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SPECIAL ISSUE: THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TIANANMEN MASSACRE

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Editor's Note:

This week marks the 30th anniversary of the Chinese government's violent military crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing, an event that has entered history as the “Tiananmen Massacre.” Estimates of the numbers of those killed on the night of June 3-4, 1989 range from the low hundreds to nearly three thousand—although the true figures may never be known, due to the Chinese government's tight censorship of information surrounding these events. Violence on a smaller scale was also seen in other Chinese cities, and the crackdown inaugurated a campaign of nationwide repression whose effects are still felt in China today.

This special issue of China Brief includes three articles that commemorate the anniversary of the mass protest movement of spring 1989, as well as the tragic repression that followed. In our first article, Dr. Larry Wortzel—who in 1989 was a U.S. Army officer serving in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing— offers an analysis of the divisions within the upper echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that led first to policy paralysis, and ultimately to the horrific violence that filled the streets of Beijing. Next, longtime analyst of Chinese politics Dr. Willy Lam discusses the ways in which the post-Tiananmen trajectory of the CCP has impacted Chinese society and politics into the present day, particularly in terms of the increasing militarization of education and public life. Finally, my own contribution will look at some of the ways in which the CCP

seeks to shape historical narratives: contrasting the suppression of historical memory surrounding June 1989 with the Party's recent propaganda campaign related to the May Fourth Movement.

We modestly hope that this issue will help to honor the memories of those who died in Beijing and other Chinese cities thirty years ago, and illuminate for our readers some of the ways that the legacy of Tiananmen lives on today.

-- John Dotson, editor

**The Tiananmen Massacre Remembered at 30 Years:
The Chinese Communist Party's Political and Military Considerations**

By Larry Wortzel



Image: Backlit by flames, PLA troops advance through Tiananmen Square in the early morning hours of June 4, 1989. (Source: ABC News/Youtube)

Introduction—Divisions Within the Communist Party Set the Stage for Tiananmen

We don't know how many demonstrators or ordinary citizens were killed during the Tiananmen Massacre, but it was bloody and brutal. After June 4, 1989, the CCP set the death toll at 200—of which it claimed that only 36 were students, and that 23 members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) or People's Armed Police (PAP) were killed. [1] A discreet source of information affiliated with the Chinese Red Cross, a doctor, told the U.S. Embassy on June 4, 1989 that the death toll was around 2,600. [2] Even after the violence on the night of June 3-4, the streets of Beijing were filled with sporadic gunfire from the PLA for days after that. [3]

One reason for the violence was an extended period of internal debate and inaction by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the protests spread throughout China in the spring of 1989. The length and size of the protests in China, and the ultimate scale of the violence, resulted in part from an inability to reach decisions on handling the protests by the Communist Party's Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). [4]

The CCP leadership had been in disagreement over the pace of economic and political reform in China for some time. After an extended period of student demonstrations in 1986, CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang was criticized for his handling of events. Hu, along with a group of CCP Leaders (Zhao Ziyang, Lu Dingyi, Wan Li and Xi Zhongxun), had argued that economic reform should proceed in parallel with Party political reforms, including an expanded role for labor unions. [5] Hu's main critics in the CCP were a group of Party elders and conservatives: Li Xiannian, Chen Yun, Li Peng, Deng Liqun, Wang Zhen, Hu Qiaomu, Peng Zhen, Bo Yibo, Yu Qili and Yang Shangkun. In 1987, Hu was dismissed from office and replaced as General Secretary of the CCP by Zhao Ziyang. Hu Yaobang's critics eventually formed the core group of "conservatives" (a CCP group of more orthodox Maoist, Marxist-Leninist Party members) who determined the ultimate course of events during the Tiananmen demonstrations and massacre. [6]

Events in Spring 1989 Leading to the Massacre

There was a long period of demonstrations around China in spring 1989, which began with the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989. That day, flags were flown at half-mast. At universities around Beijing, large-character posters were displayed by students with slogans like: "A Great Loss of Democracy and Freedom," and "The Star of Hopes Has Fallen." By the next day, April 16, several hundred people placed wreaths honoring Hu at the Monument of the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square. On April 17, students and teachers from Beijing universities gathered on Tiananmen Square shouting "Long live democracy, down with corruption, and down with bureaucracy." [7]

Students also sent a letter to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress demanding a reappraisal of Hu Yaobang and his career. At this point, the Public Security Bureau was able to control the crowd. [8] Hu Yaobang's funeral was April 22, which led to larger demonstrations and marches around the city involving students, workers, government employees, and even some military personnel. [9] Demonstrations involving tens to hundreds of thousands of people continued in Beijing through April 25. Meanwhile in Hunan Province, demonstrators were detained and arrested after rioting in the provincial capital of Changsha.

At the time the demonstrations began the members of the PBSC were Zhao Ziyang (General Secretary of the Party), Li Peng, Qiao Shi, Hu Qili, and Yao Yilin ([People's Daily](#), November 2, 1987). However, despite their high office, these men did not have as much authority as their titles implied. A group of Party elders, many of them veterans of the CCP since its formation, were part of a Central Advisory Commission that influenced

debates on how to respond to the demonstrations. [10] Further complicating matters, it was the Party Central Military Commission (*Zhongguo Gongchandang Zhongyang Junshi Weiyuanhui*, 中国共产党中央军事委员会) that formulated military policy and had the authority to give orders to the PLA. To summarize the situation as the demonstrations developed around Beijing: the Party leadership was in disarray and in disagreement about establishing martial law, as well as divided over how to respond to the general unrest, and whether to call in the PLA. [11]

After Hu Yaobang's funeral, demonstrations continued around Beijing through the rest of April, with discussions going on at the highest levels of the CCP about whether to respond, and how to respond. Li Peng and the Propaganda Department began to call the demonstrations a form of "turmoil." [12] Generally, however, the environment was permissive and the PAP and Public Security Bureau worked to create avenues for the marchers while still keeping traffic flowing around the city.

The April 26 Editorial and Hardening Attitudes Among Party Elders

Things changed on April 26, 1989. That morning *People's Daily* published a front-page, italicized editorial entitled "The Necessity of Taking a Clear-Cut Stance Against Disturbances." [13] The Defense Attaché Office in the U.S. Embassy began to get reports from former military personnel traveling into the city that their trains had been diverted so that military rail convoys could use the tracks. At the same time, students in universities claimed that as many as twenty thousand troops had been deployed to Beijing by the PLA 38th Group Army stationed south of Beijing in Hebei. Military units were reminded to "trust the Central Military Commission (CMC)" and not to deploy troops unless approved by the CMC. [14]

Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang, now CCP General Secretary and CMC First Vice-Chairman, split on how to respond to the demonstrations. Zhao did not want to crack down hard on the demonstrators. Inside the CMC, with Deng Xiaoping as chairman, conservative, hardline military veterans like Yang Shangkun, his brother Yang Baibing, Liu Huaqing, and Hong Xuezhong also differed with Zhao on how to handle the situation. [15] Thus, there were civil-military disagreements at the top levels of both the Party and the military.

During May, a few major events catalyzed the matter for the Party leadership, which led to a complete split between reform-minded Party leaders and conservatives, and brought about the dismissal of Zhao Ziyang as General Secretary ([The Washington Post](#), May 15, 2009). Zhao was sympathetic to the protestors, who wanted the April 26 *People's Daily* article retracted. On May 13, the students in the square began a hunger strike and refused to leave Tiananmen Square—which increased the loss of face for the government, as a visit to the Great Hall of the People by Soviet President Michael Gorbachev was imminent ([Chicago Tribune](#), May 14, 1989). At first, the Politburo endorsed the moderate approach to the students advocated by Zhao: for example, during Gorbachev's visit, an estimated 150,000 students and spectators gathered in the Square, making access to the Great Hall of the People difficult, but PSB and PAP guards created access corridors for vehicles. [16]

By May 17, there were more than a million people around Tiananmen Square, including students, intellectuals, workers and some government employees and military organizations. [17] Then on May 19, senior CCP leaders Li Peng, Yan Mingfu, and Li Tieying met with the student leaders. [18] Wuer Kaixi, one of the student leaders, demanded that the April 26 editorial be retracted, interrupting Li Peng several times. Li Peng asserted that the student's actions had "stirred up turmoil." [19]

Later, on May 17, Zhao Ziyang was summoned to a meeting with Deng Xiaoping. However, instead of a one-to-one discussion, Zhao was meeting with the entire PBSC. Zhao tried to have the April 26 editorial modified as an attempt to ease tensions with the students, but President and CMC member Yang Shangkun argued that martial law should be declared. Ultimately, Deng Xiaoping called for a vote by the Politburo on repealing the editorial, resulting in a sixteen to two vote in favor of calling the student movement a "riot." Zhao Ziyang then submitted his resignation as CCP General Secretary. [20]



Image: Former CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, who was pushed from office by Party elders in mid-May 1989 for his softer position towards the protest movement, makes a last-ditch attempt for dialogue with protestors in Tiananmen Square on the night of May 19, 1989. (Source: Getty Images)

The Declaration of Martial Law and Deployment of Troops in Beijing

On May 20, 1989, early in the morning, Li Peng signed the "Order of the State Council of the People's Republic of China on the Implementation of Martial Law in Parts of Beijing." [21] The units identified in the initial deployment were from the following PLA Group Armies: 24th, 27th, 28th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 54th, 63th, 65th, 67th, Beijing Garrison Command, 15th Airborne Army of the PLA Air Force, and 6th Tank Division. [22] Around dusk on May 20, PLA units attempted to enter the city from all directions; however, they were blocked by residents supporting the students. Along Fuxing Road, near Muxidi on the west side of Beijing, an entire convoy—likely from the 38th Group Army—was stopped by residents. The confrontation was peaceful, with residents speaking to soldiers and the unit taking no action to move further into the city. [23] The situation

was confused, but it was clear that even local Party branches were unhappy with the martial law declaration and the movement of troops into the city.

There also was confusion in the United States. Many in the U.S. intelligence community and academia accepted the logic of a number of commentators sympathetic to the Chinese government that the CCP would not use the PLA against the Chinese people. Others in government and the intelligence community also failed to understand the dangerous situation developing in China. However, throughout this time U.S. military attaches had been keeping up a regular stream of reporting, along with their NATO allies. [24]

Following the peaceful popular resistance that frustrated the initial attempts to impose martial law, PLA troops were pulled back to assembly areas on military bases, in factories, and in parks within minutes to an hour of striking distance into the city. [25] The commander of the 38th Group Army, Xu Qinxian, checked into a hospital rather than obey the martial law order. He was subsequently relieved of command. [26] Meanwhile the CMC ordered stronger Party indoctrination for the troops in the assembly areas. The PLA began inserting reconnaissance elements into the city while residents created barricades with city buses and bulldozers.

On June 3, there was a final attempt by the CMC to move troops to Tiananmen Square peacefully. At dawn that morning, from the east along Chang An Road, “a regiment of the 196th Infantry Division from Tianjin attempted to enter Tiananmen Square unarmed. They were turned back at the second ring road by citizens and students.” [27] Things went downhill fast after that. Troops moved into assault positions early in the morning on June 4 and the assault on Beijing by the PLA began. Even here, after two weeks of political indoctrination, the civil-military split was evident: one unit reported by British military attachés as coming from the 28th Group Army turned weapons over to demonstrators, and their armored personnel carriers and trucks were burned by the crowd. [28]



Image: Beijing citizens mill about PLA trucks and armored personnel carriers burned on the night of June 3-4, 1989. (Source: AFP/Getty Images)

Conclusions

Today, the CCP leadership would prefer not to use the PLA again in case of riots or unrest. They have strengthened and enlarged the People's Armed Police and created PAP and PSB riot units. But if the Party center felt threatened again, it is unlikely that Xi Jinping would vacillate and debate: he would not hesitate to crush widespread unrest. The CCP leadership remains as determined as ever to maintain their ruling position, and armed force remains the ultimate guarantor of the Party's grip on power.

Larry Wortzel is a veteran Asia scholar, who served two tours of duty as a military attaché in the American Embassy in China—including during the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989. Since retirement from the U.S. Army, Dr. Wortzel has served as director of the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation, and as a longstanding member of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute of Strategic Studies.

Notes

[1] Larry M. Wortzel, "The Tiananmen Massacre Reappraised: Public Protest, Urban Warfare, and the People's Liberation Army," in Andrew Scobell and Larry M. Wortzel, *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking under Stress* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), pp. 76-77.

[2] Author Louisa Lim quotes the Swiss ambassador saying that 2,700 died in Beijing; however, Lim notes that elsewhere in China, particularly in Chengdu where there were major demonstrations, as many as 300 people also died. See: Louisa Lim, *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 7, 196-197.

[3] James Lilley with Jeffrey Lilley, *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventures, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia* (NY: Public Affairs, 2004), pp. 324-338; Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), p. pp. 616-643; Theodore Han and John Li, *Tiananmen Square Spring 1989: A Chronology of the Chinese Democracy Movement* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992), PP. 59-83.

[4] The Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, or Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), is the highest-ranking policy-making organization in the CCP. On the internal squabbles, see Zhang Liang, compiler; Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision to Use Force Against Their Own People-In Their Own Words* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), pp. 52-97, 238-385.

[5] Zhang, Nathan and Link., *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 4, 14; Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, pp. 577-580.

[6] Ibid. on the events and their linkages to reform see also James A. Dorn and Wang Xi, *Economic Reform in China: Problems and Prospects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[7] Han and Li, *Tiananmen Square Spring 1989: A Chronology of the Chinese Democracy Movement*, p. 5-6.

[8] Ibid. p. 7.

[9] The two best daily chronologies are in Han and Li, *Tiananmen Square Spring 1989: A Chronology of the Chinese Democracy Movement* and Zhang, Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 4, 14; Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. Another superb resource is Jian Ding, Elaine Yee-Man Chan, and Leslie Evans, *The China Democracy Movement and Tiananmen Incident: Annotated Catalog of the UCLA Archives, 1989-1993* (Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles, April 1, 1999). The author has had the opportunity to go through the UCLA archives and in addition to having observed the events as a military attaché in China relies on his notes from the UCLA archive.

[10] William A. Joseph, *Politics in China an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 112. See also, 'Eight Elders,' <https://www.revolvy.com/page/Central-Advisory-Commission>

[11] Defense Intelligence Agency DIADIN 141-1B, *China Situation Report*, 21 May 1989, declassified in part per Executive Order 13526, 2000-0950-F/3, 11/2/10, Document 221 in the archives of the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, College Station, TX.

[12] Zhang, Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 76-77.

[13] Han and Li, *Tiananmen Square Spring 1989: A Chronology of the Chinese Democracy Movement*, p. 15.

[14] Zhang, Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, p. 79.

[15] Ibid. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, pp. 604-608.

[16] Han and Li, *Tiananmen Square Spring 1989: A Chronology of the Chinese Democracy Movement*, pp. 25-33.

[17] Ibid. p. 33; author's recollections from notes.

[18] Li Peng was one of the conservatives and was a PBSC member and Premier of China. Yan Mingfu was director of the CCP United Front Work Department and Secretary of the Politburo. Li Tieying was a Central Committee member and State Education Minister. Yan Mingfu was subsequently dismissed from his posts by the Party in late June. See Wortzel, "The Tiananmen Massacre Reappraised: Public Protest, Urban Warfare, and the People's Liberation Army," p. pp. 63-65.

[19] Han and Li, *Tiananmen Square Spring 1989: A Chronology of the Chinese Democracy Movement*, pp. 34-35.

[20] Ibid. p. 36; Zhang, Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, p. 223-232.

[21] Zhang, Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, p. 233.

[22] Wortzel, "The Tiananmen Massacre Reappraised: Public Protest, Urban Warfare, and the People's Liberation Army," p. pp. 72-73.

[23] The author and the U.S. Air Attaché to China witnessed this event.

[24] See Wortzel, "The Tiananmen Massacre Reappraised: Public Protest, Urban Warfare, and the People's Liberation Army," *passim*; Lilley with Lilley, *China Hands: Nine Decades of Adventures, Espionage, and Diplomacy in Asia*, pp. 296-334; Defense Intelligence Agency DIADIN 141-1B, *China Situation Report*, 21 May 1989.

[25] Defense Intelligence Agency DIADIN 141-1B, *China Situation Report*, 21 May 1989, declassified in part per Executive Order 13526, 2000-0950-F/3, 11/2/10, Document 221 in the archives of the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, College Station, TX.

[26] Zhang, Nathan and Link, *The Tiananmen Papers*, p. 239.

[27] Wortzel, “The Tiananmen Massacre Reappraised: Public Protest, Urban Warfare, and the People’s Liberation Army,” p. 74.

[28] Author’s notes and recollections.

The June 4th Massacre and the Militarization of Chinese Politics

By Willy Lam

Introduction: The Legacy of June 1989

Although the wounds of the June 4, 1989 massacre thirty years ago have not healed, it is imperative that the right lessons be drawn from perhaps the worst blunder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the Era of Reform. The fact that top leaders after Deng Xiaoping—who made the fatal decision to use the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to crush student demonstrators in Beijing—have refused to re-open the case of the so-called “counter-revolutionary turmoil” testifies to the fact that political reform has stagnated in the past three decades. Moreover, President Xi Jinping has been reinstating with gusto Chairman Mao’s “one-voice chamber,” and has beefed up the CCP’s long-standing police-state apparatus ([China Brief](#), March 22).

It is not an exaggeration to say that June 4 made possible the emergence of ultra-conservative cadres—such as “core leader” Xi—because the bulk of the pro-reform followers of Deng were purged or sidelined in the wake of June 1989. Shao Jiang, a London-based former Tiananmen student leader now doing research on the Chinese reforms of the 1970s and 1980s, has pointed out that immediately after the Tiananmen crackdown a whole generation of the most gifted intellectuals and reform-minded cadres were kicked out of the establishment. “Now what is left is only mediocrity,” he said ([Apple Daily \[Hong Kong\]](#), May 5). Within the Party, forward-looking factions represented by the two liberal general secretaries appointed by Deng in 1981 and 1987, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, were totally sidelined. Many reform-minded, pro-Western officials associated with Hu and Zhao were either jailed or forced to go into exile.

It is true that Deng tried to resuscitate economic reform and the open-door policy through his famous 1992 *Nanxun* (“tour to the South”). Yet the Great Architect of Reform largely abandoned political and institutional reforms that he had introduced in the early 1980s. These included the abandonment of ideological campaigns, a gradual time-table for electoral politics, and crucially, keeping the princelings (offspring of state leaders) out of high-level party posts ([Dwnnews.com](#), November 19, 2018; [Voice of America](#), November 7, 2012). The ascendancy of Xi as party General Secretary in November 2012 signaled the triumph of the Maoist theory of the “revolutionary bloodline:” that only men and women who are descendants of the PRC’s founding fathers could be trusted with upholding socialist orthodoxy and CCP one-party rule. While a relatively small number of cadres with exposure to the West—including “returnees” with degrees from Western universities—could go up the hierarchy as technocrats, they could never be inducted into the

Politburo and other inner sanctums of power within the party ([Reuters](#), November 26, 2012; [Asianews.it](#), July 17, 2013).



Image: Protestors marching in Tiananmen Square in late May 1989, prior to the military crackdown.

“Political and Ideological Education for Our Youths” Since 1989

Reform activists of 1989 and China scholars have isolated two post-Tiananmen developments that are most inimical to the healthy development of a democratic republic: first, the CCP controlling the minds of youths and intellectuals; and second, the militarization of political life. While Deng left his mark in recent Chinese history as the progenitor of “thought liberation,” he turned arch-conservative after the first wave of student demonstrations hit Chinese cities in December 1986. Deng told foreign visitors in March 1989 that “our biggest mistake in the past decade lies in the area of education, particularly failing to grasp [the task of providing] political and ideological education to our youths” ([China.com](#), December 11, 2014). During the tenure of former general secretaries Jiang Zemin (1989-2002) and Hu Jintao (2002-2012), Communist party cells in universities tightened their grip over the ideology of both professors and students. This was a departure from another point proposed by Deng: the separation of party and college administration, which was a sub-set of his overall theory of the separation of party and government ([Phoenix TV](#), August 22, 2015; [New York Times Chinese Edition](#), April 21, 2014).

Yet it is Xi who has doubled down on Maoist thought control on campus. One year after taking office in 2012, Xi circulated Party Document No. 9, which forbade intellectuals—particularly college instructors—from talking about seven taboo topics: universal values, media freedom, civil society, civil rights, aberrations in the party’s history, the “crony capitalist class,” and independence of the judiciary ([BBC Chinese Service](#), May 28, 2013). The paramount leader also noted that ideological education should begin as early as possible: “We must ensure that youths have the right kind of values from the very beginning,” he said in 2014. “It’s like getting the

buttons right when wearing a garment. If the first button is tied correctly, so will the subsequent buttons” ([People’s Daily](#), May 5, 2014).

The Militarization of Chinese Society

Yet the most lasting impact of June 4 is the militarization of Chinese politics. Firstly, only senior cadres with the backing of the armed forces—in addition to the paramilitary People’s Armed Police (PAP) and the police—can lead the CCP. As noted by Wong Yiu-Chung, a political scientist at Hong Kong’s Lingnan University, while Deng was but an ordinary party member in 1989, his status as Chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission enabled him to move the troops to subdue both student protestors and liberal party cadres loyal to then-General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. [1] The near-universal agitation for political change in May and June 1989 was so strong that only the PLA could have saved the party. Since the suppression of the 1989 “rebellion,” the CCP has imposed its rule on the people through a police-state apparatus underpinned by military and police power.

Because the party has refused to admit its blunder in 1989—in addition to other aberrations going back to the Korean War of the early 1950s—only the army and the police have been equipped to use force to sustain the party’s tattered mandate of heaven. This course of militarizing public affairs was made apparent in the immediate wake of the massacre, when Deng met on June 9, 1989 with representatives of the troops tasked with enforcing martial law. Calling the soldiers “the loveliest people” in China, he eulogized them for being “always under the leadership of the party, always the defender of the nation... [and] the defender of socialism.” Deng also addressed the intellectuals and students behind the democracy movement. “How cruel are our enemies,” he said. “We should not even give them one percent of forgiveness” ([People’s Daily](#), October 24, 2006).

“After June 4, soldiers still directly rule over large swathes of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region,” said Albert Ho, Chairman of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China. Ho, who has galvanized Hong Kong’s support for democratization in the mainland, added that “tight control all over China is also effectuated by the PAP, the police, spies, even members of the Chinese mafia [who have been co-opted by the police].” [2] The militarization of Chinese politics has undergone a qualitative change under Xi, who has promoted the symbiotic relationship between ordinary citizens on the one hand, and soldiers and other uniformed forces on the other.

Xi has pulled out all the stops to popularize Maoist axioms such as “all citizens are soldiers” (*quanmin jiebing*, 全民皆兵) and “the synthesis of the [requirements of] peace and war” (*ping-zhan heiyi*, 平战合一) ([Gov.cn](#), September 22, 2017; [People’s Daily](#), April 21, 2016). The White Paper on National Defense of 2015 provided the justification for a country-wide defense mobilization “that can meet the requirements of winning informationized wars.” It highlights mass civilian involvement in “preparation for military struggle” ([US-China Economic and Security Review Commission](#), June 1, 2015; [SCIO.gov.cn](#), May 25, 2015). Able-bodied men

are encouraged to serve as reservists in after-work hours. Graduates from top universities such as Tsinghua and Peking Universities are urged to take a two- to three-year stint in the PLA after graduation to buttress their patriotic credentials. Fishermen become “marine militiamen” when the Navy wants to boost the projection of military power to assert Chinese sovereignty over the South China Sea ([Ming Pao \[Hong Kong\]](#), April 30; [HK01.com](#), April 28). If ordinary citizens, including students from top universities—who were prominent among the protest movement in the generation of 1989—feel that it is an honor to join the armed forces even on an irregular basis, the CCP’s objective of liquidating dissent through militarizing everyday life may have been realized.

The substantive merger of civilian and military interests has also been promoted through two mechanisms: first, the sharing of national resources between the two sectors; and second, the appointment of top managers from defense and aerospace companies to senior civilian positions. The 2015 White Paper praised the idea of “an all-element, multi-domain and cost-efficient pattern of civilian-military integration.” The document said this would facilitate “[the principle of] resolutely holding on to the developmental path under military-civilian symbiosis.” For example, both the CMC and the State Council would promote “uniform military and civilian standards for infrastructure, key technological areas and major industries, and explore ways and means for training military personnel in civilian educational institutions” ([China Brief](#), June 19, 2015).

The Xi era has witnessed the enhanced cooperation of research and development (R&D) between military and government research facilities on the one hand, and laboratories of commercial firms and universities on the other. More government resources have also been devoted to nurturing PLA-related “private companies” such as Huawei and ZTE ([Nikkei Asian Review](#), December 13, 2018; [Mingjingnews.com](#), June 10, 2018; [Radio French International](#), May 5, 2018). Calling himself a *junzhuan ganbu* (军转干部), literally “a cadre who has transferred from the military [to the civilian sector],” Xi has elevated dozens of managers from the defense and aerospace establishment to positions such as the governors and mayors of major provinces and cities ([People’s Daily](#), June 3, 2014; [Xinhua](#), May 27, 2014). Examples of *junzhuan ganbu* who have made good include: Zhang Qingwei (Party Secretary of Heilongjiang), Ma Xingrui (Guangdong Governor), Yuan Jiajun (Zhejiang Governor), Zhang Guoqing (Tianjin Mayor), and Hao Peng (head of the State Assets Supervision and Administration Corporation). Zhang, Ma and Yuan are all former executives of the mammoth China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation. Zhang is a former president of arms manufacturer and marketer Norinco, while Hao used to run the Aviation Industry Corporation of China ([China Brief](#), September 25, 2014).

Prospects for the Reemergence of Democratic Reform

With China showing signs of becoming a militarized state, it is perhaps not surprising that former Tiananmen Square protestors and other China observers are not optimistic about the reappearance of any democratic movement in China in the foreseeable future. “The further militarization of the party-state, in addition to the enhanced powers given to the secret police, has made political reform almost impossible,” said Guoguang

Wu, Professor of Political Science at the University of Victoria. [3] Wu Renhua, a 1989 student activist who is now a visiting scholar at Taiwan's Tung Wu University, attributes the lack of resistance to Xi's militarized regime to "millennia of serfdom." "From Confucius and down through the ages, Chinese have exhibited the slavish mentality of obeying the powers that be," said Wu, who has authored a book on how the 1989 democracy movement was quashed. ([Cable News \[Hong Kong\]](#), May 15).

However, Yu Ying-shih, a former Princeton professor and a recognized authority on Chinese culture, is adamant that the "June 4 Spirit" of democracy will return. The year 2019 marks the centenary of the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which is hailed as the Chinese Enlightenment that first introduced the ideals of science and democracy to the newly emancipated intelligentsia. "The quintessence of the May Fourth Movement is still developing," Yu told the Hong Kong media. "June 4 was also a manifestation of the May Fourth ethos. As long as Chinese democracy is not realized, people will keep remembering June 4, and another June 4-style movement will occur" ([Apple Daily](#), May 4).

A major factor favoring change could be that corruption, which was one of the root causes of the 1989 student crusade, has worsened. Guoguang Wu, who was a member of a team that advised Zhao Ziyang on political liberalization, has said that rent-seeking and associated abuses had increased partly due to the Party's dependence on "protection" by the military and the police. Albert Ho, who is also a former chairman of the Hong Kong Democracy Party, thinks the agents of change within China have increased even as the CCP has failed to run the country other than through brutal oppression. "So-called mass incidents, or riots and disturbances, have approached 200,000 instances a year," he said. "Yet the CCP administration does not have institutional means to resolve contradictions between the party and the people." Ho has further stated that, given the non-transparency of Chinese politics, it was difficult to predict whether—and when—cataclysmic changes might occur. "The moment of big transformation may come when the actions of anti-party, pro-democracy pace-setters in different sectors coalesce," he said. "And the student movement of 1989, which spread the seed of freedom in dozens of cities, serves as a reminder that activists all over the country must never give up hope."

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Notes

[1] Author's interview with Wong Yiu-chung, May 26.

[2] Author's interview with Albert Ho, May 27.

[3] Author's interview with Guoguang Wu, May 30

**“Study May Fourth,” But Not June Fourth:
The CCP Seeks Control of China’s Historical Legacies**

By John Dotson

Introduction—The Chinese Government’s Official Narrative on the Tiananmen “Turmoil”

Ever since the tragic events of the 1989 Beijing Massacre, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has maintained a rigid official narrative regarding the “turmoil” (*dongluan*, 动乱) of spring 1989. [1] This narrative states that the anti-corruption, pro-democracy protests of spring 1989 were “anti-Party, anti-socialism activities” (*fan dang fan shehuizhuyi de huodong*, 反党反社会主义的活动) directed at overthrowing the state; and that the violence resulted from “a minority of violent rioters” (*shaoshu baoluan fenzi*, 少数暴乱分子) who had “incited some people to oppose the martial law troops” tasked with restoring order. Per the official verdict, “This political disturbance wrecked our country’s normal social order, threw the course of normal economic development into disarray, and brought about enormous harm for the party, nation, and people.” [2]

While this terse narrative has been maintained within CCP channels, in the years since Tiananmen the state-controlled press of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has vigorously suppressed broader public discourse regarding the massacre. [3] Chinese citizens making even muted or oblique protests related to the “June 4 Incident” (*Liu-Si Shijian*, 六四事件) have been made subject to harsh punishments—as with four men arrested in Sichuan in 2016, after they placed labels that memorialized the 1989 protest movement onto liquor bottles ([SCMP](#), April 4).

With this in mind, many foreign observers were surprised when PRC Defense Minister Wei Fenghe (魏凤和) referred to the massacre in comments made on June 2 at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. When prompted by a reporter, Wei commented that the events of 1989 were “political turbulence and the central government took measures to stop the turbulence, which is a correct policy.” Wei further stated that, due to the government’s actions in 1989, “China has enjoyed stability and development” over the past thirty years ([BBC](#), June 2). This message was reinforced in even starker terms in a June 3 editorial in the state-controlled, nationalist outlet *Global Times*. The editorial, titled “June 4 Immunized China Against Turmoil,” invoked the collapse of other Communist states by saying that “[t]he Chinese government’s control of the incident in 1989 [was] a watershed marking the differences between China and former Eastern European socialist countries, including the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.” The editorial also asserted that “[d]ropping the incident thereafter has... [allowed] the country [to] leave the shadow behind, avoid disputes, and help all Chinese people face the future” ([Global Times](#), June 3).

Although Wei and the editorial adhered to the official narrative, some foreign observers might have been startled to hear official PRC sources making any mention whatsoever of the taboo topic of June 1989. However, these two sources were both directed at foreign audiences: Wei was speaking at an international

forum held abroad, and the editorial was in the English-language edition of the *Global Times*. These messages have not been repeated in China's domestic press. [4] At home, the CCP leadership would prefer not to speak about Tiananmen at all.

Appropriating the May Fourth Movement

Rather than attempting to justify the government's actions during the Tiananmen crisis thirty years ago, throughout spring 2019 the CCP propaganda apparatus focused attention on another anniversary: the centennial of the "May Fourth Movement" (*Wu-Si Yundong*, 五四运动), an intellectual movement that grew out of student protests on May 4, 1919 against the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. [5] Although the original May Fourth protests were motivated by specific grievances, the protests became the symbol and name for a broader intellectual renaissance in education, culture, and political thought. Per the official narrative promoted by the CCP today, the May Fourth Movement represented the awakening of modern Chinese patriotism, and provided the intellectual ferment that gave birth to the Communist Party—which was itself to become the institutional mechanism that saved China from backwardness and foreign imperialism.



Images: Members of the CCP Politburo scribble notes as CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping speaks during an April 19 "study session" to discuss the significance of the May Fourth Movement. (Source: CCTV)

This message was promoted by state media in April and May under the slogan "Strengthen Study of the May Fourth Movement and the May Fourth Spirit" (*Jiaqiang dui Wu-Si Yundong he Wu-Si Jingshen de Yanjiu*, 加强对五四运动和五四精神的研究). CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping took an active role in this propaganda campaign, giving a speech before the Politburo on April 19 in which he called the "May Fourth Spirit" a key part of "achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people." Xi's comments focused on the importance of instilling this spirit in young people, and revealed his concern for youth indoctrination: this effort, Xi said, must "clarify the relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese youth movement, [and] strengthen political leadership of the mass of youth, guiding the mass of youth to consciously persist in the Party's leadership, to hear the Party's words, and walk the Party's path" ([Central People's Broadcasting](#), April 21).

In case anyone were to somehow miss the message from Xi's speech, the broader propaganda campaign reiterated in other venues the need for CCP control over the thoughts and endeavors of young people. As written in *People's Daily* by Zheng Shiqu (郑师渠), a professor at Beijing Normal University, one of the key lessons to be learned from the May Fourth Movement is that "student movements must merge with the mighty currents of the people's national revival, and receive proper guidance, in order to have positive prospects" ([People's Daily](#), April 30). In line with this emphasis, official events commemorating the anniversary emphasized activities for young people, especially university students (*see image below*).



Image: Students from Beijing Normal University participate in an April 30 ceremony in the Great Hall of the People to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement. (Source: Xinhua)

Despite the efforts of official propaganda to maintain a positive (albeit totalitarian) tone surrounding the centennial of the May Fourth Movement, there were clear signs that regime security officials were nervous about the anniversary. In late April and early May, police presence was stepped up around universities in Beijing, to include increased identification checks and random inspections ([Radio Free Asia](#), May 3). An extended four-day public holiday was declared following the traditional May Day holiday—officially as part of an effort to boost public shopping consumption, but also possibly an effort to prevent mass meetings from forming at schools or workplaces. In late April, six members of Beijing University's Marxist Study Society—who have run afoul of authorities in the past due to activities intended to raise attention to the plight of poor workers—were arrested in an apparent round-up of potential troublemakers prior to the anniversary ([CNN](#), May 1).

Conclusions

The Chinese government has long been sensitive about anniversary dates that might become focal points for dissent or public unrest—or simply for discussions that might range beyond the Party’s official version of history. The contrasting treatment of the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre, and the 100th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, reveals two dramatically different approaches: continued suppression of discourse regarding the former; and “flooding the zone” with propaganda and activities in relation to the latter. In all of this, there is clear concern for the direction that might be taken by student activism, if not made subject to proactive government control.

Few ways exist to spin memories of the June 1989 massacre into a convincing narrative sympathetic to the regime. However, the May Fourth Movement offers the CCP a potentially much more attractive narrative: one that extols the role of young people in shaping China’s “revival,” while also presenting a positive origin story for the Party and emphasizing its continued role in leading the way towards China’s future. Which narrative proves to be more enduring among China’s younger generation remains to be seen.

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Notes

[1] This terminology dates all the way back to the April 26, 1989 editorial in *People’s Daily* that set the stage for the CCP’s narrative, and which heralded the ultimate violent suppression of the protest movement. See: “We Must Raise the Banner to Clearly Oppose Turmoil” [*Bixu Qizhi Xianming de Fandui Dongluan, 必须旗帜鲜明地反对动乱*], *People’s Daily*, April 26, 1989.

http://news.ifeng.com/history/today/detail_2010_04/26/1089387_0.shtml.

[2] *Eighty Important Events in the History of the Chinese Communist Party* [*Zhonggongdang Shishang de 80 Jian Dashi, 中共党史上的80件大事*], No. 72: “The Political Disturbances of 1989” [*1989 Nian Zhengzhi Fengbo, 1989年政治风波*], June 13, 2001.

<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/252/5301/5302/20010613/488133.html>.

[3] Louisa Lim, *The People’s Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

[4] The author has been unable to identify newspaper articles or other sources in the state-controlled Chinese press that either reported on Wei Fenghe’s comments, or echoed the narrative of the cited English-language *Global Times* editorial. The domestic PRC press has remained silent about the anniversary of June 1989.

[5] The Treaty of Versailles granted Japan control over former German-controlled territory on the Shandong Peninsula. The May Fourth Movement contained an element of anti-Japanese patriotism due to this issue—as well as due to Japan’s “Twenty-One Demands” made in 2015, which granted Japan significant influence in Manchuria and over China’s weak government in Beijing.