

Twenty Years after Tiananmen

Rational Action and US Decision-Making

Gregory P. Dupuy

The relationship between contemporary foreign policy analysis (FPA) and international relations theory (IR theory) is often confusing. Both analytical approaches seek to contribute to knowledge about the nature of international politics. IR theory tends to be characterized by rationalist epistemology that promotes objectivist, structural explanations of outcomes in international politics. Employing a systemic perspective, analysts using IR theory contend that the structure of the international system is the most significant determinant of behavior in international politics. The advantage of this approach is that it allows the behavior of many different states to be compared across time. FPA, on the other hand, is centrally concerned with explaining the actions of specific people in a specific situation. Though its findings may not be broadly applicable to any situation, FPA is valuable because it identifies the theoretical intersection between the determinants of state behavior in practice – human decision-makers and the state.¹ Incorporating human decision-makers into analysis allows for much greater narrative detail than IR theory, at the expense of theoretical consistency. IR theorists tend to be skeptical of FPA because it requires significant speculation, especially about the way decision-makers interpret the world. Nonetheless, if the longstanding rationalist theories of international relations are an accurate source of explanation to the outcomes of world politics, we should expect the

¹Valery M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1 (2005): 5.

Gregory P. Dupuy is a Master's candidate in the International Politics program at American University's School of International Service. His research focuses on the social construction of insecurity in the context of nonproliferation issues and U.S. foreign policy. He holds a BA (cum laude) in Sociology and International Studies from Colby College. He has interned at the United Nations offices in Washington and worked as a paralegal in the environmental department of Latham & Watkins LLP.

principles of rationalist theory to be observable in action among decision-makers in a foreign policy case study analysis.

To explore the relationship between rationalist IR theory and FPA, this paper analyzes the decision-making of an archetypal 'realist' U.S. presidential administration in an international crisis: the response of the George H.W. Bush administration to the Tiananmen Square incident in China in the summer of 1989. The two approaches will be compared through a rationalist model for foreign policy decision-making – the Rational Actor Model ("RAM") – a translation of rationalist epistemology into a case study framework. This study suggests that the RAM cannot sufficiently account for decision-making, even when the outcomes decision-makers produce are suggested by realism. In this case of a realist presidential administration, the influences of the decision-makers' personality and ideology are crucial, complementary factors influencing the outcome of U.S. foreign policy.

The Bush Administration

The four years of the G.H.W. Bush Administration (1989-1992) have come to be known as a model of pragmatic realism in U.S. foreign policy. President Bush often spoke of the moral composition of U.S. foreign policy in his public speeches, such as his inaugural address, when he declared: "America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principle. We as a people have such a purpose today; it is to make kinder the face of the nation and gentler the face of the world."² However, Bush had been consistently involved in constructing the face of the nation while a member of the National Security Council, as Vice-President in the Reagan Administration and Director of Central Intelligence under President Ford. With few exceptions, both of those administrations conducted foreign policy through the lens of Cold War realpolitik. Bush's association with definitive realist practitioners and extensive experience implementing strategic foreign policy that prioritized geopolitical stability suggests that he adhered to the principles of realism for security policy, even if

² Colin Campbell and S. J. Rockman, *The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals* (New York: Chatham House Publishers, 1991), ii.

he would present a 'kinder, gentler' face to the world when possible or advantageous.

Bush selected a relatively homogeneous group of foreign policy elites to fill his cabinet. At the nucleus were seasoned, realist cold-warriors Brent Scowcroft (National Security Advisor), James A. Baker III (Secretary of State), and Dick Cheney (Secretary of Defense). Baker and Cheney had significant experience with previous Republican administrations as Chiefs of Staff (Reagan and Ford, respectively), while Scowcroft had been the assistant to Henry Kissinger in the Nixon administration and National Security Advisor to President Ford. Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger in particular were disciples of the realist doctrines espoused by Henry Kissinger; both were employed by Kissinger Associates prior to joining the Bush administration. Throughout their term in office, in fact, Bush and Scowcroft would consult with Kissinger and former-President Nixon, especially in the context of back-channel diplomacy.³

Without extensively delineating its members' ideological credentials, this study presumes that the Bush administration should be characterized as definitively 'realist,' as opposed to overtly 'idealist.'⁴ To the extent this is true, one would expect its foreign policy decisions to provide evidence of rationalist (if not rational) decision-making, as modeled in the subfield of foreign policy analysis by the RAM. We can test this hypothesis by assessing the administration's response to the events at Tiananmen Square in China during 1989.

The Tiananmen Square Incident

In the middle of April 1989, the death of a former reform-minded general secretary – Hu Yaobag – led to a spontaneous demonstration

³ George H.W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 25-26.

⁴While all U.S. presidents make idealistic inauguration speeches and practice diplomacy, George H.W. Bush (especially in comparison to successors Bill Clinton and George W. Bush) is generally thought to have placed pragmatic concerns such as global stability ahead of lofty ideals in foreign policy.

of grief by students and citizens at Tiananmen Square in Beijing.⁵ Over the course of a month, the demonstration escalated into a powerful movement led by a coordinated organization of students seeking negotiation with the government for pragmatic changes in the university system and moderate expansion of political freedoms and democracy. Student leaders successfully sustained the protest in order to capture foreign media attention surrounding a groundbreaking state visit by Mikhail Gorbachev on May 15. Unprepared and embarrassed by the chaos in the capital, leaders of the Communist Party Politburo were divided on how to deal with the presence of the thousands of student protesters in Tiananmen Square and the state of chaos in the streets.⁶ General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, widely held to be the successor to Deng Xiaoping as the highest ranking decision-maker, personally visited with the students and was reluctant to use force to expel them. The Premier of the State Council, Li Peng, insisted that martial law was required to restore order or it would threaten the regime. Acting according to a secret custom, the deadlock among the reformers and the hard-liners among the Communist Party leadership was referred to Deng Xiaoping, the leading elder who had transformed China after the Cultural Revolution. Deng sided with the hardliners and the Party chose to institute martial law in Beijing; Zhao was cast as an outsider and removed from the Party soon afterward. By May 20, divisions of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) surrounded the Square and proceeded to occupy the city with tanks. Nonetheless, the unarmed students bravely resisted the efforts of the PLA to clear the Square and continued to assemble, while protesting and negotiating with the army and the government.

The incident known worldwide as the 'Tiananmen Square Massacre' took place late in the evening of June 3, 1989 as PLA divisions in tanks and military busses approached the thousands of students as-

⁵Jean A. Garrison, *Making China Policy: From Nixon To G. W. Bush* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 111.

⁶Zhang Liang, *The Tiananmen Papers*, ed. Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 192-198.

sembled in the square from multiple directions.⁷ The students refused to retreat, responding instead by burning cars and throwing Molotov cocktails at tanks and buses, attempting to repel the advancing soldiers. Before long, the army opened fire upon the crowds with live ammunition and proceeded to forcefully clear out the square, despite seven hours of student resistance. Initial U.S. Embassy cables estimated 500 to 2,600 deaths and up to 10,000 injuries from gunfire, assault, and tank movements, as well trampling resulting from the mass exodus from the square.⁸ The actual number of casualties may have been much less, but the image of the Chinese military engaging thousands of unarmed, peacefully-demonstrating students with live ammunition and crushing them with tanks was televised live throughout the world, as all the major Western media had been in town covering the Gorbachev visit.

The crackdown at Tiananmen Square was a crisis for a China, but also a legitimate crisis for the United States. Immediately after the incident, the safety of the American students and diplomatic staff in Beijing was of serious concern. Recently declassified information that U.S. embassy cables as late as July 6 were circulating rumors that Deng Xiaoping had been killed and Li Peng was targeted in a coup attempt suggests that there was a high degree of chaos and poor access to information.⁹ Senior defense attaché Jack Leide recalls embassy wives reporting that a column of Chinese armor had turned its machine guns on the diplomatic apartments that lined the broad avenue two miles east of Tiananmen.¹⁰ Leide ran into the U.S. Embassy an-

⁷Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000); Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers," *Foreign Affairs* 80 (January/February 2001).

⁸See Document 16, Cable from U.S. Department of State, "China Task Force Situation Report No. 3 - Situation as of 1700 EDT, 6/4/89," in the National Security Archive at George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB16/documents/index.html> (accessed December 4, 2008).

⁹See Document 19, "Secretary of State's Morning Summary for June 6, 1989, China: Descent into Chaos," in the National Security Archive at George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB16/documents/index.html> (accessed December 4, 2008).

¹⁰Tyler, 360.

nouncing that an attack on the diplomatic quarter was under way and ordered all classified material in the defense attaché's offices to be shredded. The attack never came, but these accounts reveal the existence of a crisis atmosphere at the time.

More significantly, the Tiananmen Square crackdown presented a major crisis for U.S. policy toward China. The day after the incident President Bush was inundated with demands from Congress that he break diplomatic relations with Beijing, recall the ambassador, and impose the most severe sanctions he could muster.¹¹ Dan Rather of CBS News reported that "the legitimacy of the Communist Party has been destroyed," while an aide to Secretary Baker interrupted the drafting of the United States' response to say: "You cannot *not* respond to these images on TV; you have got to say something that expresses the outrage people feel and about how unacceptable this behavior is!"¹² Such sentiments express how the Bush Administration was expected to strongly condemn the actions of the Chinese government.

The United States' Response

President Bush issued the United States' initial response in a press conference on June 5, 1989. With restrained rhetoric, Bush announced the suspension of all government-to-government sales and commercial exports of weapons, suspension of visits between U.S. and Chinese military leaders, and sympathetic review of requests by Chinese students in the United States to extend their stays.¹³ "I don't want to hurt the Chinese people; I happen to believe that commercial contacts have led, in essence, to this quest for more freedom," he stated, adding: "It would be a tragedy for all if China were to pull back to its pre-1972 era of isolation and repression." There would be no break in diplomatic or economic relations.¹⁴

¹¹Tyler, 359.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Bush and Scowcroft, 90; Tyler, 360.

¹⁴"World Report 1989: China," Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1989/WR89/China.htm> (accessed December 4, 2008); Bush and Scowcroft, 90.

A strong response to the Bush administration's restraint was led by an alliance of anti-Communist Republicans (including Senator Jesse Helms, R-NC) and idealist Democrats (including Rep. Stephen Solarz, D-NY) in Congress.¹⁵ Anticipating imminent sanctions legislation, the president announced a second wave of sanctions on June 20 that included the suspension of all high-level contacts with Beijing and postponed consideration of new international financial institutional loans to China. Later in July, however, Congress attempted to attach amendments to the Foreign Aid Authorization Bill for fiscal year 1990/1991, which led to a combined comprehensive sanctions amendment that passed the House 418-0 and the Senate 81-10.¹⁶ After initially promising to veto the bill, the President signed a modified version that gave him greater leeway to waive sanctions and tabled negotiations for assigning Most-Favored-Nations status to China. Furthermore, in July and August of 1989 Congress passed the Pelosi Emergency Chinese Immigration Relief Act, unanimously. The bill extended the President's original offer to Chinese students in the United States so that they would be eligible for four years of residency. As he had "already done most of this," through covert executive order, Bush issued a pocket veto, explaining to leaders in Congress that the Chinese officials had stated to him privately that China would cut off their student exchange programs if such a bill were passed.¹⁷

In spite of publicly expressing strong disapproval toward the Chinese government, the President and his administration had been secretly maintaining contact with Chinese officials throughout his term of office, including the summer of 1989. President Bush attempted to reach Deng by phone in the days following the incident, but was unable to reach him because he had been relocated away from Beijing.¹⁸ Less than two months after the Tiananmen crackdown, the president personally requested an emissary meeting with the

¹⁵Garrison, 111-112.

¹⁶This bill called for suspension of OPIC support, halting of previously authorized trade and development funds, mandated opposition for six month to liberalization of export controls, and banned the export of crime control equipment and nuclear equipment that could be used for military purposes.

¹⁷Bush and Scowcroft, 159.

¹⁸Ibid, 99.

Chinese leadership.¹⁹ Sending Scowcroft and Eagleburger, the administration sought to “keep the lines of communication open” with the Chinese leadership even as Congress passed stricter legislation to restrict diplomacy and punish China for the massacre. On December 9 and 10, the administration once again sent Scowcroft and Eagleburger to China for discussions with the Chinese leadership, but this time disclosed the meeting in spite of their public support to halt such contacts as a sanction against Tiananmen.²⁰ At this meeting, the administration offered to remove its sanctions against a previously-planned joint-communications satellite launch and directed the Export-Import Bank to resume lending to firms doing business in China.²¹ By May 1990, Bush had extended MFN status to China, despite widespread calls of prominent Americans to cancel low-tariff privileges as punishment for Tiananmen. As politicians and the media in the United States increasingly directed their attention toward the situations in Panama and the Middle East in 1990, the Bush administration continued its efforts to restore the optimistic tenor of U.S.-China relations.

Realism and RAM

While the crackdown on student protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989 did not directly represent a threat to U.S. national security, its effect on U.S. foreign policy toward China evoked intense ideological conflict that threatened to destroy seventeen years of increasingly warm relations. Moreover, if the Communist regime were to break apart due to economic factors (in addition to political turmoil), there would be a significant shift in the balance of power in Asia. The outcome favored and ultimately produced by the Bush Administration in response to Tiananmen was indicative of a realist belief system that

¹⁹See Document 33, State Department document entitled ‘Themes’ (June 29, 1989), “*Tiananmen Square, 1989 - The Declassified History: A National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book*, National Security Archive at George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB16/documents/index.html> (accessed December 4, 2008).

²⁰Robert G. Sutter, *U.S. Policy Toward China: An Introduction to the Role of Interest Groups* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 31.

²¹Tyler, 370.

places national security – in terms of stability in the international system as well as national economic interests – ahead of ideational concerns, such as peace and human rights. But how does realism work its way into the decision-making process?

Supporters of modern or Waltzian structural realism contend that there is no place for decision-making analysis in a true theory of international politics, mainly because their explanatory model calls for deductive reasoning, rather than inductive inquiry.²² Additionally, a decision-maker is impacted by a wide variety of constraints in addition to the structure of the international system, which cannot be captured by the unitary variables of structural realist theory. However, classical realism – a loosely-defined set of explanatory approaches based on human nature – would seem to provide an ideal platform for the implementation of rational choice in IR theory.²³

The RAM in Allison and Zelikow's classic *Essence of Decision* was likely introduced to give credence to their lauded models of bureaucratic and organizational politics, but it also represents the most logical implementation of the assumptions of classical realism toward decision-making.²⁴ The model assumes the ontology and epistemology of classical realism, that the international system is composed of unitary actors that define their preferences and act according to their interests, which are given by anarchic international structure – power and/or stability. The Allison-Zelikow RAM states that unitary actors practice rational decision-making through a four-step process of (1) prioritizing goals; (2) identifying options; (3) weighing consequences; and (4) choosing maximum utility.

Examining the case of the United States' pragmatic response to the Tiananmen Square incident, we should first be able to locate a

²²See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

²³For this paper Hans Morgenthau and E.H. Carr are considered to be exemplary classical realists, while historical predecessors such as Thucydides, Hobbes, and Machiavelli are considered relevant to the tradition.

²⁴Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (2nd Edition)* (New York: Longman, 1999); for critique of Allison and Zelikow see Stephen D. Krasner, "Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland)," in *American Foreign Policy – Theoretical Essays*, ed. G. John Ikenberry, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005) 447-459.

process of prioritizing goals within the Bush Administration (assuming the Administration is the rational actor to be analyzed). Given that the president selected a foreign policy team experienced in geo-strategic management of the Cold War, the administration's policy goals were directed toward stability. On June 4, 1989, Bush met with Baker and Scowcroft to discuss how to respond to the events in Tiananmen. After stating the "first and obvious point" – that the United States must show it considered the military crackdown to be unacceptable – Bush's priority (as stated in his memoirs) was clear: "What I certainly did not want to do was completely break the relationship we had worked so hard to build since 1972."²⁵ Inferring that what Bush did not want to do was more important to him than what he did want to do, this is evidence of prioritizing goals.

Second, we should be able to depict the Administration identifying its available options. This is less clear, since Bush and his advisors appear to have always been in the mindset that the official response should consist of rhetoric of disappointment and limited, soft sanctions. One can imply that other available options would have been complete economic sanctions, retraction of diplomatic relations, egregious intervention on behalf of the democratic supporters, or status quo, but the accounts of Bush and Scowcroft do not suggest they conceived their options in an systematically-organized manner.

Third, we should see the administration performing cost-benefit analysis for each of its policy options. Again, there is little public evidence that the administration sat down as a group to discuss its options systematically. In memoirs with Scowcroft, the president does provide shades of his thinking on costs and benefits: "We had to remain involved, engaged with the Chinese government, if we were to have any influence or leverage to work for restraint and cooperation, let alone for human rights and democracy."²⁶ His statement above about the danger of breaking relations with the Chinese suggests that Bush was well aware of the risks of too strong of a retaliatory response, and sought to strike a moderate balance between empowering the regime in China and criticizing their behavior.

²⁵Bush and Scowcroft, 89.

²⁶Ibid.

Finally, the RAM suggests we should see the Bush Administration choosing the 'optimal choice' in framing its response to China. The president's subsequent reflection shows that the administration chose the moderate path that they wanted to choose: "I felt confident we were taking the right steps."²⁷ On the other hand, the Administration was constrained by the united Congressional legislation in pursuit of punitive sanctions against China. Had Congress deferred all decision-making power to the President in this case, it is difficult to imagine a different outcome. However, if the President had not been as assertive as he had, or had another president occupied the office with a perspective more sympathetic to idealists in Congress, it is possible that U.S.-China relations could have been formally paused, which could have lead to an entirely new set of unpredictable outcomes with possible changes in the international system.

Applying the four-step process in this case suggests that there are several problems with the RAM analysis. First, realism involves unitary actors (states), but decision-making models require a human unit of action, be it a president, a team, or a legislative body. In the case of Tiananmen, it is not clear that there was a single rational actor coordinating state policy. Congress exercised its role in regulating international affairs by passing sanctions legislation, but President Bush had a different set of interests with a different 'optimal choice.' Second, whether the United States defines its interests in terms of a pro-human rights identity or through traditional notions of stability and security, it is impossible to ascertain which choice is 'optimal.' This notion is common within constructivist IR scholarship, which has much to say about the definition of interests as a function of identity rather than a function of structural anarchy. Third, identifying the four-step rational choice process in a decision-making analysis does not necessarily explain why an outcome occurred; it may not be possible to prove how much the process in action contributed to the final decision. And finally, without a more specific account of the context of the decision-making process, the RAM may merely provide more description than explanation.

²⁷Ibid, 90.

Considering the Effect of the Personality and Belief System of George H. W. Bush

It is easy to conceive of examples in history for which the personality of a state's leader had a significant effect on a foreign policy decision. Personality as a variable may have little predictive power, but because the challenge for decision-making models is to locate the most explanatory power, irrespective of utility to prediction, personality models can be important in certain circumstances. David Winter suggests that Fred Greenstein has provided a useful framework to assess the influence of personality; it may be an especially important variable *when the actor occupies a strategic location, when the situation is ambiguous or unstable, when there are no clear precedents or routine role requirements, and when spontaneous or especially effortful behavior is required.*²⁸

Considering that the RAM was somewhat ambiguous in explaining how George H.W. Bush produced such a realist response to the Tiananmen Square incident, it is worthwhile to assess the utility of a personality approach. Greenstein's rubric first requires that the actor occupy a strategic location. President Bush was one of the most powerful people in the world in 1989, and his executive power to determine U.S. foreign policy surely placed him in a sufficiently-strategic position. Second, the United States' response to the Tiananmen Square incident took place at a particularly unstable moment in U.S.-China relations, as a power struggle was taking place in China and the United States was redefining its relationship to the Soviet Union. Third, the United States had no experiences with which to compare a violent military crackdown of a peaceful democracy movement by a major trading partner; the divergent responses by the president and Congress suggests no routine role existed either. And fourth, the frequent hand-written letters, phone calls, and secret diplomatic envoys employed by President Bush suggest that he exhibited especially spontaneous and 'effortful' behavior throughout the crisis. Thus, each of the components in Greenstein's framework was present, which

²⁸David Winter, "Applying Personality Theory to Foreign Policy Behavior: Evaluating Three Methods of Assessment," in *Political Psychology and Foreign Policy*, ed. Eric Singer and Valerie M. Hudson (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 103-155.

suggests it is possible that the personality of President Bush had a significant impact.

Margaret Hermann has proposed some additional circumstances for which personality will affect foreign policy in particular.²⁹ First, *the more general interest the head-of-state has in foreign policy, the more likely his personality characteristics are to affect foreign policy behavior.* Similarly, *the more training in foreign affairs the head of state has had, the more likely his beliefs about the world are to affect foreign policy behavior.* Both of these are especially compelling in the case of President Bush. George H.W. Bush was arguably the most experienced and qualified of any president in U.S. history in the area of foreign policy; he had been Ambassador to the UN, liaison at the United States' initial diplomatic efforts in China, Director of Central Intelligence at the CIA, member of the National Security Council for one year as DCI in the Ford Administration, and NSC member for eight years as Vice President in the Reagan Administration – the only president to ever have any substantive experience with the NSC before coming to office.³⁰ He was also lauded by Scowcroft for "...elevating personal diplomacy to a status it never had before."³¹ Scowcroft recalls, "If he had an issue to discuss with [any] leaders, he would call, but sometimes for no particular reason he would pick up the phone and ask how they were doing, or call and say 'I've got a problem here, I'd like your understanding and support, if possible.'" Such behavior demonstrates an unprecedented level of personal management in foreign affairs for a U.S. president.

We can deduce that at the time of the Tiananmen incident, the personality of President Bush was likely to have an affect on foreign policy decision-making. Subsequently, to claim that a leader's attrib-

²⁹Margaret G. Hermann, "When Leader Personality Will Affect Foreign Policy: Some Propositions," in *In Search of Global Patterns*, ed. James N. Rosenau (New York: Free Press, 1976); see also, Margaret Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 24 (1980): 7-46; Margaret Hermann, "How Decision Units Shape Foreign Policy: A Theoretical Framework," *International Studies Review* 3 (2001): 47-81.

³⁰Brent Scowcroft, "Judgment and Experience: George Bush's Foreign Policy," in *Presidential Judgment: Foreign Policy*, ed. Aaron Lobel (Hollis: Hollis Publishing Company, 2001), 106.

³¹*Ibid*, 107.

utes mattered in a particular outcome is, in effect, a counterfactual assertion about the universe of potentially available leaders who might have figured in the events that led to that outcome.³² Consequently, the power of the personality variable in the Tiananmen response can be measured as a function of the unique behavior of President Bush.

Counterfactual analysis is only useful in situations for which multiple causal outcomes are conceivable. Greenstein proposes that if a researcher wishes to use counterfactual analysis in order to strengthen claims about the role of personality, it is essential to (1) assess the context in which the events under consideration took place, (2) establish precisely what outcome is to be explained, and (3) identify relevant personal qualities in order to compare with those of other actors.³³ If it can be revealed that the decision to forego strong sanctions against China was the result of the personal qualities of the decision-makers (in this case, President Bush), it follows that another policy outcome was possible, and in fact, likely.

First, the context and timing of the Tiananmen incident were significant. Tensions in the Cold War had been fading since Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Corresponding to the thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations, Gorbachev's formal visit to China in 1989 signaled that the triangle diplomacy between the United States, Soviet Union, and China would be increasingly characterized by cooperation, rather than confrontation. In Eastern Europe, Poland was leading a peaceful return to democracy. In fact, on June 4, as tanks rolled over students in Tiananmen Square, Poland held its first free election since 1920 and the Communist party did not win a single open seat in the legislature. Surely American news broadcasts containing celebrations of democracy in Eastern Europe followed by the violent suppression of democracy in China had the effect of mobilizing public opinion against China and toward a strong policy response. This public opinion was parlayed by the overwhelming majority of both houses of Congress that pressed for severe sanctions against China. The sentiments of Congress and the raised awareness of public citizens to the issue of democracy around the world, as well as the history of and precedent

³²Fred Greenstein, "The Impact of Personality on the End of the Cold War: A Counterfactual Analysis," *Political Psychology* 11 (1998): 1-16.

³³*Ibid.*

for the United States to support democracy as principle, suggests the president should have directed U.S. foreign policy to punish China. In this case, a personality analysis of George Bush is useful to explaining the outcome of the United States applying only limited military sanctions (which would be waived within a year).

The most significant personal quality of George Bush that transcended his policy choices in the Tiananmen crisis is that he was a gifted, charismatic diplomat with a friendly relationship to the Chinese government. Bush was perceived as an amiable but dry 'policy wonk' in America, and he would fail to turn a number of foreign policy successes into a second term of office largely because of being upstaged in the 1992 election campaign. On the world stage, however, the president felt at home, and this is particularly true of relations with China. On the topic of the Tiananmen response in his memoirs, Bush recalls:

I felt confident we were taking the right steps. I had a keen personal interest in China and I thought I understood it reasonably well, enough to closely direct our policy toward it.

...It was my time as chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing that gave me a deep and lasting appreciation of these extraordinary people, who make up a fifth of the world's population...I spent over a year in China and tried to get to know the leaders and people as well as I could...Barbara and I tried to widen our contacts in every fashion. We bought bicycles and went about town as the Chinese themselves do. I created as many excuses as possible to invite Chinese to functions, and I attended the national-day celebrations held by other countries.³⁴

While at the Liaison Office Bush came into contact with many of the leaders of China in 1989, including Deng Xiaoping.³⁵ Deng held a luncheon for Bush in 1975 before he returned to the United States to lead the CIA. While Bush was out of government during the years of

³⁴Bush and Scowcroft, 91-92.

³⁵For accounts of George Bush's encounters with Deng Xiaoping, see Bush and Scowcroft, 92-97.

the Carter administration, Deng visited Houston and greeted Bush 'warmly as a friend.' Later as Vice President, Bush was sent to China to present Reagan's policies to Deng, which the two would later joke about after Bush won the presidency.

Bush's personal feelings for China and the Chinese people were recognized and appreciated by the Chinese leadership. At a meeting with Premier Li Peng while in Asia for the funeral of Emperor Hirohito in February 1989, Bush questioned Li on the topic of reform in China. Li stated: "As old friends, I feel we can talk in this very frank way. With others, I might not approach the question in this manner."³⁶ Meeting with Deng on that same trip, Bush writes:

When Deng called me a *lao pengyou*, an old friend in China, I felt the phrase was not just the usual flattery, but a recognition that I understood the importance of the US-China relationship and the need to keep it on track. I will always have great respect for the positive changes this strong leader, who had his own ups and downs, brought to China.

The day after the Tiananmen incident, Bush attempted to call Deng on the telephone, an unprecedented act for a U.S. president. After failing to reach him twice, Bush wrote a personal letter to Deng in order to compel an emissary meeting to get the relationship 'back on track.' The letter states:

I write in a spirit of genuine friendship, this letter coming as I'm sure you know from one who believes with a passion that good relations between the U.S. and China are in the fundamental interests of both countries.

...I have insisted that all departments of the US government be guided in their statements and actions from my guidance in the White House. Sometimes in an open system such as ours it is impossible to control all leaks; but on this particular letter there are no copies, not one, outside of my own personal file.

³⁶Bush and Scowcroft, 93.

...Any clemency that could be shown to the demonstrators would be applauded worldwide. We must not let the aftermath of the tragic recent events undermine a vital relationship patiently built up over the past seventeen years. I would, of course, welcome a personal reply to this letter. *This matter is too important to be left to our bureaucracies* [emphasis added].³⁷

These statements reveal that President Bush had a very personal role in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy toward China after the Tiananmen incident. It is unlikely that any other president would have had the professional experiences in China that produced Bush's warm feelings toward the Chinese and personal relationships with Chinese leadership. President Clinton, for example, was elected in 1992 after campaigning on the need for promoting American values and human rights in his foreign policy. It has also been noted herein that no other president has practiced personal diplomacy to the extent of George Bush from 1989 to 1992. While President Reagan may have preferred a stable outcome for China, it is unlikely that he would have had the ability or interest in overriding both houses in Congress and public opinion to uphold the stability of a Communist country. Furthermore, it is unlikely that any Western heads-of-state had the kind of relationship with Deng Xiaoping that would permit any sort of direct communication. And finally, President Bush was perhaps the most involved in foreign policy of any modern U.S. president. Scowcroft comments that "As a result of [his] experienced background, when he was elected President Bush knew very well what he wanted to do...and then chose people that he worked with before to run *his* system" [emphasis added].³⁸ The extent to which Bush managed foreign policy issues was exceptionally greater and more respected by his advisors than any other recent President.

³⁷Bush and Scowcroft, 102.

³⁸Scowcroft, 106.

Conclusions

This paper has argued that the United States' response to the Tiananmen incident was strongly influenced by George H.W. Bush and his knowledge of and relationship to China and its leaders, not merely an ideological predilection toward realism. The RAM alone is not capable of explaining or describing the decision-making process in the context of this foreign policy crisis vis-à-vis China. Rather, a personality analysis is useful and important, because it reveals how an ideology such as realism requires complex implementation by decision-makers.

This conclusion reveals the inherent limitations of both FPA and IR theory. The personality approach to foreign policy modeling has provided more explanatory power for the decisions taken in the case (that is, the decision-making process), but the outcome produced by the Bush Administration is not exceptionally opposed to what rationalist IR theory predicts, that a large power pursues a stable balance of power in the international system. Which approach is more meaningful or 'correct'?

Those who defend rationalist IR theory as a method of explaining international politics may argue that it is impossible for the RAM, a foreign policy model, to represent the tenets of rationalist IR theory. Some contend that the focus on case studies in FPA does not contest rational theory on its own terms. Christopher Achen and Duncan Snidal, for example, find that the logic of case studies inherently provides too little logical constraint to generate dependable theory and too little inferential constraint to permit trustworthy theory testing.³⁹ Moreover, there is inherently a great deal of inference in case study analysis, and analysts usually provide no assessment of the reliability of their historical judgments. And more generally, there is no end to possible explanatory variables. "Categories can be multiplied to fit all cases," state Achel and Snidal. "We often cannot tell a consequential finding from an artifact, and when we succeed, the next case makes us begin all over again." They claim that rational action cannot be ex-

³⁹Christopher Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics* 41 (1989): 145.

tracted and tested from any case study analysis, arguing instead that what rational IR theory has proven over time is more meaningful than anything a decision-making approach can provide.

Defining the relationship between case studies and theory is the key to understanding how FPA and IR are complementary and not entirely contradictory. Surely there is meaningful logic to both approaches. Despite the relative lack of empirical support for realism in the literature of decision-making, the rational approach has a number of useful and relevant qualities that do not require and may not be capable of representation in every case study. While rational theory may be incapable of explaining why one foreign policy decision is made over another at a specific moment, it can provide a general pathway to explaining and predicting states' pursuit of fixed interests, such as security, over an extended period of time. Achen and Snidal contend that highlighting the predictive value of rational theory does not suggest that realism can explain exactly why an outcome was chosen; rather, IR theory suggests the choices that decision-makers will have to face. Its explanatory power may not be easily verified through an inductive analysis of a situation, but the same can be said for any other model or theory of international relations. Rational choice logic contains only the thinnest assumptions possible to generate some sort of theory applicable to behavior of all states in a system. Realists contend that any attempt to induce more detail is contrary to the purpose of the theory; thus, a model of rational action for a case study may never be a true representation of IR theory, even if it would seem to share several assumptions.

IR theory approaches can only explain the dynamics of the international system, and cannot adequately explain the processes and decisions of states or individuals. Yet, Achen and Snidal concede that analytic theory cannot stand without case studies. Theory and modeling do have a distinct usefulness, that they provide a means to *understand* the logic of state behavior from the bottom-up, rather than the top-down. This is especially useful for policymakers and foreign policy practitioners requiring predictive power, if not for international relations scholars as well. While a decision-making analysis challenges the assumptions of realism, it does not need to present a viable alternative to systemic analysis; it brings IR out of its broader context

and into the world of action. The decision-making approach and case study analysis in general provide an opportunity to set aside the pursuit of an untenable 'objective explanation' of state behavior and instead focus on understanding how states behave.

In the context of trying to understand the dynamics of the crisis facing the Bush Administration in the summer of 1989, the RAM is not useful. This could suggest that the RAM is a poor case-study model. Or, despite the fact that elements of realist ideology are clearly evident in the Bush Administration, it may not be reasonable to characterize the outcome as realist. The summer of 1989 was a unique moment in international politics, when democratic movements were in the newspapers daily and the socialist countries' internal tensions with the Communist Party were omnipresent as the Soviet Union was crumbling. The international system was in a state of change, and that is a state for which rational IR theory is poorly-equipped to assess. Future research on this period might consider comparing a constructivist theory analysis to the foreign policy case-study approach.

Regardless of which IR theory approach is employed, the foreign policy case-study approach to analyzing the United States' response to the incident at Tiananmen Square is undeniably powerful. Using a model incorporating the role of personality proves that it is possible, if not likely, that another President – if not all other Presidents – would have chosen to act differently and implemented a stricter or less-nuanced response towards China.