapter 6). In the paragraphs that follow, I will offer my comments on each section.

In the Introduction (Chapter 1), Buriánek states his hypothesis that the American decision to intervene in Libya was the result of Obama yielding to his advisors and to European allies. The Introduction discusses the relevant literature in detail and pays particular attention to Graham Allison's "Bureaucratic Policy model." The traditions of U.S. foreign policy traditions are elucidated as is the evolution of U.S. policy toward Libya. I think that the Introduction is of excellent quality and prepares the reader for what the content of the main chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of the Arab Spring in Libya. As Buriánek writes, the initial protest over the detention of a lawyer turned into an uprising. The portrayal of the diplomacy surrounding the crisis is phenomenal. It is clear that the United States was not the main international actor initially. There were divisions among Obama administration officials as to whether American involvement was desirable. What turned the tide in favor of intervention was a resolution of the Arab League that called for a no-fly zone and

recognized the opposition in Libya as the legitimate government. British and French leaders took the lead and this was another factor that persuaded Obama to act. Arguments in favor of intervention were also advanced at the United Nations where the so-called “responsibility to protect” was referred to. Increasingly, thanks to Gulf Cooperation Council support, the UN Security Policy passed a resolution with some abstentions, most notably Russia and China. The momentum shifted decisively in favor of American military intervention. This chapter is well written, but I must add that there are some mistakes in English grammar that detract from the quality of the text.

Operation Odyssey Dawn forms the subject of Chapter 3. The portrayal of the details is impressive and the breakdown of military capabilities deployed is quite technical, which adds to the authenticity. A no-fly zone was declared and ultimately placed under NATO auspices. In the end, the operation succeeded. I find this chapter quite interesting.

In Chapter 4, Buriánek points out some inaccuracies of the Obama administration’s reasoning to justify the intervention in Libya. Indeed, there was much collateral damage largely because the Americans withdrew from participation in enforcing the no-fly zone, which made the British and French job harder. Furthermore, much of the intelligence and reporting on events on the ground inside Libya was incomplete and even inaccurate. It is pointed out by the author that making decisions concerning military intervention on the basis of such information is not desirable. Buriánek also demonstrates that Arab support for the intervention was not as widespread as people were led to believe and that the vote in the Arab League had been hijacked by the Gulf Cooperation Council. When it comes to the African Union, the organization actually had formulated a peace initiative that the rest of the world disregarded. Also, other motives for French and British involvement are mentioned.

These range from electoral politics to national prestige. This chapter is well argued, but the quality of the written English is far from ideal.

Chapter 5 discusses the activities of the American Congress and Obama's respect for the War Powers Resolution. Buriánek writes that Obama did not request authorization from Congress and thus did not fulfill the criteria of the War Powers Resolution to the letter. This is described as an interpretive approach undermining the War Powers Resolution when deployment is of a limited nature as was the case in Libya. I think that this chapter helps put things in perspective.

In the Conclusion (Chapter 6), Buriánek summarizes his main points and explains why many models cannot be used to explain President Obama's decision-making process. The Bureaucratic Politics model has been cited as the best explanation for what transpired in the case of Libya in 2011. President Obama was persuaded by advisors and foreign leaders to intervene in Libya. I think that the Conclusion is sound and valid.

My overall impression of the dissertation is positive. However, as this is a Master's thesis, the mistakes in English grammar and usage cannot be overlooked. I feel that it deserves a classification of **B** depending on the quality of the oral defense.

.....
doc. PhDr. Francis D. Raška, PhD.
Charles University
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of International Studies
Department of North American Studies