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M. E. Sarotte. "China's Fear of Contagion. Tiananmen Square and the Power of the European Example." *International Security* 37:2 (Fall 2012): 156-182. DOI: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00101. http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00101

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The article contributes to the literature about the Chinese leadership's decision-making process at the time of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis by introducing new documents from the East German archives and the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library. Sarotte argues that one of the major reasons for the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) decision to resort to force was the top party leaders' "fear of the demonstration effects of democratic changes in Poland and Hungary" (161). Reminding readers that previous student protests of the reform era were not suppressed by military force, the author poses an intriguing counterfactual question: "without the example of 1989 in Eastern Europe, would the Beijing leaders' response have been as a bloody?" (162).

The article demonstrates how Eastern European democratization affected the thinking of the CCP leadership in early 1989, in April and May 1989 (right before the crackdown), and in late 1989. It also argues that the cost of taking military action was lowered by the expectation of the CCP leadership that the U.S. "would not go to extremes" (177) in its reaction to crack down and that Washington would ultimately attempt to preserve the Sino-American relationship.

The article's principle findings support earlier works that highlighted the importance of developments in Eastern Europe for the thinking of the CCP leadership in both Maoist and

Dengist eras. In 1974 Roderick MacFarquhar documented how 1950s unrest in Eastern Europe fuelled Mao's decision to launch the 1957 anti-rightist movement (which was presided over by Deng Xiaoping).¹ Richard Baum's influential 1994 account of the dynamics of reform-era Chinese politics emphasized how the political situation in Poland affected Deng's thinking about political reform throughout the 1980s.² For example, as Baum argues, in 1980, the growing political crisis in Poland initially prompted Deng and his more liberal-minded lieutenants to contemplate elements of "preemptive democratization" to stave off potential labor unrest in China.³ However, a serious worsening of Poland's political crisis and the possibility of chaos in that country contributed to the late 1980 decision to freeze further political reforms. Since that time, Deng's fear of Polish-type instability conditioned his approach to political reform. For example, in his December 30, 1986 speech devoted to student disturbances in China, Deng praised the Polish government's 1981 declaration of martial law in response to the Solidarity crisis. For Deng this was an ultimate proof "that you cannot succeed without recourse to methods of dictatorship."⁴ At the time of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, Deng's "recurrent Polish nightmare" was amplified by the emergence of an autonomous industrial workers' movement supporting the students.⁵

The archival evidence introduced by Sarotte confirms some of the insights from the Chinese sources of more uncertain provenance. For example, some of the comments made by Li Shuzheng Deputy Director of the International Relations Department of the CCP's Central Committee during her fall 1989 conversations with the East Germany leader Erick Honecker's heir apparent, Egon Krenz, echo the account of Deng Xiaoping's decision-making during the crisis contained in what is supposedly the diary of the former Prime Minister Li Peng⁶.

The documents used in the article also elucidate some of the fine details of Chinese elite politics at the time of the Tiananmen Crisis. For example, the February 1989 conversation between Prime Minister Li Peng and President George H. W. Bush (when Li Peng reminded his American guest that Deng Xiaoping remained China's pre-eminent leader "despite stepping down from most of his other official posts) demonstrates that such statements were standard in international meetings. This further weakens the accusation of CCP conservatives that General Secretary Zhao Ziyang (who told virtually the same thing to the visiting Mikhail Gorbachev in May 1989) betrayed an important party secret (165). In another example, documents used by Sarotte suggest that in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown, Deng Xiaoping was initially

¹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of Cultural Revolution, Vol. 1: Contradictions Among the People, 1956-1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974)

² Richard Baum, *Burying Mao. Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1994)

³ Baum, *Burying Mao*, 102-104.

⁴ Baum, *Burying Mao*, 205.

⁵ Baum, *Burying Mao*, 275.

⁶ *Li Peng liu si ri ji zhen xiang: fu lu Li Peng liu si ri ji yuan wen* [The True Story of Li Peng's June 4 Diaries: With the Original "June 4 Diaries" of Li Peng] (Hong Kong: Ao yao chu ban you xian gon si, 2010).

against removing Zhao Ziyang from all leadership positions (most likely as part of his continuing balancing against the CCP hardliners) (174-175).

Overall, the article is a welcome addition to the growing (but still relatively sparse) literature attempting to place Chinese politics in the context of China's relations with its key reference states.⁷ The broader significance of Sarotte's work is that it sheds additional light on the important interactions between international context, domestic politics, and democratic diffusion.

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⁷ For some of the major examples see Peter Nolan, *China's Rise, Russia's Fall: Politics, Economics, and Planning in the Transition from Stalinism* (New York: St. Martin's 1995); Christopher Marsh, *Unparalleled Reforms: China's Rise, Russia's Fall, and the Interdependence of Transition* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Thomas P. Bernstein and Hua-Yu Li eds., *China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949-Present* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010)