

TIANANMEN SQUARE MASSACRE OVERVIEW AND FAQ

OVERVIEW:

The Tiananmen Massacre (also known as the Tiananmen Incident or simply *Liu Si*, (June 4th in Chinese), was a turning point in the history of modern China, and posed a great challenge to U.S.-China relations. It occurred on the night of June 3-4, 1989 and involved the slaughter of hundreds of unarmed, pro-democracy student and other peaceful protesters in central Beijing by regular troops of the People's Liberation Army on direct orders from China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping. The Tiananmen Movement for political reform began in Beijing in mid-April 1989, and soon spread to over 150 cities in China. The Chinese government's brutal suppression closed the door to substantial political reforms in China, preserving the political monopoly of the authoritarian communist dictatorship. In the aftermath of the crackdown, the Tiananmen Mothers, an organization of grieving mothers prevented from publicly mourning their slain children, embodies the pathos of *Liu Si*.

SPRING 1989 CHRONOLOGY (SOURCE: PBS FRONTLINE AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY)

April 17, 1989: thousands gather at Tiananmen Square to mourn the death of former Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, who died on April 15.

April 18-21: unrest spreads to other cities and universities.

April 22: memorial service for Hu is held; students demand Premier Li Peng acknowledge petition regarding Hu's legacy; students begin to boycott classes.

April 25: Li Peng convinces senior leader Deng Xiaoping that demonstrations threaten Communist Party rule. The Politburo, China's de facto

ruling body, adopts an aggressive posture against protests.

April 26: *People's Daily*, the official communist party newspaper prints a hostile editorial condemning the protests as counter-revolutionary.

April 27: the editorial inflames the protests and they grow in size and scope.

April 28-May 3: many students return to classes; Deng Xiaoping demands remaining protesters disband ahead of historic visit by Soviet leader Gorbachev. CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang's, a proponent of moderation, becomes isolated.

May 13-16: protesters begin a hunger strike ahead of Gorbachev's visit; officials are forced to cancel Gorbachev's official welcome in Tiananmen Square; Politburo is now split; Zhao Ziyang wants the Party to accept demands for political reform.

May 17-19: plans for martial law are in the works as Li Peng agrees to meet with students; the meeting on May 18 does not achieve any progress, and the Politburo agrees to declare martial law on May 19.

May 20-24: Martial law is proclaimed in the urban districts of Beijing. Tens of thousands of troops

are mobilized to occupy the city, but are forced to withdraw on May 24 due to roadblocks by protesters.

June 2-June 4: Deng Xiaoping orders an assault to put down the "counterrevolutionary riot." Protesters attempt unsuccessfully to block the advance of troops and tanks that fire indiscriminately. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of protesters are killed as the PLA advances on Tiananmen Square.

June 9: Deng Xiaoping congratulates military commanders for crushing the "rebellion."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (SOURCE: PBS FRONTLINE AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY)

In how many cities did demonstrations occur throughout China?

» *The Tiananmen Movement was nation-wide and involved 181 cities.*

When was martial law established?

» *Martial law was officially established on May 19 after hunger strikes interfered with Soviet leader Gorbachev's state visit causing the Chinese Communist Party leadership to lose face.*

How many troops were used to quell the protests and what are the estimated casualties?

» *Approximately 200,000 troops were mobilized to retake Beijing from the protesters. The People's Liberation Army was initially prevented from entering the city on May 24, but embarked on a final assault on June 3-4. The precise number of casualties is unknown, but is*

estimated to be upwards of several hundred.

Who were the principal leaders of the Tiananmen Movement?

» *Wang Dan, Shen Tong, Wu'er Kaixi, Chai Ling, among others.*

Who were the principal leaders of the regime at the time of the Massacre?

» *Premier Li Peng, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, and Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang*

How did the Chinese government characterize the protests and the crackdown?

» *Initially the Politburo acted leniently toward the protesters, but after the April 26 editorial, May 13 hunger strikes and subsequent international loss of face, and the May 24 failure of the People's Liberation Army to enter Beijing, the Politburo adopted a hostile stance toward the protests.*

How did the U.S. government respond to the Massacre, both publicly and privately?

» *The U.S. government under President George H.W. Bush placed sanctions on China, including a suspension of military sales; the U.S. Congress also passed the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992, affording Chinese exchange students permanent residency status who came to the U.S. between June 5, 1989 and April 11, 1990. Secretly, however, an envoy was sent to China playing down the official U.S. actions and assuring China of business as usual.*

Currently, what is the official Chinese interpretation of June 4?

» *That the Tiananmen Movement was counterrevolutionary and aimed to destroy the communist regime.*