

Tadeáš Prouza

M.A. Dissertation Evaluation

2018

Angažmá Obamovy administrativy v syrské občanské válce

Tadeáš Prouza has written his M.A. dissertation on the Obama Administration and its approach to the civil war in Syria. This topic is by no means easy to tackle and it is good that Tadeáš chose Honza Bečka to be his supervisor. Written in Czech, the work is divided into an Introduction, three main chapters, and a Conclusion. The referencing is consistent and Tadeáš has demonstrated that he has consulted multiple sources. In the next paragraphs, I will offer my comments on each individual part of the treatise.

In the Introduction, Tadeáš spells out the content of the individual chapters and he explains just how complex the issue of the Obama Administration and Syria is. In addition, he does provide a brief analysis of the main sources consulted. The Introduction is generally good, but it would have been better if Tadeáš had created a separate section discussing sources. This is just a minor organizational criticism.

Chapter 1 provides interesting background information on the topic and a brief recapitulation of the historical context of the complex nature of U.S.-Syrian relations. Correctly, Tadeáš lists the main American interests in the Middle East, which include safeguarding the security of Israel, securing access to energy resources, the war on terror, and preventing hostile powers from gaining a foothold in the region. He contrasts the rhetoric of the Bush and Obama Administrations. In his utterances to the American people, Obama promised a less doctrinaire and more multilateral approach than his predecessor. In fact,

Obama seemed determined to open a new chapter in relations between the United States and the Muslim world as such. The analysis of American-Syrian relations is informative and accurate and Tadeáš makes clear that Obama did not hesitate to act militarily in other countries (i.e. Libya) when he deemed it to be necessary. This chapter is well written and encourages the reader to continue reading.

In Chapter 2, the outbreak of the “revolution” against the rule of Bashir Assad is scrutinized and the reactions of the Obama Administration are discussed in detail. Sanctions, so-called “red lines” promising (but not delivering) retaliation in the event of Assad’s use of chemical weapons, and Obama’s ultimate decision not to intervene after Assad used chemical weapons are placed in context as is the murky, multifaceted nature of anti-Assad rebels. I like this chapter because it is balanced and lays the groundwork for the third (final) chapter.

The emergence of ISIS as one of the opposition groups and its international consequences form the subject of Chapter 3. ISIS originated in Iraq and the stated goal of the organization is the establishment of a Muslim caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Obviously, the existence of this fanatical Islamist group proved unacceptable for the Obama Administration, which became involved in the fight against ISIS. However, the lack of firm determination on the part of the Obama Administration opened the door to other powers, such as Russia and Turkey, seeking to profit from the situation. In addition, Tadeáš correctly assesses the shortcomings of the “train and equip” policy. This chapter says it all. The analysis is both accurate and balanced.

In the Conclusion, Tadeáš recapitulates his main points as presented in the individual chapters. He emphasizes in the final paragraph that Obama's (in)activity with regard to the Syrian conflict strengthened Islamists. The policy failure was indeed due to the lack of a comprehensive strategy.

Tadeáš's work indeed meets the requirements for a successful M.A. dissertation. As I stated in the first paragraph, Dr. Jan Bečka's guidance clearly played a role in the positive outcome. Insofar as grading is concerned, I recommend an **excellent** classification of **A or B** depending on the oral defense.

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