Why the People's Army Fired on the People: The Chinese Military and Tiananmen

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The flowering of the student protest movement in the People's Republic of China (PRC) in April 1989 and its bloody suppression by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) some two months later have been widely documented.[1] The use of lethal force to crush a nonviolent protest movement has been almost universally condemned. Rarely discussed or understood, however, are the factors that led to the PLA's opening fire with live ammunition on the citizenry of Beijing on 3–4 June 1989. This article seeks to explain why units of the PLA ultimately moved against the demonstrators with such ferocity and explores some major implications of the military's actions for the future of relations between China's armed forces and society.

Leaders and Party-Military Relations

Two points are critical to understanding the events of 1989: the role of a small but enormously influential group of elderly communists, and the relationship between the military and the Chinese Communist party (CCP). First, although China's aging paramount leader Deng Xiaoping insisted that the reins of power had been successfully handed over to a new, younger generation of leaders, the events of 1989 proved this was reversible.[2] By the end of 1988 the PRC's political elders, all veteran communists of the Long March era, were ostensibly either retired or on

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the verge of retirement. A new younger core of leaders had supposedly stepped to the fore—at least they occupied the most visible positions of authority in the formal hierarchy of the power structure; this generation administered the day-to-day affairs of the state, but major policy decisions were still made by the elders. A small circle of influential octogenarians still held unparalleled prestige by virtue of their association with the communist movement since its earliest days.

The most important of these men number some half a dozen. Most easily recognizable is Deng Xiaoping (b. 1904). Though he is the dominant figure as the events of 1989 clearly show, Deng is far from being the unchallenged ruler of China. Also extremely powerful are two former generals: State President Yang Shangkun (b. 1907), and Vice President Wang Zhen (b. 1908). Chinese often refer to this group as the "Gang of Elders."[3] Here they are referred to as the "elders."

Second, the CCP and the PLA hierarchies, especially at the higher echelons of leadership, remain inextricably intertwined. The role of the military in Chinese politics is usually analyzed within the rubric of *civil-military,* or *party-military* relations.[4] This division, while convenient for scholars is often an arbitrary one. Andrew Nathan has observed that the party and the army "have formed throughout their history a single institutional system with a single elite performing simultaneously the functions of political and military leadership."[5] Virtually all of the CCP's political leaders in pre-1949 China were also generals or political commissars in military units. Over time it has become easier to distinguish between the civilian and military hierarchies and the leaders—especially at the lower levels of the PLA—but the distinction between the two remain blurred at the highest level of political power.

Military figures who trace their careers as far back as the 1920s still exist. Old soldiers, such as President Yang Shangkun, retain strong followings within the PLA and hold top-level posts in both party and state bodies with direct responsibility for the PLA. Deng Xiaoping was a political commissar with the Second Field Army, and during the mid-1970s he also served as PLA chief of staff. He, like Yang, also retains tremendous support and prestige among China's soldiers. Thus, although they hold top posts in the party and state apparatus, both can be logically classified as "military men." During the critical months of April, May, and June, Deng and Yang were chair and vice chair, respectively, of both the Party Central Military Commission (CMC) and the State CMC.

This type of leadership constellation—identified as a distinctive characteristic of communist states—has been described as "dual role elites."[6] The party-military relationship in China is not adequately described as the

"penetration" of the military by the party, and is perhaps better described as party-military "interpenetration."[7]

Genesis of the Orders

The following three sections correspond to distinct phases of the crisis: the first describes the rise of the protest movement and the CCP leaders' response; the second addresses the CCP leadership's decision to impose martial law and order the PLA to intervene, which resulted in a standoff; and the third examines orders to use deadly force and the specific characteristics of the military operation on 3–4 June.

Phase One: The Initial Response to the Protest Movement

Deng Xiaoping's economic reform program, which had proceeded relatively smoothly and successfully for almost a decade, began to produce unwanted and unpopular results. By early 1989 urban Chinese were growing increasingly disgruntled with inflation, flagrant official corruption, and glaring inequities in the distribution of the fruits of the economic reform program. China's leaders vacillated on difficult decisions, and reformers were unable to offer quick or easy solutions. The elders blamed CCP Secretary Zhao Ziyang for the deteriorating economy, and Zhao's patron, Deng Xiaoping, considered the party chief a mounting political liability.

Sparked by the death of former CCP Secretary Hu Yaobang on 15 April, the spontaneous student demonstrations rapidly gained momentum. Unrest also spread to other parts of China: protests were held in many other cities, and rioting erupted in Changsha and Xian on 22 April. After students began a boycott of classes on 24 April, the elders issued a stern warning: a strongly worded editorial in the *People's Daily* of 26 April condemned the demonstrations.[8] Rather than intimidating the students, the editorial only served to invigorate the movement. The following day saw the largest crowd since the beginning of the crisis: more than 100,000 students forced their way past police cordons into Tiananmen Square, cheered on by a crowd of some 500,000 onlookers. The intensity of the movement and the breadth of support it attracted caught the leadership of the CCP off guard and divided.

The situation was complicated by two high-profile international events scheduled for May. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) was convening its first-ever meeting in Beijing, and the city was hosting the first Sino-

Soviet summit in 30 years. World attention focused on the Chinese capital, yet both events were overshadowed by the mass demonstrations. The protests disrupted scheduled activities: the official welcoming ceremonies for Gorbachev on 15 May were held at the airport instead of Tiananmen Square, which was awash in a sea of demonstrators.[9]

As the weeks went by, the demonstrations did not let up. Token displays of strength by public-security officers and units of the People's Armed Police (PAP) aimed at intimidating the students seemed only to revitalize the protests. Meanwhile, a consensus began to emerge among China's top leaders: in their eyes, negotiation and restraint had failed. Student demands were growing progressively more radical and rebellious. As the protests continued, party elders grew increasingly frustrated and restless. Their anger was not directed only at the student demonstrators but at the younger leaders of the party and government who, in the elders' opinion, were proving incapable of rapidly resolving the crisis.

Thus, the student demonstrations confronted a leadership divided over economic policy and embroiled in a power struggle in which Zhao Ziyang was fighting for political survival. Further, hordes of foreign journalists were in Beijing to cover the ADB meeting and Sino-Soviet summit. Deng and other top leaders were furious about the prolonged student occupation of Tiananmen Square—which demarcates both the city center and the symbolic heart of China—but were unwilling to evict them forcefully while the international media recorded the event. Faced with this unusual combination of circumstances, China's leaders handled matters less by deliberate design than by paralysis and ineptitude.

Phase Two: Martial Law is Declared and a Standoff Results

After Gorbachev's visit the leadership made an attempt at compromise: Premier Li Peng held a dialogue with student leaders in the Great Hall of the People on 18 May. When Li Peng failed to convince the students to end their protests, the elders decided to impose martial law in the capital and suppress the demonstrations. Li Peng declared martial law on state television in the early hours of 20 May at the conclusion of an "extraordinary" meeting of the CCP Central Committee and the State Council with Beijing municipal party, government, and military cadres.[10]

Martial law officially went into effect in the central area of the capital at 10 a.m. on 20 May. Martial law had never been imposed in Beijing before—even during times of major upheaval.[11] The act was an attempt both to intimidate the students and to pay token heed to constitutional

law: martial law was formally declared by Li Peng in his capacity as premier of the State Council, under the authority of the 1982 State Constitution.[12] President Yang Shangkun spoke briefly after Li, announcing that troops had already been dispatched to the city to restore order. Shortly afterwards Beijing Mayor Chen Xitong issued three martial law orders, which, among other things, instructed troops and police to enforce martial law by "whatever means necessary."[13]

The actual decision to impose martial law was apparently made at a Politburo Standing Committee meeting a few days before, probably late on 17 May. The meeting was reportedly called by Deng at his residence, and all five members of the Standing Committee—Li Peng, Zhao Ziyang, security chief Qiao Shi, Vice Premier Yao Yilin, and propaganda chief Hu Qili attended. In addition, three elders—Deng, Yang Shangkun, and Li Xiannian—were present, despite the fact that none were members of this body. After heated discussion, Deng called for a show of hands on the question of whether to impose martial law. The vote was reportedly five to two in favor, with Zhao and Hu dissenting. After this meeting Yang, Li Peng, and Qiao reportedly formed a "temporary small leadership group" to oversee the imposition of martial law in Beijing.[14]

Shortly after Li Peng declared martial law, troops began maneuvers in the vicinity of the city center. In a show of force, small units, some armed, others without weapons, tried to convince demonstrators to disperse. Instead of weakening the resolve of the demonstrators, these efforts seemed to galvanize student protesters and revitalize public sympathy for them. Citizens began almost immediately to impede the progress of troops: military trucks were halted and their tires slashed. These acts of defiance quickly multiplied as hundreds of thousands of Beijing residents spontaneously poured out onto the streets to block the roads leading to the square when troops approached. The soldiers, many of whom were unarmed, were stopped in their tracks, surrounded in a sea of civilians.

To the elders and other CCP leaders, China seemed on the brink of chaos, and the crisis seemed to demand swift, decisive action; the protests had to be suppressed and order restored. Traditionally, Chinese governments have felt it necessary to claim a monopoly on morality. The students directly challenged this claim by capturing the moral high ground. A critical event in this regard was the hunger strike that began on 13 May. In a political culture in which symbolism is everything, the demonstrators' carefully worded moralistic appeals and scrupulously nonviolent deeds paradoxically raised the stakes in the eyes of China's leaders. The contest soon escalated "from moralizing to revenge," with both top student leaders and the elders viewing the protests as a symbolic battle to the death.[15]

The elders also came to fear they might be physically overthrown. They were apparently deeply worried about the threat of a military coup d'etat and the possibility of civil war. There was clearly tremendous sympathy and support for the youthful protestors not only among the common people but also within the ranks of the CCP. As the depth and breadth of popular discontent became clear, Zhao Ziyang sought to champion the movement's cause. In mid-May he publicly criticized Deng Xiaoping and openly voiced support for the student movement.[16] Zhao disappeared from public view after a tearful meeting with students in Tiananmen Square just before martial law was declared. Rumors circulated of pro-Zhao plotters within the CCP and/or PLA who might try and seized power.[17]

Obvious and alarming signs of public discontent and protest appeared throughout Beijing and in virtually all major Chinese cities. The student demonstrators were joined by intellectuals, workers, and members of nearly all organizations within the capital, including the party newspaper, the *People's Daily,* and members of the military and the Public Security Bureau. Demonstrations occurred across China, and the nightmare most feared by the octogenarians was also looming: a fledgling workers movement independent of CCP control.[18] These were the visible signs, but Beijing was also rife with rumors of plots.

Thus, on 9 June when Deng spoke of a full-blown "rebellion" confronting martial-law enforcement troops, he spoke in all seriousness.[19] What constituted a rebellion in his eyes? Anything that conflicted with the Four Cardinal Principles declared by Deng in 1979 and enshrined in the 1982 PRC constitution—namely, adherence to the socialist road, leadership of the CCP, Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, and the people's democratic dictatorship. Indeed he was right: during the final days of the protests at least some activists did call for the overthrow of the CCP.[20]

Phase Three: The Bloody Crackdown

In one sense, the decision by China's leaders to use armed troops to break the deadlock in Beijing was similar to Romanian leader Ion Iliescu's June 1990 appeal to coal miners to come to Bucharest and disperse antigovernment protesters. Both governments felt impotent to deal with determined demonstrators paralyzing normal activity in their respective capitals. As with the National Salvation Front government's appeal to miners in Romania, the Chinese elders' call to the PLA to disperse the demonstrators in central Beijing was an act of desperation. In the eyes of

the Romanian government, efforts by the police had failed. Lacking authority within the army, which was reticent to move against civilians, the new regime appealed to one of its few loyal groups—the coal miners. In the eyes of China's leaders, police efforts, dialogue, and finally threat and intimidation had failed to break the resolve of the protesters. The parallel is in the level of desperation felt by both governments, which drove them to extreme measures.[21]

It is not unusual for a government faced with civil unrest to show little hesitation in calling out the troops. It is a common knee-jerk reaction by governments to riots or demonstrations—even when a riot-control capability is present.[22] While national and regional police usually possess the crowd-control equipment and training, there are many factors that lead governments to bypass the police. Ideally police riot-control units should be ready on short notice; however, there is often significant lag time between when they are called upon and when they are ready to be deployed. Also, the numbers of riot police available may be wholly inadequate to deal with huge crowds, or the police may be poorly trained. In some countries the mere presence of riot police can provoke crowd violence—witness the almost ritualized street warfare between riot police and radicals in Japan and South Korea in recent years.

Following abortive efforts by large numbers of troops on 2 June and early morning on 3 June to advance toward the city center, the fateful decision was made to restore normalcy to the capital with deadly force. While details of when, how, and by whom the actual decision was made are sketchy, deduction and analysis of the limited evidence reveal a fairly coherent picture. The decision was probably made either in the late morning or early afternoon of 3 June.[23] The decision itself was either made by Deng alone or by Deng and several other prominent individuals—probably elders. It is difficult to imagine how such a critical decision and subsequent order could have come without Deng's approval. No other individual can match Deng's level of prestige or authority. Most likely the decision was also approved by members of the shadowy "temporary small leadership group."[24]

Had the order been issued by any lower authority, it almost certainly would have been challenged. That the decision was made by the commander of the Martial Law Enforcement Command (who significantly has never been publicly identified) is unlikely. No senior officer would have been willing to take responsibility for the drastic order, given the open opposition to such a move at all levels of the PLA.

Some troops marched publicly in support of the students. On 16 May a group of approximately 1,000 soldiers in camouflage combat fatigues

marched arm-in-arm along Changan Boulevard to show their solidarity with the student protestors. A week later a group of some 100 PLA naval cadets marched through Tiananmen Square in full uniform shouting: "Down with Li Peng!" At least one antiintervention poster appears to have been put up by military men in the aftermath of 4 June on the National Defense University campus in Beijing.[25]

Many officers publicly declared themselves against using troops to suppress the student movement. The public letters and pronouncements issued by both senior military leaders and highly respected retired veterans are the most glaring evidence of the depth and spread of opposition to using force against the students. Retired marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian publicly insisted that the PLA should not be used to suppress the protests. There were at least several other open letters. Former defense minister Zhang Aiping along with other military figures including Yang Dezhi, Xiao Ke, Ye Fei, and Chen Zaidao urged that the PLA not be sent into the capital. Their letter to the party CMC and the Martial Law Headquarters stated: "The PLA belongs to the people. It should not confront the people, much less suppress them." Another open letter written by unnamed middle-ranking officers was sent to the commission urging restraint and supporting Zhao Ziyang.[26] PLA commanders also knew that CCP leaders were divided over how to respond to the crisis, and the former were unwilling to become pawns in a factional struggle. These considerations help explain the reluctance of PLA units to suppress the demonstrations.[27]

While the specific wording of the order itself was ambiguous, the content of the decision is clear. The vague language was probably deliberate since no one wanted to assume direct responsibility for the decision and any resulting bloodshed. Troops were simply instructed to empty Tiananmen Square of demonstrators as quickly as possible.[28] Radio, television, and loudspeaker announcements starting in the late afternoon on 3 June warned Beijing residents to stay indoors. The bulletin stated that soldiers and policemen had "the right to use all means to forcefully dispose of [those who defy martial law regulations]."[29] Such orders, according to a Hong Kong newspaper, were tantamount to telling troops and police that they could "kill on the spot with the authority of the law."[30] The elders undoubtedly realized that their decision would lead to bloodshed. However, under the circumstances, they felt this was an acceptable price to pay for clearing the streets and reestablishing their authority.

The General Military Response

In many units the troops were extremely reluctant to move against civilians because they had been indoctrinated into believing that the PLA was truly an army of the people. In the unlikely event that troops might overlook such propaganda, they were constantly reminded of it by Beijing crowds; soldiers were told by civilians that they were the people's army and that they should not move against the people.

During the military crackdown, numerous stories circulated of individual units or whole armies battling each other—some supporting the people and others backing the crackdown. It now seems that these rumors, which many desperately wanted to believe, were false.[31] In the wake of the crushing of the movement rumors were epidemic: Deng was dead or near death, and an assassin had wounded Li Peng.[32]

Some observers speculate that the large numbers of troops and sophisticated weaponry in the Beijing vicinity indicated that PLA units had clashed with units opposed to the crackdown. Estimates on the number of troops in and around the capital range from 150,000 to 350,000. Some were equipped with antiaircraft guns and heavy artillery.[33] It is not clear why troops and tanks deployed themselves as if to protect Beijing from an external assault. Perhaps experts are overlooking the obvious explanation: when facing serious unrest thought to be a "counterrevolutionary rebellion," one does not take chances.

The army believed that members of the CCP leadership may have been involved and that a coup d'etat might be attempted. Given the initial reluctance of certain units to move against the protesters and the blatant insubordination of some leaders, the elders were uncertain about the reliability of military units. At least token units representing more than half of the PLA Group armies participated in the 3–4 June operation. In this climate it was better to err on the side of excessive numbers in order to deal with any unexpected development. Also, the presence of units from across China did not allow the troops of any one commander to completely dominate the proceedings—thus discouraging thoughts any officer might have of launching a coup d'etat.

The indecision over the use of troops and the resulting delay in moving them into the city probably helped to consolidate a consensus among key military officers once the decision was made. The turning point may have come when military officers began to fear the ultimate disintegration of PLA unity and discipline, and when they perceived that senior party leaders were united on a single course of action. A consensus probably emerged among both senior civilian and military leaders that the unrest

had gone on too long. Many officers, including younger reform-minded leaders who supported or sympathized with the student movement, probably began to fear that China might sink into chaos. Once it was clear that Zhao had lost the power struggle, there seemed little alternative to leadership of the elders. Most officers ultimately concluded that for the good of the nation they had to restore order.[34] Thus, when orders came down from the highest echelon of the Chinese leadership to break up the demonstrations, most soldiers were likely relieved finally to have decisive orders to obey.

The Operational Response

Once units of the PLA began the serious business of crushing the protest movement, weeks of remarkable civilian self-control and military discipline gave way to pent-up feelings of anger and frustration. The outburst was exacerbated by the inadequate training and inappropriate equipment of the military units involved in the operation.

The officers and enlisted men of the PLA had been under constant and unrelenting pressure for weeks. They were not used to being opposed by civilians, nor were they accustomed to being unable to follow orders. First confused, then frustrated, and finally humiliated, the soldiers could not understand the greater forces at work in the Chinese capital or the exhilaration and self-confidence of the students and ordinary Chinese citizens who confronted them. The firm but usually amiable resistance of these people confounded the soldiers. As time went on, this bewilderment turned to frustration as military units were unable to carry out even the simplest orders.

The soldiers were also confronted by increasingly ugly crowds. Troops saw their comrades injured and physically exhausted by a combination of crowd violence, freak accidents, and hot weather. The change in the crowd's mood and behavior occurred earlier than many observers realize. Angry and violent confrontations between PLA forces and civilians took place well before 3–4 June. Although isolated, these incidents tended to darken the mood both of the PLA and the public. The first violent scuffle took place on 18 April outside the Xinhua Gate, the main entrance to the Zhongnanhai complex housing China's top leaders. Soldiers as well as PAP members cleared an unruly crowd outside the gate.[35] Several other serious clashes between soldiers and demonstrators occurred in mid-May.[36] At least one soldier was killed and dozens were injured in the line of duty well before 3–4 June. A PLA officer was reportedly killed in an accident

in the western suburbs of Beijing on 23 May: he either fell off a moving truck, or was accidently knocked under the wheels of an oncoming vehicle while engaged in crowd control. News of his death spread to other military units, and he was quickly canonized as a "revolutionary hero."[37] In late May, dozens of soldiers and PAP members were injured severely enough to be hospitalized.[38] Dehydration, heat stroke, and exhaustion were common problems in the summer heat, as many troops marched or jogged for miles in heavy military gear, and without adequate water and food.[39] Gifts of food and drink from students and bystanders likely compounded the soldiers' sense of frustration and confusion over their predicament.[40]

The PLA's self-restraint and patience were beginning to wear thin after weeks of standoff. The crowds, although generally sympathetic and well behaved, humiliated the soldiers, lecturing, berating, and even cursing PLA troops.[41] In the early morning on 3 June, some troops were reportedly stripped of their uniforms and beaten so badly that they were reduced to tears.[42] Perhaps the final straw came when fresh troops waiting on the outskirts of Beijing saw tired, dejected, and distraught comrades returning from unsuccessful attempts to enter the city center.[43]

In a growing number of incidents the crowds became less friendly and more suspicious and even angry. The mood of the people changed because the PLA had not joined them; also unsettling were rumors of violence against crowds by military and police. The crowds began to sense that although the military might be sympathetic to their cause, it would not abandon the authorities and join the demonstrators *en masse.* Many realized that instead of an ally, the army had become the enemy. The sense of suspicion and foreboding was heightened by a traffic accident on 2 June. A speeding police jeep careened into a crowd, killing three persons and injuring another. Although the driver appears simply to have lost control of the vehicle, rumors swept through Beijing that the incident was a deliberately staged provocation.[44] Tension ran high in the capital, and the number of demonstrators, which had dwindled during the week, began to rise again. The expectations of further troop movements seemed well founded when, early on Saturday morning, troops on the outskirts of Beijing—mostly unarmed—made a determined effort to enter the city center. The force was repulsed only after a violent scuffle with angry crowds. Crowds also discovered caches of weapons with out-of-uniform officers on buses attempting to enter central Beijing.[45]

Television and radio broadcasts on Saturday afternoon and evening warned residents to stay indoors. The announcement marked an escalation in the government's efforts to suppress the demonstrations, but based on the military response up to that date, many citizens could not believe they

were in mortal danger. The people's army would never fire on the people.[46] The events of the past weeks had lulled the demonstrators into a false sense of security: the government seemed powerless against the crowds, and the army was unwilling to move against them.

When troops first began shooting late on 3 June civilians could not believe they were using live ammunition until people began to fall and blood began to flow. This realization provoked outrage among some, who set upon troops with frightening ferocity.

Many of the troops used in the Beijing crackdown were very young—18 and 19 years of age.[47] Some of the troops displayed little discipline, were poorly trained, and badly led.[48] Certainly some of their actions were more characteristic of rampaging rebels than disciplined infantrymen. Troops reportedly attacked wildly and randomly without provocation, firing on medical personnel and ambulances—clearly marked as such—that were trying to aid wounded civilians.[49] Other targets of indiscriminate fire were bicyclists, pedestrians, and even diplomatic compounds and ordinary apartment buildings.[50] Some of this behavior can be explained by the anger and frustration unleashed that fateful weekend. Soldiers had heard of comrades injured or killed by civilians or witnessed the brutality of frenzied civilians against soldiers first-hand. Untrained in the intricacies of riot control or urban warfare, some troops panicked. Desertions may account for many of the 400 soldiers reported missing.[51]

This inexperience and lack of training in urban warfare likely contributed to the casualty rate: many of the injuries and deaths among the troops appear to have been inflicted by fellow soldiers in the chaos of battle.[52] Eyewitnesses reported that on 4 June an armored car traveling at high speed away from Tiananmen Square smashed into a truck full of soldiers, knocking it over, killing at least one and injuring many others. That same evening, armored cars speeding toward the city center were tailing each other so closely that they were unable to brake without crashing into each other when the lead vehicle stopped suddenly. Troops simply set ablaze and abandoned their wrecked vehicles in their haste to reach Tiananmen Square.[53] Many soldiers almost certainly sustained injuries from accidents like this chain collision.

PLA officers involved in the operation insist their troops were well disciplined and obeyed orders. According to these officers, units fired only when attacked and only when ordered to do so. Troops were said to have first fired into the air, and to have fired on crowds only when this failed to dissuade rioters. Some accounts by the troops themselves seem refreshingly—sometimes brutally—honest, matter-of-fact, and free from propaganda.[54]

The Party Line on the Use of Deadly Force

The party line put out by senior Chinese leaders in the aftermath of 3–4 June is consistent but deplorable. The heavy loss of life is regretted, but the casualties—hundreds killed and thousands injured—were unavoidable, according to officials.[55] The PLA did not have units trained or equipped to deal with riots. While units of the PAP are equipped with tear gas, shields, and batons, these were only marginally used. Antiriot squads were created in the early 1980s, but it appears these units were too small and not adequately trained or equipped to have a significant effect. According to Premier Li Peng, PLA Chief of Staff Chi Haotian, and Vice Minister of Public Security Tao Siji, riot-control equipment was unavailable.[56] Quite possibly such equipment was inaccessible or in disrepair. What is certain is that the few PAP riot-control units deployed were ineffective in dealing with the vast crowds.[57] The police also proved incapable of dealing with the demonstrations. It should also be noted that China does produce its own tear gas: the Jingan Corporation, with close links to the PAP, even markets tear gas and other items to foreign buyers.[58] Further, China also imports riot-control gear.[59]

The evidence points to gross government incompetence. Although senior Chinese leaders maintain publicly that the crackdown was justified, there are clear signs from the leaders themselves that they consider 3–4 June a botched job. New CCP Secretary Jiang Zemin admitted that the authorities had erred in not maintaining an adequate force of police equipped with nonlethal weapons.[60] Since June 1989 there has been a concerted effort to create new and more effective riot-control units in major Chinese cities.[61] Perhaps the best indication of party thinking is that the two most prominent new rising stars at the national level in the aftermath of 4 June—the former mayor of Shanghai, Jiang Zemin (the new CCP head), and the former mayor of Tianjin, Li Ruihuan (the new propaganda chief)—handled the mass demonstrations in their respective cities in a sophisticated and peaceful manner.[62]

Implications

First, the sacred bond between the PLA and the Chinese people has been irreparably damaged.[63] Since June 1989 the *Liberation Army Daily* has openly acknowledged that the public reputation of the PLA has been seriously undermined.[64] The army had enjoyed high prestige and reverence among virtually all Chinese. Although its image had been tarnished

somewhat in recent years, the PLA managed to retain a mystique associated with its heroic exploits against successive enemies: the Japanese, the Kuomintang, and the United States (in Korea). This aura was perpetuated by "Learn from the PLA" campaigns and the army's restoration of order during the Cultural Revolution.

At least in Beijing there has been a noticeable decline in the prestige of the PLA among Chinese people and a rise in feelings of anger and revenge directed at the army. Snipers continued to fire on troops for days after 3–4 June, and in the three-month period following the bloody crackdown there were more than 160 civilian attacks against troops stationed in Beijing, causing more than 30 PLA deaths.[65] Less dramatic, but equally telling, is the significant falloff in the sales of army-style hats for children, which had been very popular.[66]

When an army is employed by a government against its fellow citizens, such a negative reaction is understandable and not uncommon. Similar public outrage was directed at the military in South Korea after the crushing of the Kwangju uprising in 1980, and in Burma after the bloody suppression of student protesters in Rangoon in 1988.

Second, there has been a corresponding decline in military morale. Armies resent being ordered to move against their own people. Armies dislike playing policeman. The use of the army to crush the 1970 street protests in Poland reportedly dealt a devastating blow to military morale. The same appears to be true in Burma following that government's 1988 crackdown.[67]

The evidence of the decline in PLA morale again is fragmentary but convincing. For example, the PLA seems to have taken very seriously rumors of Beijing residents trying to poison soldiers' drinking water.[68] Given the events of the past decade, morale was not that high to begin with. Under Deng, China's priority has been economic modernization, and the PLA had endured the demobilization of some one million men, a declining share of the national budget, and the lessening of its political influence. The PLA has encountered difficulties in meeting recruitment goals because an army career, once viewed as a promising path of social mobility, is less attractive when so many more lucrative careers are available.

Third, the PLA is likely to be less willing to obey orders to move against civilians next time. Here the example of Poland is instructive. In 1956 when ordered by the government to move against striking workers in the city of Poznan, the army shot dead dozens of civilians. In 1970 when the government ordered the army to suppress striking Polish workers the army was deeply divided and many generals, commanders, and

units refused to obey.[69] When Polish workers rioted in 1976, then defense minister Jaruzelski reportedly insisted: "Polish soldiers will not fire on Polish workers."[70]

Fourth, middle-aged or young officers in the PLA might decide the time has come to take control of the CCP. Here again, the Polish example is instructive. After following orders to fire on civilians in 1956 and balking in the 1970s, in 1981 the military seized the reins of power in the party. Martial law was declared, and dissidents and top party leaders were interned by the military.[71] Some PLA officers may conclude, as Polish soldiers did, that the army must rescue the party from itself.[72]

The collapse of communist governments in Eastern Europe might even lead PLA officers to conclude that communism is an anachronism. The example of the Romanian army in the December 1989 revolution, which deserted Nicholae Ceausescu, might seem particularly relevant to some PLA officers. While the story of the Romanian revolution is still incomplete, it appears the refusal of army units to fire on civilians was critical in Ceausescu's overthrow.[73] A rumored military revolt in Inner Mongolia may be a tentative step in that direction.[74] Certainly, younger PLA officers have expressed great admiration for noncommunist foreign military heroes who became political leaders. One group has established a De Gaulle Society.[75]

If the people's army is once again called upon to move against the people, there is no guarantee that it will obey. Such a situation may arise when the current fragile status quo is disrupted by the death of Deng Xiaoping and candidate strongmen vie for supremacy. If soldiers fire on civilians again, the result could be a severe splintering of both the CCP and the PLA. Rather than risk the consequences of direct military-civilian confrontation, the authorities will likely rely heavily on the newly established riot-control units. The PRC's first antiriot squads proved so ill-prepared in 1989 that the authorities are now making a determined effort to ensure these new units will be effective.

The army's ultimate test may come after the elders have passed on. The party-army relationship in China is evolving from *symbiotic* with interaction at all levels to *coalitional* with interaction only at the highest strata.[76] A crucial indicator of the PLA's role in another crisis is the degree of party-army interpenetration. If it is strong, the PLA should function as the "party in uniform" and move to bolster a faltering CCP; if it is weak, the PLA's role will be less predictable; if this interpenetration ceases to exist, the PLA might assume a role more like that of the military in many Latin American states.[77] In any event, the PLA should remain the ultimate political arbiter in China for the foreseeable future.

Notes

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1. See, for example, Yi Mu and Mark V. Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen: Reform and Reality* (San Francisco: China Books, 1989); *Problems of Communism* 38 (September/October 1989) [entire issue]; Amnesty International, *Preliminary Findings on the Killings of Unarmed Civilians, Arbitrary Arrests and Summary Executions Since June 3, 1989* (New York: Amnesty International Publications, 1989) [hereafter *Preliminary Findings*]. On the military's role, see June Teufel Dreyer, "China After Tiananmen: The Role of the PLA," *World Policy Journal* 4 (Fall 1989): 647–56; June Teufel Dreyer, "The People's Liberation Army and the Power Struggle of 1989," *Problems of Communism* 38 (September/October 1989): 41–48; Harlan W. Jencks, "The Military in China," *Current History* 88 (September 1989): 265–68, 291–93; Harlan W. Jencks, "The Losses in Tiananmen Square," *Air Force Magazine* 72 (November 1989): 62–66.

2. Ironically, an important aspect of Deng's political reforms was a reinvigoration of the bureaucracy. Older officials were encouraged to retire and younger, more energetic ones were promoted.

3. John P. Burns, "China's Governance: Political Reform in a Turbulent Environment," *China Quarterly* (London) no. 119 (September 1989): 483–84. Other elders include conservative economist, Chen Yun (b. 1905); retired National People's Congress chairman Peng Zhen (b. 1902); Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Chairman and former general, Li Xiannian (b. 1909).

4. See, for example, Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982); and Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987). For a different analysis, see Eberhard Sandschneider, "Military and Politics in the PRC," in *Chinese Defense and Foreign Policy,* ed. June Teufel Dreyer (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 331–50.

5. Andrew Nathan, "A Factional Model of Chinese Politics," *China Quarterly* no. 53 (January/March 1973): 58.

6. Amos Perlmutter and William M. LeoGrande, "The Party in Uniform: Toward a Theory of Civil-Military Relations in Communist Political Systems," *American Political Science Review* 76 (December 1982): 778–89.

7. *Penetration* is used to describe civilian control of the military in communist systems. See Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 15–18. *Interpenetration* is used to describe party-army relations in Yugoslavia. See Robin Alison Remington, "Political-Military Relations in Post-Tito Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavia in the 1980s,* ed. Pedro Ramet (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985), 57. Cheng Hsiao-shih contends that the PRC political-commissar system is a mechanism by which the PLA exerts its influence on the CCP. See his *Party-Military Relations in the PRC and Taiwan: Paradoxes of Control* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990).

8. For the 26 April editorial, see "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," in *China Quarterly* no. 119 (September 1989): 717–19.

9. See, for example, Li Peng's interview in *Die Welt* (Hamburg), 20 November 1989 [hereafter Li Peng Interview], Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: China* [hereafter FBIS-CHI], 22 November 1990, 26.

10. Zhongguo Xinwenshi (Beijing) and *Renmin Ribao* (Beijing), 20 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 22 May 1989, 21–23; *Wen Wei Po* (Hong Kong), 25 June 1989, in FBIS-CHI, 26 June 1989, 34; Yi and Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen,* 64–66.

11. Martial law, of course, was declared in the Tibetan city of Lhasa in March 1989 after bloody ethnic riots broke out.

12. Technically the declaration imposed martial law only on "parts" of the capital, but as far as soldiers and civilians were concerned, the entire municipality was affected. The 1982 PRC constitution permits the State Council to impose martial law in parts of a municipality (article 89). Only the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress has the formal authority to place an entire municipality under martial law (article 67). For the martial law announcement, see Beijing television, 20 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 22 May 1989, 26.

13. For the martial law orders issued on 20 May 1989, see "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* no. 119 (September 1989): 723–24.

14. On the meeting, see *Ching Pao Monthly* (Hong Kong), June 1989, 23; *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong) [hereafter *SCMP*], 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 23 May 1989, 42; Agence France Presse (Hong Kong) [hereafter AFP], 22 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 22 May 1989, 20–21; Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Update: How the Hardliners Won," *New York Times Magazine,* 12 November 1989, 95. The leadership group seems to have included Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, and Qiao Shi. It was likely chaired by Yang or Wang Zhen. See *SCMP,* 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 23 May 1989, 42; *Ming Pao* (Hong Kong) 12 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 12 June 1989, 20; Kyodo (Tokyo), 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 24 May 1989, 18.

15. Lucian Pye, "Tiananmen and Chinese Political Culture: The Escalation of Confrontation from Moralizing to Revenge," *Asian Survey* 30 (April 1990): 331–47.

16. On Zhao's "mistakes," see "Beijing Mayor's Address to the NPC Standing Committee on Background to the 4th June Massacre," in *China Quarterly* no. 120 (December 1989): 919–46.

17. *Asiaweek* (Hong Kong), 9 June 1989, 26. Deng told military leaders on 9 June that a "rebellious clique" wanted to "overthrow our state and the Party." See "Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation," *China Quarterly* no. 119 (September 1989) [hereafter "Deng's Speech,"], 725.

18. On workers and labor unions, see Wang Shaoguang, "Analyzing the Role of Workers in the Recent Protest Movement," in *China: The Crisis of 1989—Origins and Implications,* ed. Roger V. Des Forges, Luo Ning, and Wu Yenbo (Buffalo: Buffalo Council on International Studies and Programs, State University of New York, 1990), 234–44.

19. "Deng's Speech," 725.

20. See "Beijing Mayor's Address." But there is no evidence of a well-organized plot. Very few dissidents explicitly advocated the violent overthrow of the CCP. See Andrew Nathan, "Chinese Democracy in 1989: Continuity and Change," *Problems of Communism* 38 (September/October 1989): 26–27.

21. See Daniel N. Nelson's op-ed piece in *New York Times,* 19 June 1990.

22. Personal communication, Harry Wells, formerly of the Royal Hong Kong Police and a riot-control expert.

23. "Beijing Mayor's Address," 940; Shi Wei, "What Has Happened in Beijing?" in *The June Turbulence* (Beijing: New Star Publishers, 1989), 43; *Hong Kong Standard* (Hong Kong) [hereafter *HKS*], 5 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 10; *Ming Pao* 12 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 12 June 1989, 19–20.

24. Various sources claim that the crackdown was championed by Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, or Qiao Shi. *Ming Pao,* 5 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 79; *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), 4 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 23.

25. See *Hsin Wan Pao* (Hong Kong), 17 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 17 May 1989, 57; AFP, 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 24 May 1989, 29; *Ming Pao,* 5 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 8.

26. Kyodo, 22 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 22 May 1989, 4; *SCMP,* 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 23 May 1989, 41–42; *Ming Pao,* 22 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 22 May 1989, 5–6; Zhongguo Tongxunshi (Hong Kong), 18 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 18 May 1989, 38–39.

27. On grounds of military professionalism as it is understood by many scholars of civil-military relations, the PLA should have responded without hesitation to its orders. That it did not suggests one of two things: either the PLA does not meet the minimal standards of a professional military, or—more likely—that the PLA has a different concept of this term. See Dreyer, "Power Struggle of 1989."

28. Melanie Manion, "Introduction," in *Beijing Spring, 1989: Confrontation and Conflict: The Basic Documents,* ed. Michel Oksenberg, Lawrence R. Sullivan and Marc Lambert (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), xxxix.

29. *China Daily,* 5 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 76–77.

30. *Ta Kung Pao,* 4 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 23.

31. For the rumors, see Hong Kong television , 6 June 1989, *Ming Pao, Ta Kung Pao,* and *Wen Wei Po,* 7 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 7 June 1989, 26–28; *Washington Post,* 6 June 1989, A1, A14; *Wall Street Journal,* 7 June 1989, A28; *New York Times,* 9 June 1989, A11. For the evidence, see Dreyer, "Power Struggle of 1989," 45; Jencks, "Military in China," 267. Tai Ming Cheung concludes a few clashes occurred. See *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong) [hereafter *FEER*], 5 October 1989, 69.

32. Commercial Radio (Hong Kong) and *SCMP,* 5 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 52; *Ming Pao,* 6 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 6 June 1989, 17–18.

33. Dreyer, "China After Tiananmen," 651; *SCMP,* 10 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 12 June 1989, 16; *Ming Pao,* 7 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 7 June 1989, 25.

34. Jencks, "Losses in Tiananmen Square," 64. Gerald Segal, who argues that the PLA cannot be identified as a "group actor" in Chinese politics, still acknowledges that the military tends to be united "on the most basic issue of supporting domestic political order." See his "The Military as a Group in Chinese Politics," in *Groups and Politics in the People's Republic of China,* ed. David S.G. Goodman (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1984), 94.

35. *The Financial Times* (London), 19 April 1989, 1; *Cheng Ming* (Hong Kong), 1 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 2 May 1989, 28. Most accounts do not mention that troops were involved.

36. *Washington Post,* 23 May 1989, A18; *SCMP,* 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 23 May 1989, 41; Xinhua (Beijing), 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 24 May 1989, 39–40.

37. Radio Beijing, 24 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 25 May 1989, 25; Beijing television, 29 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 29 May 1989, 56.

38. Hundreds of PAP and public-security personnel were also injured. See Xinhua (Beijing), 25 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 26 May 1989, 6; Beijing television, 28 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 31 May 1989, 57; Shi Wei, "Why Impose Martial Law in Beijing?" in *The June Turbulence,* 37.

39. Xinhua (Beijing), 24 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 25 May 1989, 36; Tanjug (Belgrade), 3 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 27; "State Council Spokesman Yuan Mu Held a Press Conference ...," in *The June Turbulence,* 11–12; *Preliminary Findings,* 5.

40. See, for example, *Washington Post,* 21 May 1989, A1; *Beijing Review,* 5–11 June 1989, 13.

41. *Renmin Ribao,* 23 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 25 May 1989, 40; *Wen Wei Po,* 25 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 25 May 1989, 25; Dreyer, "Power Struggle of 1989," 46.

42. Shi Wei, "What Has Happened in Beijing?" 42.

43. Personal communication, Professor Huan Guocang, Columbia University.

44. Yi and Thompson, *Crisis at Tiananmen,* 78–81. Although the vehicle involved had police license plates at the time of the accident it was allegedly on loan to Chinese state television. See *Renmin Ribao,* 10 June 1989, 1.

45. *Preliminary Findings,* 5. The weapons may have been deliberately left for civilians to obtain and use – thus providing an excuse for the PLA to use deadly force against the protests. See Huan Guocang, "The Events of Tiananmen Square," *Orbis* 33 (Fall 1989): 497. More likely, however, the military sought to move weapons secretly to supply unarmed troops who were infiltrating the city center. See Kristof, "China Update," 71.

46. This was the pervasive feeling of people in the streets at that time, according to most published accounts and reports given to the author by eyewitnesses.

47. "Deng's Speech," 726.

48. June Dreyer called the soldiers "misfits." See *Wall Street Journal,* 7 June 1989, A28.

49. *Preliminary Findings,* 16–17.

50. See, for example, *Wall Street Journal,* 8 June 1989, A1, A16; *Preliminary Findings,* 12–17.

51. On the alleged shortage of riot-control gear, see *Washington Post,* 7 July 1989, A1, A27. On the lack of riot-control training, see Jencks, "Military in China," 267. On desertions, see Hong Kong Radio, 3 June 1989, FBIS-CHI, 5 June 1989, 28. As of 6 June, 400 officers and enlisted men were reportedly missing. See "State Council Spokesman," 5.

52. Many PLA deaths were probably from "friendly fire." See Gerald Segal, "The Future of the People's Liberation Army," in *China in Crisis: The Role of the Military,* ed. Paul Beaver (London: Jane's Information Group, 1989), 38.

53. *Preliminary Findings,* 8–9, 14–15. Civilians also set fire to military vehicles.

54. See, for example, "Li Peng Interview," 26; Chi Haotian's statement in *U.S. News & World Report,* 12 March 1990, 54. The PLA Press published a volume titled *jieyan yiri* [One day under martial law] containing accounts by military participants about 3–4 June. It is surprisingly free of polemics and propaganda—and apparently too honest, because it was quickly withdrawn from circulation.

55. Chen Xitong stated 200 died and 3,000 were injured. See "Beijing Mayor's Address," 944. Yuan Mu reported 300 deaths. See "State Council Spokesman," 5. Nicholas Kristof estimated between 400 and 800 people died. See *New York Times,* 3 June 1990, A20. Amnesty International estimated about 1,000 people died. See *Preliminary Findings,* 22.

56. For Li's remarks, see *Washington Post,* 7 July 1989, A1, A27; for those by Chi and Tao, see *U.S. News & World Report,* 12 March 1990, 54.

57. See, for example, *Preliminary Findings,* 6, 19; and *Washington Post,* 4 June 1989, A1, A34.

58. Harry Wells, personal communication.

59. At least one shipment was seized in Hong Kong en route to China. *HKS,* 25 May 1989, FBIS-CHI, 25 May 1989, 67.

60. *Beijing Review,* 25 June–1 July 1990, 13.

61. CNA (Taipei), 9 March 1990, FBIS-CHI, 14 March 1990, 22; *Wen Wei Po,* 17 March 1990, FBIS-CHI, 20 March 1990, 33.

62. *Pai Hsing* (Hong Kong), 16 November 1989, FBIS-CHI, 22 November 1989, 21.

63. Jencks, "Military in China," 293.

64. See, for example, *Jiefangjun Bao,* 8 February 1990, FBIS-CHI, 2 March 1990, 23–25. The downward spiral in military-civilian relations is evident also from a battle between peasants and navy personnel in southern China in late 1989. See *Ming Pao,* 6 December 1989, FBIS-CHI, 6 December 1989, 57–58.

65. *Tang Tai* (Hong Kong), 12 May 1990, FBIS-CHI, 18 May 1990, 16–17.

66. *New York Times,* 29 October 1989, E2.

67. On Poland, see A. Ross Johnson, Robert W. Dean, and Alexander Alexiev, *East European Military Establishments: The Warsaw Pact Northern Tier* (New York: Crane Russak, 1982), 52. On Burma, see *FEER,* 17 August 1989, 22.

68. Dreyer, "Power Struggle of 1989," 46.

69. Jerzy J. Wiatr, *The Soldier and the Nation: The Role of the Military in Polish Politics, 1918–1985* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988), 113, 118–21.

70. Ivan Volgyes, "Military Politics of the Warsaw Pact Armies," in *Civil-Military Relations: Regional Perspectives,* ed. Morris Janowitz (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981), 200.

71. Wiatr, *Soldier and the Nation,* 121, 162–63.

72. On Poland, see Perlmutter and LeoGrande, "Party in Uniform," 787–88.

73. For a reassessment of the 1989 Romanian revolution, see *Washington Post,* 24 August 1990, A19.

74. *New York Times,* 14 June 1989, A17.

75. Professor Huan Guocang, personal communication.

76. On these terms, see Perlmutter and LeoGrande, "Party in Uniform," 782–85.

77. See Gerald Segal and John Phipps, "Why Communist Armies Defend Their Parties," *Asian Survey* 30 (October 1990): 975. The authors actually discuss the Soviet Union here, not China.