Beijing Spring, 1989
CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT
The Basic Documents

Michel Oksenberg
Lawrence R. Sullivan
Marc Lambert
Editors
Introduction by
Melanie Manion

Featuring
"Death or Rebirth? Tiananmen: The Soul of China"
By Li Qiao et al.
Translated by H. R. Lan and Jerry Dennerline
To our parents,
Israel and Klara Oksenberg,
Virginia and Lawrence Sullivan, Sr.,
Lee and Evelyn Lambert,
and Celia Langert,
whose extraordinary devotion
has nurtured us through the years.
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Contents

Preface
  MICHEL OKSENBERG WITH LAWRENCE R. SULLIVAN ix

Introduction: Reluctant Duelists
  The Logic of the 1989 Protests and Massacre
  MELANIE MANION xiii

Sketch Map of Beijing City Center 2

I. Polarized China: Two Conflicting Views of Beijing Spring 3

1 Death or Rebirth? Tiananmen: The Soul of China
  COMPILED BY LI QIAO ET AL. 7

2 Report to NPC on Quelling the Counter-Revolutionary Rebellion
  CHEN XITONG 55

ANTECEDENTS 91

II. Prelude: Reform and Retrenchment

3 Report to the Thirteenth CCP National Congress [Excerpts on
  Political Reform]
  ZHAO ZIYANG 95

4 Four Major Crises China Will Face and Countermeasures
  XIAO JIABAO 101

5 Report on the Work of the Government
  LI PENG 112

6 Zhao Ziyang on Economic Retrenchment and Reform
  at Enterprise Forum 120

III. Neo-Authoritarianism: Debates on China’s Political Structure 123

7 Deng Xiaoping on Neo-Authoritarianism 125
8 Concerning Controversial Views on Neo-Authoritarianism
DENG ZIQIANG

9 Commenting on Neo-Authoritarianism
WU JIAXIANG

10 Neo-Authoritarianism: An Impractical Panacea
ZHOU WENZHANG

11 Establish Democratic Authority
HU JIWEI

12 “New Authority” Going Astray
LI WEI

13 Commenting Again on Neo-Authoritarianism—Pushing Democratization Forward through the Market
WU JIAXIANG

IV. Intellectual Dissent

14 Speech at the Theoretical Discussion Meeting Marking the Tenth Anniversary of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh CPC Central Committee [Excerpts]
SU SHAOZHI

15 China Needs Democracy
FANG LIZHI

16 Letter to Deng Xiaoping
FANG LIZHI

17 Open Letter to the Party and Government from Thirty-three Famous Chinese Intellectuals

18 On Human Rights Abuses
FANG LIZHI

19 Intellectuals’ Open Letter to Leaders [February 26, 1989]

20 Zhao Ziyang at a Meeting with President Bush

21 Three Attacks Aimed at Overthrowing Zhao
LO PING

22 Li Xiannian Urges Changing the General Secretary
LO PING

BEIJING SPRING

V. The Crisis Begins

23 The Last Eight Days of Hu Yaobang
LO PING

24 A Document Circulated among Senior Party and Government Officials Earlier This Month [April 25, 1989]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>It Is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand Against Disturbances</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>[Renmin ribao, April 26, 1989]</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>The Student Movement and Hu Yaobang Represent the Banner of Justice—Thoughts on Reading the April 26 <em>Renmin ribao</em> Editorial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>WANG RUOWANG</strong></td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Yuan Mu and Others Hold Dialogue with Students [April 29, 1989]</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Make Further Efforts to Carry Forward the May 4th Spirit in the New Age of Construction and Reform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ZHAO ZIYANG</strong></td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Zhao Urges Nation to Maintain Stability</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>State Rejects Students' List of Demands</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Students’ Reasonable Demands to Be Met through Democratic, Legal Channels: Zhao</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Zhao Ziyang’s Speech Welcomed by Students</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Hunger Strike Announcement</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Zhao Ziyang Meets Mikhail Gorbachev</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Gorbachev Speaks on Reform Issues</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VI. The Political Struggle for Tiananmen**

| 36   | Li Peng Holds Dialogue with Students                                | 269  |
| 37   | Some PLA Officers Send Open Letter to Central Military Commission  | 282  |
| 38   | Fourteen Beijing Press Units Send Open Letter to CPC Central Committee and State Council | 283  |
| 39   | Personnel from Nineteen Overseas and Home Media Send Letter to Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng | 284  |
| 40   | All-China Federation of Trade Unions Issues Statement              | 285  |
| 41   | Shanghai Municipal Trade Union Council Cable                       | 286  |
| 42   | Twelve NPC Members’ Letter of Appeal for an Emergency Meeting      | 287  |
| 43   | Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng Visit Fasting Students at Tiananmen Square | 288  |
| 44   | Zhao, Li Visit Hunger Strikers in Tiananmen                        | 290  |

**VII. Martial Law**

| 45   | Report on the Situation of the Student Movement in Beijing         | 298  |
|      | **LI XIMING**                                                      |      |
| 46   | Li Peng Delivers Important Speech on Behalf of Party Central Committee and State Council | 309  |
47 The Order of the State Council on Enforcing Martial Law in Part of Beijing Municipality
   LI PENG 315
48 Students Visit Marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian 316
49 On May 22 Li Peng Again Stressed That the Student Movement Was a Disturbance 317
50 Main Points of Yang Shangkun's Speech at Emergency Enlarged Meeting of the Central Military Commission 320
51 Solve the Current Problems in China Along the Track of Democracy and the Legal System
   YAN JIAQI AND BAO ZUNXIN 328
52 Speech to CPC Central Advisory Commission Standing Committee
   CHEN YUN 331
53 "Full Text" of Speech to Li Peng and Yao Yilin [May 31, 1989]
   DENG XIAOPING 333

VIII. Premonitions of Violence

54 What Does the Statue of the "Goddess of Democracy" which Appeared in Tiananmen Square Indicate?
   WU YE 341
55 Recognize the Essence of Turmoil and the Necessity of Martial Law
   PROPAGANDA DEPARTMENT,
   BEIJING MUNICIPAL PARTY COMMITTEE 342
56 Wu'er Kaixi Says, "We Must Face Reality"—China's Democratic Movement Might Retrogress 354

IX. The Aftermath: A Nation Divided

57 State Council Spokesman Yuan Mu Holds News Conference 363
58 June 9 Speech to Martial Law Units
   DENG XIAOPING 376
60 Why Good Intentions May Lead to Turmoil and Riot 388
61 Newsletter from Beijing: Beijing Crisis Worsens Under the Violence
   HUA MING 390
62 The Judgment of History Will Be Severe
   KUNG YAO-WEN 393
63 Statement Issued by Zhongguo Tongxun She Employees 395
64 Wen Wei Pao Does Two Things to Mourn Beijing Victims 396
65 Denouncing the Li-Yang Clique, Traitors to the People 397

Glossary of Important Figures, Recurrent Terms, and Abbreviations 399
Preface

MICHEL OKSENBERG WITH LAWRENCE R. SULLIVAN

Beijing has been the setting for many moments of high drama during the Chinese people’s tortuous search for national wealth and righteous rule. As a center of both government and intellectual life, it has witnessed struggles for power by extraordinarily willful politicians, militarists, and popular movements. Its citizens have periodically suffered from invading armies—foreign and domestic—while in this century the city’s intellectuals, students, and workers have repeatedly voiced their grievances and hopes for more enlightened and democratic government to transform China into a modern nation.

Politically, the capital embraces a duality. It is physically dominated by the imposing structures from which the Ming (1368–1644), Qing (1644–1911), Republican (1911–1927), and Communist (1949–) leaders and bureaucrats issued their edicts and performed the rituals of rule: the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Premier’s Office of the Republican government, the Great Hall of the People, the Zhongnanhai headquarters of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), and the many ministerial offices in the city. But equally important are the memories associated with particular locations where protests and political actions have occurred. Scattered about Beijing, but generally concentrated within or near the Forbidden City, are the places where Kang Youwei and his associates presented their petition to the emperor in 1898; where May Fourth demonstrators paraded for democracy in 1919; where martyrs perished during the 1920s after opposing various warlord oppressors; and where December Ninth movement leaders organized their opposition in 1935–36 to the ineffectual government response to Japanese aggression. Since the Communist revolution in 1949, Tiananmen Square (whose vast space the new regime carved out of the city in 1950) has often been the focal point of mass political activity: from the orchestrated parades of the early 1950s to the massive Red Guard rallies in 1966 when Mao Zedong mobilized youth discontent to attack his political enemies in the CPC. Nearby, in Xidan, is the wall where activists pasted their posters in 1978–79 calling for democracy and freedom of expression, while also denouncing China’s Communist system in terms that would reverberate throughout Beijing in the spring of 1989.

The buildings that have housed past and present governments are daily reminders
of the glory and power of the state, while recollections of protests and demonstrations that have rocked the capital tenuously exist in people’s minds. The former appear powerful, while the latter seem ephemeral. State buildings persist while protests against the state disappear. Yet memories of those outbursts of human energy and thought have often proved just as decisive in shaping the course of Chinese history as have decisions emanating from Beijing’s architectural structures.

Thus, the capital’s history, as with Berlin, Paris, Moscow, or Washington, and more recently Prague, Budapest, and Bucharest, is encapsulated in both its official buildings and monuments and its public spaces. Activities in these two parts of any capital are usually integrated and interdependent. But occasionally, fissures erupt when large segments of the populace gather to condemn the actions and ideas of officials who occupy state buildings. Many in the street are, in fact, government bureaucrats who have chosen to oppose the very system that employs them. The capital openly divides: political leaders in state buildings versus the public in open spaces.

This is what occurred in Beijing from mid-April through early June 1989. Led by students, a large portion of the city’s populace, including some industrial workers, took to the streets in massive demonstrations against their rulers, with Tiananmen Square as the central point of activity. Here was the destination of the huge parades—at times reaching one million—that wound downtown from the university district in the northwestern section of the city. At the western edge of the square, students knelt on the steps of the Great Hall of the People, consciously emulating the way virtuous but loyal censors remonstrated in imperial times to petition the government. In the center of the square at the Monument to the People’s Heroes, the newly created Beijing Autonomous Union of Students set up its command headquarters as thousands of students encamped nearby for days on end. Here also the hunger strikers ignited the conscience of the nation, while in the northern portion of the square students later erected the Goddess of Democracy and pointed the statue toward Mao’s imposing and stern portrait, which hangs over the tunnel entering the Forbidden City. The square was also the scene for a perfunctory visit by Li Peng, and General Secretary Zhao Ziyang’s last tearful farewell to the students, knowing he would soon lose his position. Finally, the square was the destination of the awesome military force that smashed its way into the city after peaceful forays by troops had brought hundreds of thousands onto the avenues to block the army’s advance. These

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Zhao also commented to the students that as a young man he had been involved in student demonstrations against the Guomindang, going so far as to lie on railroad tracks to disrupt rail traffic—an act later emulated by students and workers in several cities after the June 4 crackdown. Zhao’s statement in his strong Henan accent that “it doesn’t matter what happens to me” (wusuowei) was later mimicked by Beijing residents in daily confrontations with authorities.
events are now eradicably embedded in the memories of the city’s population as major struggles continue over how future generations in and outside China will recall and judge these events.

This volume presents important documents from the Beijing spring. Together they illuminate several questions: First, how did the populace occupying the public spaces and the political leaders ensconced in state buildings justify their actions? How did each side in this deeply divided city give meaning to their activities? And how did they interpret the motives of their adversaries? Second, since no political rupture of this magnitude occurs suddenly, what were the long-term causes and origins of the demonstrations and protests? What factors explain the enormous gulf that separated the people in the square from the rulers behind the walls of Zhongnanhai and their secret compound west of the city, where they evidently fled in late May? Third, what social, economic, and political forces drove the confrontation toward its tragic end of military suppression and a massacre of several hundred, if not thousands of, Beijing residents? To what extent, indeed, were the participants enmeshed in a struggle that escaped anyone’s control? Melanie Manion’s introductory essay grapples with these and other questions. In addition, brief introductions to each part provide some guidance to the reader. But the underlying conception of this collection is that the documents speak for themselves.

A central concern of this volume is the origin of the crisis in Beijing. The documents included here do not, however, fully capture the vision, ideals, and yearnings that gripped the students. This important part of the story is only partially captured in Document 1, “Death or Rebirth? Tiananmen, The Soul of China,” a moving and detailed account of the first stages of the demonstrations written by several Chinese participants. The voices of student leaders, such as Wu'er Kaixi, are also captured in the transcripts of the student dialogues with Premier Li Peng (Doc. 36) and the poetic testament of the May 12 Hunger Strike Announcement (Doc. 33). Readers interested in the full expression of student, worker, and popular views should, however, consult a forthcoming companion collection of documents, China’s Search for Democracy: The Student and Mass Movement of 1989.

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2Leaders went to their West Mountain (Xishan) compound for security reasons and also moved their families into Zhongnanhai out of fear of popular reprisals. Unit (danwei) leaders and rank-and-file party members were also reportedly frightened that the masses would take revenge on them even before June 3.

3Student dialogues with other leaders, such as Beijing Mayor Chen Xitong, were evidently not recorded, and thus transcripts are not currently available. Dialogues were also carried out in other provinces, such as Anhui, and have been described by Western observers. See Jonathan Perry, Bulletin, East Asian Studies, University of California, 6, 4 (April–June 1989): 3.

The primary purpose of the present volume is, instead, to convey the views of the Communist leadership—conservatives and moderates alike—and the establishment intellectuals who have profoundly influenced political debate in China since 1949. Arranged in a rough chronological order of nine parts, these documents provide highly divergent perspectives on the political and economic problems confronting China and, more specifically, the unfolding events of April 15 to June 4, 1989. Part I, "Polarized China," contains two documents with highly contrasting interpretations of the spring movement: "The Soul of China" and the official interpretation on the "quelling of the counterrevolutionary rebellion" given by Beijing Mayor Chen Xitong. The political and economic antecedents to the demonstrations are covered in the next three sections. Part II, "Prelude: Reform and Retrenchment," contains various speeches from 1987 to 1989 by Zhao Ziyang, Li Peng, and others outlining contradictory solutions to China's severe economic problems. An equally contentious debate among party leaders and intellectuals on the political structure of China is presented in part III on "Neo-Authoritarianism," while part IV, "Intellectual Dissent," reproduces the even more radical views of prominent dissidents such as ex-People's Daily editor Hu Jiwei and the internationally known astrophysicist Fang Lizhi.

The last four parts cover the movement from the sudden death of Hu Yaobang on April 15, to the declaration of martial law and the crackdown itself, to the aftermath of a divided China. Part V, "The Crisis Begins," provides moving accounts of Hu Yaobang's last days and transcripts of early dialogues between leaders and students. Part VI, "The Political Struggle for Tiananmen," contains various documents on the hunger strike, negotiations, and expressions of support for the students. With Zhao's clear defeat, the government decided on a declaration of martial law on May 19—covered in part VII—that led to the ultimate tragedy of violence and repression on June 3-4, revealed in the documents in part VIII, "Premonitions of Violence." Finally, part IX, "The Aftermath," portrays the deep political divisions and domestic and international outrage produced by the government's decision to resolve the crisis of spring 1989 with bullets and tanks rather than dialogue and compromise.

This volume provides an authoritative record of the most dramatic political struggle in the People's Republic of China since the Cultural Revolution and offers a testimony to its tragic climax.
Introduction: Reluctant Duelists
The Logic of the 1989 Protests and Massacre

Melanie Manion

Moral outrage at the massacre of protesters and bystanders in Beijing is a natural response to a grossly inhumane act. We reacted all the more acutely because the act took us by surprise: it flatly contradicted the estimates of most China experts and the apparent public defeat of force as a regime option in the first two weeks of martial law. While it may have been naïve to expect a victory for the protesters, even political sophisticates were shocked by the violence of June 4, 1989.

The massacre was a disaster—for the protesters and their supporters most obviously, but also for the Chinese Communist regime and its program of economic reform. What, then, explains this tragic outcome? This introduction reconstructs events of April, May, and June from the inferred perspectives of organized protesters in Beijing and those we now know as regime hardliners. My purpose is to make sense of the narrow rationale of particular acts and to discover how they fit together to produce the massacre of 4 June. Essentially, I conclude that the logic of the 1989 protests and massacre is one of players pressed into a duel. Events unfolded as they did mainly because protesters and hardliners operated on the basis of mistaken and irreconcilable assumptions and estimates about the practical implications of mass political participation. And while the massacre was by no means inevitable from the start, the exchange between protesters and hardliners caused both sets of players to update information in a way that escalated events, to a point at which retreat in the form of compromise was virtually impossible.

Assumptions and Initial Estimates

On April 26 an editorial in the Renmin ribao, the Communist Party newspaper, labeled the recent student protests in Beijing “a planned conspiracy and a distur-
On April 27 the Preparatory Committee for a Beijing Autonomous Union of Students responded with an organized protest march and rally. By that time hardliners and protesters had already formed mutually contradictory ideas about what to expect.

Briefly, hardliners took for granted that socialist economic and political development in the People's Republic of China (PRC) require a Communist Party monopoly of leadership and a high degree of social stability. Autonomous organizations such as the nascent student union and large demonstrations obviously challenged both monopoly and stability, and hardliners concluded that protest organizers were deliberately out to ruin them and the system.

At the same time, protesters assumed that the political history of more than a decade provided information on what the regime would tolerate and how it would sanction actions viewed as unacceptable. If that experience was a reliable predictor, then they had good reason to conclude that there was some chance of a positive response to their demands and that the probability of being suppressed was high, but the probable level of suppression relatively moderate.

In fact, policies and protests of the past decade did not provide the most relevant lessons for the protesters. To the extent that they based expectations on those experiences, they were guided by incomplete and misleading information about the norms and costs of unauthorized political action. A main reason is that the size of the movement and forms of protest adopted presented a more serious challenge to the regime than protests of the previous ten years had done. Hardliners reacted less to the content of the protests than to the movement's size and forms of protest, which called up memories of the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976. The hardliners' perceptions were also conditioned by a particular political context: the protests seemed to be yet another provocation, part of the increasingly radical movement of dissent among nonstudent intellectuals in 1989.

From Mourning to Protests

The catalyst for the Beijing protests was the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15. Hu had been removed from his position as Communist Party general secretary in 1987 for his toleration of an earlier round of student protests, which had begun in late 1986 and were suppressed after he was ousted. Hu's tacit support of the students, his reputation as a defender of political and intellectual freedoms, and his critical stance on official corruption made him a popular leader among liberal intellectuals.

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Even before Hu’s death, however, student activists at Beijing University had begun organizing a big prodemocracy demonstration for the anniversary of the 1919 May Fourth Movement—the patriotic movement promoting “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy,” celebrated annually in the PRC. Some of the same students had earlier organized a “democracy salon,” a series of talks by invited liberal intellectuals, held first in a student dormitory room and later (to accommodate a larger audience) on a campus lawn near the statue of Cervantes. In short, some of the students who would later emerge as leaders in the protest movement were already engaging in various forms of unauthorized political activity before the death of Hu Yaobang. Hu’s death merely accelerated an ongoing process of political ferment.

Immediately after Hu’s death, posters went up at Beijing University, mourning him and also calling for more democracy. Two days later, hundreds of students and teachers marched from the University of Political Science and Law to the square at Tiananmen, located in the center of the city. In the center of the square stands the Monument to the People’s Heroes. There the protesters assembled to place wreaths and shout slogans: long live democracy, long live freedom, long live the rule of law, down with corruption! On April 18 thousands of students from Beijing University and People’s University marched to Tiananmen. People gathered to listen to informal speeches on political reform. The crowd, including students, numbered about ten thousand. Hundreds of students began a sit-in before the Great Hall of the People, which bounds Tiananmen on the square’s west side. Over a thousand assembled outside Zhongnanhai, the elite residential compound about a mile to the west of the square, and demanded a meeting with top leaders. Similar demonstrations took place on April 19 and 20, when the first clashes between students and police occurred. On the morning of April 22, three student representatives knelt for thirty minutes on the steps of the Great Hall of the People, in a vain attempt to present a petition to the government.

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2 I was told that Wang Dan was one of the main organizers of the democracy salon. Wang emerged as one of the top student leaders in the protest movement.

3 I heard several conflicting versions of the clashes, but most students I talked to maintained that students had tried unsuccessfully to enter Zhongnanhai, had dispersed peacefully on April 19, but that there had been violence on April 20. Apparently, some students had thrown things at the police and resisted detention. Police had kicked students with leather shoes and beat them with belts. The authorities denied this version of events. See “Attempted Storming of Zhongnanhai” and “More on Storming of Zhongnanhai,” Beijing Xinhua Hong Kong Service, in FBIS, April 19, 1989, 15–16; “Disturbance Disrupts Mourning,” Beijing Domestic Service, in FBIS, April 20, 1989, 16–17; “Second Attempt to Storm Zhongnanhai,” Beijing Xinhua, in ibid., 24–25; “Beijing TV Carries Dialogue,” Beijing Television Service, in FBIS, May 1, 1989, 29–30. Document 27.

4 The petition was accepted by two members of the funeral committee. Students considered that response inadequate and even humiliating. See the account by one of the students who presented the petition in “Beijing TV Carries Dialogue,” 33–36.
Later that morning, while the official funeral ceremony for Hu Yaobang was being held, a crowd of 100,000 gathered in the square to mourn and protest.

Different views and demands were evident in the posters, some of which were openly critical of Deng Xiaoping and Premier Li Peng. But on April 23, representatives of nineteen universities and colleges in Beijing collectively agreed on seven demands: a reassessment of Hu Yaobang, a reassessment of the 1986 student movement and the campaign against bourgeois liberalization that had followed suppression of the movement, increased funds for education, legislation for press freedoms, more measures to combat official corruption, accurate reportage on the protest movement, and an investigation and public disclosure of police violence against students on April 20. Student demands would change frequently in the weeks to come.

By April 24, the students had already presented the authorities with a movement that was bigger, better organized, and with more apparent social support than the protests of 1986. Nineteen schools had united to form the Preparatory Committee for a Beijing Autonomous Union of Students. The committee had decided to promote strikes by students, workers, and shopkeepers and to publish an open letter to the Chinese people, calling for nationwide protests. Students from Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Tianjin traveled to Beijing to help plan a nationwide student strike for May 4. Universities and colleges in Beijing sent representatives to other cities to seek

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4See "19 Beijing Universities and Colleges Put Forward a '7-Point Petition' and a '2-Point Provisional Decision', Calling for Strikes by Workers, Shopkeepers, and Students Throughout the Country," Hong Kong Ming pao, April 24, 1989, in FBIS, April 24, 1989, 32.

6On May 2 the student movement presented a new petition to the government, which dropped the politically sensitive demands for a reassessment of the 1986 protests and the campaign against bourgeois liberalization. The new petition added the following demands: maintaining the constitutional rights of citizens, making public the findings of surveys conducted in ten Beijing universities and colleges, and investigating policy mistakes of recent years so as to discover the reasons for the inflation. These demands were presented as preconditions for opening a dialogue with authorities. On May 6, students dropped preconditions for dialogue and presented a petition that only listed topics for dialogue, as follows: the significance of the student movement, ways to expand political and economic reform, and ways to develop further democracy and the legal system. On May 13, students limited their demands to two: dialogue with the authorities and an affirmation of their movement. After martial law was declared, students again proposed preconditions for dialogue, as follows: the lifting of martial law, the withdrawal of troops, a promise of no reprisals against protesters, and enhanced press freedoms. See "Beijing Student Self-Rule Association Issues Statement at News Briefing," Hong Kong Hsin wan pao, May 1, 1989, in FBIS, May 1, 1989, 59; "Students Present Demands," Hong Kong AFP, in FBIS, May 2, 1989, 10–11; "Zhao Aide To Talk with Students," Hong Kong South China Morning Post, May 8, 1989, in FBIS, May 8, 1989, 20–21; "Students Stage Hunger Strike," Beijing Xinhua, in FBIS, May 15, 1989, 38; "Authorities, Students Resume Talks," Hong Kong Hongkong Standard, May 31, 1989, in FBIS, May 31, 1989, 43–44.
more support for the strike. On April 21, students at Beijing University had begun to boycott classes. By April 24, over twenty universities in Beijing were on an enforced strike, with picket lines surrounding classroom buildings. Students in Beijing were asked to write letters to their friends in other parts of the country to explain the aims of the movement. Public speech groups were established to deliver speeches in the city, to appeal to other sectors of society by talking about problems such as the recent inflation and corruption among officials, both issues on which people tend to have very strong feelings. Students posted pamphlets on street lamps, trees, and bus windows to explain their views. The rudimentary autonomous unions on separate campuses set up independent campus broadcasting stations. Students also began to collect donations to begin an independent newspaper.

Such forms of protest were not without precedent in the history of the PRC. The big-character posters, unofficial student organizations, and link-ups with other units and cities recalled for many older officials the tactics of student Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution. On April 25 Deng Xiaoping concluded: "Now, there are some people doing the same old thing, that is just like the rebellion faction during the Cultural Revolution. They won't be satisfied until all is chaos." Other leaders, too, made references to the Cultural Revolution throughout May and June, in describing the crisis as they viewed it. The association is not surprising: many leaders in the post-Mao regime had been persecuted and toppled from power by Red Guards. Zealous young people defying authority easily raised fears of another such chaotic and threatening movement.

Most of the 1989 student protesters had barely reached the age of ten by the time the Cultural Revolution had ended and been officially repudiated. They did not draw inspiration for their movement from the Red Guards. To the contrary, they believed there was a fundamental difference between the Cultural Revolution and their own protests: the former had been initiated, manipulated, and finally terminated by different groups in the top elite, but theirs was a genuine mass movement.
**Perspective of Protesters**

In a movement that by the end of April could already claim thousands of student supporters and dozens of leaders, there could not be complete unanimity in objectives, motivations, and expectations. But in the seven weeks before the movement was crushed, top protest leaders and elected student representatives managed to make a large number of collective decisions and to obtain active support for those decisions from a large proportion of students. In that sense, despite the differences among them, they presented the authorities with a cohesive student movement, about which several generalizations can reasonably be made.12

Obviously and for a number of reasons, protesters estimated initially that a positive response to their demands was not completely unthinkable for the authorities. First, they assumed socialism was a fairly flexible framework, one that could conceivably accommodate their actions and demands. Student protesters had grown up in the most materially prosperous period of Chinese Communist rule. More to the point, they had not been politically socialized in the rigid ideological atmosphere of the Maoist era.13 They had grown up in a period when the party propagated the view that classics of communism offered no blueprint for building socialism, and that only practical results could reveal the validity of policy. They had seen the boundaries delimiting socialism pushed back by bold economic reforms, such as the decollectivization of agriculture and the opening of special trade zones for foreign investment. They were also familiar with steps toward political reform in other socialist countries—most recently, Poland and the Soviet Union.14 Indeed, student leader Wang Dan explicitly referred to Eastern European countries such as Poland and Hungary as models.15 Second, student protesters could justifiably perceive themselves as playing a legitimate role in advancing the political reforms.

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12Thus, unlike the leaders at the top, whose divisions were translated into different public stances on how to deal with the protest movement, the students presented the authorities with a publicly unified movement.

13Indeed, Deng Xiaoping has proclaimed that lack of proper socialization is a main cause for the protests. See "‘Text’ of Deng Xiaoping Speech Delivered on 9 June," Beijing Domestic Service, in FBIS, June 27, 1989, 9-10. Document 58.

14In addition to learning about events from Chinese news services, many students listen to broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Voice of America.

already proposed by the authorities. Many of their demands reiterated the regime's own policies of reform. Corruption among officials, press freedom, and education were major issues on the official reform agenda and extensively discussed in the official Chinese press. In voicing their demands, then, for the most part student protesters were not presenting an inherently subversive program. Indeed, when asked in an anonymous interview with a foreign reporter about the future of the Communist Party, a student leader replied: "There is no other party capable of running the country. We think democratization is possible with the CPC [Communist Party of China] in power." Even after the massacre of June 4 had presumably shattered for protesters the legitimacy of the current regime, in the relative safety of Western Europe student protest leader Wu'er Kaixi affirmed that the next prodemocracy movement would still have the aim of reforming socialism, not fighting it.

Protest leaders made great efforts to signal to the authorities that their aims should be viewed as essentially reformist, rather than counterrevolutionary. They adopted measures to ensure that the demonstration of April 27 was peaceful, orderly, and orthodox. They denounced violent riots that had erupted in Xi'an, tore down posters criticizing party and government leaders, did not shout antiparty or antigovernment slogans, and prevented nonstudent infiltrators from entering their ranks to cause trouble. They confronted police cordons with the slogan "The people love the people's police, the people's police love the people!" They carried banners proclaiming, "Uphold party leadership, adhere to socialism!"

Nonetheless, protesters also estimated that there was a high probability of being suppressed. This view was shared by university administrators and faculty, many of whom pleaded with students not to demonstrate on April 27. The right to post big-character posters had been removed from the constitution, and demonstrations without prior authorization violated Beijing municipal regulations. More generally, dissent is not usually tolerated in the PRC, and previous movements in 1978 and 1986 had been suppressed. The authorities had shown on May 2.

An exception was the demand for a reassessment of the 1986 protests and campaign against bourgeois liberalization, which was politically very sensitive and was dropped on May 2.


"Interview with Exiled PRC Dissidents Wu'er Kaixi and Yan Jiaqi," n.d. in Paris, Paris Le Monde, July 11, 1989, in FBIS, July 12, 1989, 29. Not surprisingly, Wu'er has since expressed less orthodox views. For example, in a talk to the American Heritage Foundation on August 4, 1989, he reflected that the students had been naïve to ask for changes from the regime, and that it was now clear that systemic change is needed.

The regulations on demonstrations were issued after the 1986 protests. In a meeting with authorities on 29 April, a student questioned the constitutionality of the regulations: "Some students among us have submitted requests to stage demonstrations, but all their
April that they were prepared to use police force against the protesters. Most important of all, the party newspaper had publicly labeled the movement in serious political terms and threatened to suppress it. It was common knowledge in Beijing that the April 26 *Renmin ribao* editorial had been based on a talk given by Deng Xiaoping on the previous day—and thus had to be taken seriously. The editorial asserted that the protests aimed to “negate the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system.” It warned: “All comrades in the party and the people throughout the country must soberly recognize the fact that our country will have no peaceful days if this disturbance is not checked resolutely.”

Yet while the protesters were psychologically prepared to be suppressed with force, they also believed with good reason that the level of suppression would probably be moderate. In part, protesters were inclined to be hopeful because of their rather naive assumptions about the flexibility of socialism, their own self-image as legitimate participants in the reform program, and their measures to signal their reformist orthodoxy. But it was also because in recent years protesters had been punished less and less severely with each incident. Under another regime, a 1976 demonstration to mourn Premier Zhou Enlai and protest against the influential Gang of Four had ended with bloody beatings and imprisonment of the more active protesters. The official verdict on that demonstration had been reversed in 1978, when it was labeled a completely revolutionary mass movement. In 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, authorities had briefly tolerated a popular pro-democracy movement and then in 1979 had suppressed it, imprisoning its main leaders. Again under Deng, the authorities had ended the late 1986 student protests by criticizing and dismissing from the party three prominent intellectuals—Liu Binyan, Fang Lizhi, and Wang Ruowang—accused of instigating and promoting the movement. Liu, a writer, was permitted to spend the 1988–89 academic year in the United States. The astrophysicist Fang spent 1988–89 on the campus of Beijing University, where he spoke frequently about the failings of the Communists. In short, the costs of protest had decreased with each protest movement. It was entirely reasonable for student protesters to view 1976 as an unlikely worst case scenario and 1979 or 1987 as more plausible ones.

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*Introduction*

Attempts have been thwarted by various means. Therefore, my fellow students are of the opinion that even though the ten rules and regulations do not contravene the law, in essence they strictly ban demonstrations because no approval is granted to any request for permission to stage a demonstration.” See “Beijing TV Carries Dialogue,” 46.

*20* “It Is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand against Disturbances,” 24.

*21* Indeed, when martial law was declared, many protesters expressed to me their conviction that no matter what happened to them, they were convinced that history was on their side, and that the official verdict on the movement would be reversed as it had been for the 1976 protests.

Perspective of Hardliners

Those we now know as regime hardliners viewed the protests and their organizers as deliberately malevolent, because they openly violated the fundamental principle of Communist Party leadership and the post-Mao doctrine of social order as a prerequisite for economic and political development. Yet presumably, a large number of Communist leaders in the post-Mao era share with hardliners those basic normative assumptions. What seems to separate hardliners at the top from other leaders is the hardliners' greater fear of social unrest, greater distrust of intellectuals, and (for some) greater suspicion of Western influences—producing a greater initial willingness to resort to force in the face of actions such as the Beijing protests. Thus, while many at the top may have had similar beliefs, they did not necessarily have similar reflexes. Deng Xiaoping outlined a hard-line response as early as April 25, well before the movement had gained momentum.23 In this he was undoubtedly influenced by Beijing leaders Li Ximing and Chen Xitong, who provided a crucial briefing on the situation on April 24.24 Premier Li Peng was also quick to perceive the protests as "antiparty" and "antisocialist"—the conclusion drawn in a meeting he chaired, also on April 24.25

Several generations and a set of basic assumptions about what constitutes legitimate political activity separate student protesters and regime hardliners. With some exceptions, protesters' violations of those assumptions did not present themselves in their demands and slogans.26 Indeed, throughout the movement the authorities stated publicly that they shared with the protesters virtually all of the objectives of political reform that were voiced as issues. The authorities also affirmed that the vast majority of protesters had good intentions. Even the harsh editorial of April 26 stated clearly: "The broad masses of students sincerely hope that corruption will be eliminated and democracy will be promoted. These too are the demands of the party and government."27 In sum, student protesters were correct in estimating initially

less, the regime has recently singled him and his wife out as full participants in the protests, probably in large part because of Fang's role in the 1986 protest movement and because he and his wife fled to the American Embassy in Beijing after June 4. See, for example, "Article 'Exposes' Fang Lizhi's 'Traitorous' Acts," Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service, in FBIS, June 27, 1989, 20.

23"Text of a Document Circulated among Senior Party and Government Officials Earlier This Month," 35-36.


25Ibid. The meeting was of the Politburo Standing Committee. Party leader Zhao Ziyang was absent, having left the day before for a visit to North Korea.

26See note 16 above.

27"It Is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand against Disturbances," 24.
that the regime might find the content of their protest tolerable. Protest in general, however, and the adopted forms of protest in particular, were obviously and utterly subversive. Despite their generally orthodox pronouncements, protesters violated key tenets of post-Mao orthodoxy.

In 1978 party leaders had officially acknowledged economic backwardness as the main obstacle to the PRC's progress toward communism, and, consequently, economic development as the primary task for the current stage of socialism. That decision marked the turning point from Maoism to the post-Mao era of reform, allowing the Chinese, as part of a program to promote socialist development, to introduce practices more common in capitalist market economies.

Reformist leaders had not similarly embraced political pluralism. They had acknowledged, however, that the country could benefit from more consultative politics—encouraging people to voice suggestions and criticism about problems, including mistakes and abuses in leadership. They had reinstated and revitalized a number of organizations and mechanisms for that purpose: party discipline inspection commissions, government supervisory departments, local people's congresses, party and government offices to receive letters and visitors, and "mass organizations" for youth, students, workers, and women. These were the existing legitimate channels of socialist democracy, through which the masses could communicate their views to the authorities.

Post-Mao reformers had also adopted measures to strengthen the rule of law, with one stated rationale that strong rules check strong rulers. In this regard, enhancing rules was enhancing democratic rule. By definition, then, democratic political expression respected the existing framework of rules: "The observance of laws, rules, and regulations constitutes the basic condition for the practice and promotion of democracy. Violating laws, rules, and regulations means undermining democracy and leads inevitably to turmoil." Yet the underlying objection to the student protests was not that they rejected the existing party-dominated youth league and student unions, nor that their posters and demonstrations violated the constitution and broke the law. These were merely specific instances of the more fundamental challenge to the assumptions on which the post-Mao order had been built: that socialist economic and political development is premised on a Communist Party monopoly of leadership and a high degree of social stability.

Although the authorities had granted the masses the right and provided the means to raise opinions, they had more or less reserved a monopoly on defining and imposing solutions. According to the dominant official view, there was no
need to institutionalize political participation in organizations independent of the Communist Party. It was argued that the party had demonstrated its ability to rectify its mistakes, to lead effectively, and to foster democracy: "Our party is fully capable and bold in giving scope to its strong points, correcting the deviations and mistakes in its work, eliminating negative phenomena of all kinds, and continually advancing the cause of China, revolution and construction. Past history has proved this point."  

One major risk of democracy that was not managed by the party was said to be social disorder and its corollary, economic disaster. In Deng Xiaoping's words: "China's main aims are to promote development and eradicate backwardness so that our country will have greater strength and the livelihood of our people will be gradually improved. Without a stable political environment it is impossible for us to do so." The editorial of April 26 warned that protest movements, if unchecked, could develop into "a serious chaotic state." As a consequence: "A China with very good prospects and a very bright future [would] become a chaotic and unstable China without any future."  

Authorities could point to the economic successes of authoritarian politics in developing countries in the past several decades. In support of this perspective, some Chinese social scientists had advanced several versions of a theory of neoauthoritarianism, with many arguing that democratization would be most successful as a gradual process of political tutelage, directed by strong, enlightened rulers.  

Thus the party had appropriated the responsibility and the exclusive right to solve problems and promote democracy. In principle, both democratization and the economic development that was the main task in the current stage of socialism needed strong party leadership and social stability. These assumptions are not unique to the hardliners: they are the foundation of post-Mao political and economic policy. More radical reformers (including but not limited to party leader Zhao Ziyang, who was from the beginning inclined to be conciliatory toward the protesters) found themselves in a minority among the top elite.  

While these basic assumptions help explain the hardliners' revulsion against the protests, the political environment in which the protests took place contributed to a magnified view of the threat they posed. Hardliners lumped all their critics together and perceived the April protests as part of the recent radical  

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32"It Is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand against Disturbances," 24.  
33See Liu Jun and Li Li, eds., Xin quanweizhuyi: dui gaige lilun gangling de lunzheng (Beijing: Beijing jingji xueyuan chubanshe, 1989).
dissent by older nonstudent intellectuals. This had included a petition to release political prisoners (among them Wei Jingsheng, a protest leader imprisoned in 1979)—signed and publicized by prominent mainland Chinese intellectuals as well as even more radical dissident expatriates in political organizations abroad. Fang Lizhi, who had been blamed for instigating the 1986 student protests, was one of the most outspoken petitioners in 1989. Fang was also living on campus at Beijing University, and his wife was in contact with some of the student activists at the university. The student demand to reverse the verdict on the 1986 protests and the campaign against bourgeois liberalization that had followed suggested a relationship between the 1986 and 1989 movements. Hardliners saw the relationship as direct and organizational. It is not surprising that the hardliners failed to draw fine distinctions among their critics, and that the April protests seemed all the more threatening because of it.

The editorial of April 26 provided the preliminary verdict of the hardliners on the protesters and their movement: "Flaunting the banner of democracy, they undermined democracy and the legal system. Their purpose was to sow dissension among the people, plunge the whole country into chaos, and sabotage the political situation of stability and unity. This is a planned conspiracy and a disturbance. Its essence is to, once and for all, negate the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system." Exchange and Escalation

By April 26, hardliners and protesters had made public their positions, the former in the Renmin ribao editorial and the latter in the decision to protest on the following day. The position of the hardliners did not rule out cooptation: they had focused their attack on protest organizers and had labeled the majority of protesters as confused but essentially well-meaning. The position of the protesters did not rule out compromise: they had adopted as protest objectives many official policies. Given their mutually contradictory assumptions, however, hardliners and protesters could not agree on the answer to a basic question: can

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34 Many of the more recent statements about Fang Lizhi's role are obvious attempts to find scapegoats. But there clearly was a perception of the protesters as part of a larger movement of dissent that had not been snuffed out in the campaign against bourgeois liberalization. For example, He Dongchang (vice-minister in charge of the State Education Commission) stated in the April 29 encounter with students: "Some extremists who had shouted the wrong slogans in the past have corrected themselves. This is good, and it is welcomed. But students should be aware of the bearded people—I mean those who are older—and see if they have truly mended their ways. This question requires some deep thought." "Beijing TV Carries Dialogue," 42.

35 A colleague of mine says he finds this mentality easier to understand when he thinks of an example in the more familiar American context: Richard Nixon.

36 "It Is Necessary to Take a Clear-Cut Stand against Disturbances," 24.
socialism accommodate institutionalized political forces independent of the Communist Party? Protesters proposed to institutionalize the movement in dialogues with the authorities and autonomous unions; hardliners found this completely unacceptable. Not surprisingly, the exchange between the two from April 27 to June 3 caused the movement not to defuse but to escalate, to a point from which neither hardliners nor protesters could reasonably retreat.

The exchange unfolded in the following way. Responses from the authorities led protesters to update and revise previous estimates: hardliners seemed unable to suppress them and unwilling to grant concessions. The protesters became confident and frustrated. As a result, their positions and tactics became more extreme. At the same time, the bold actions of protesters only confirmed for hardliners the validity of their previous estimates. Their restraint was taken for weakness, their concessions were rejected as inadequate, and the protesters responded with increasingly subversive activities. This convinced hardliners that protest organizers were indeed out to destroy the party monopoly and social stability that they viewed as necessary conditions for development and that sustained them in power.

Zhao Ziyang contributed to the escalation with his signals of an alternative soft line in the top leadership stratum. Zhao's evident willingness to be conciliatory encouraged protesters, initially to hope for meaningful concessions from the authorities and later to call for the political defeat of Li Peng and the hard line. For the hardliners, the tacit coalition of leader and protesters made the movement all the more dangerous and intolerable.

No Repression

For protesters, the demonstration of April 27 provided the information for the first major updating of initial estimates about suppression. Fully expecting to be beaten or detained, about 100,000 university students marched to Tiananmen. Along their route they met hundreds of thousands of citizens who applauded, shouted their support, and offered refreshments. They were joined on the square by more citizens, and the crowd numbered about 500,000. To their surprise, protesters discovered that the overwhelming majority of police along the route and at the square were unarmed. As the crowds jeered and the lines of marchers strained forward, the police cordons yielded easily. Student protest leader Guo Haifeng probably spoke for many when he concluded: "I am not

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37 Students told me they set out on their march feeling like martyrs for a just cause, expecting that the suppression threatened in the April 26 editorial would be realized. Other Chinese told me that virtually everyone expected the regime to use force on that day, and that the courage of the students partly accounts for the massive support they received from the crowds that lined their route to the square.
afraid anymore, this time there are too many of us.'"38

The events of April 27 to June 3 repeatedly confirmed this confident revision of initial estimates. Although hardliners frequently criticized the protests and issued several warnings, they did not take decisive measures to suppress the movement. Even the declaration of martial law on May 20, which at first produced great tension among the protesters and renewed expectations of violent suppression, proved to be a hollow threat for a full two weeks until June 4.39 Again the Beijing population rallied to support the students and defy the authorities. On the outskirts of the city large crowds of students and citizens surrounded the trucks of more than fifty thousand troops. Officers and peasant soldiers were lectured about the just demands of the movement and scolded for trying to suppress it.40 The response of the army was to stop, and eventually to retreat. Virtually no incidents of army violence occurred.41

For two weeks the troops assigned to enforce martial law held back. Protesters regained their confidence. It was all too easy to conclude once again that the students had won legitimacy, not only among the Beijing population but among those whose job it was to coerce—the police and now the soldiers—and that the movement’s moral force had overcome the force of arms. There were also suggestions of high-level military opposition to martial law: for example, on May 21, marshals Nie Rongzhen and Xu Xiangqian had apparently telephoned Deng Xiaoping to urge against the use of force to end the movement, and seven veteran generals had apparently sent a letter to the Military Affairs Commission and the Martial Law Command demanding that the army remain outside the city.42 Whether or not those rumors are true, they were widely circulated and believed on the square and in the streets.

In the early hours of June 3 the authorities made another major attempt to end the protests. About thirty thousand unarmed soldiers set out on foot from

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38"Student Leader Discusses Issues," Hong Kong AFP, in FBIS, May 1, 1989, 8.
39Students on the square expected the troops to suppress them with tear gas, and protest activists had posted notices around the square explaining how to deal with tear gas. Many students and others in the crowd were very frightened, as they were unfamiliar with the gas.
40Many students and ordinary citizens displayed great courage in stopping the troops. But from the perspective of the peasant soldiers, the student speeches must also have sounded rather patronizing.
41A clash at Fengtai on May 22 produced casualties on both sides, but authorities quickly affirmed that neither students nor soldiers were to blame. Ordinary citizens had become angry when they mistook the army’s retreat for an advance into the city. According to the authorities, students had cooperated with troops to reduce tensions. See "Spokesman Holds News Briefing on Confrontation," Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service, in FBIS, May 24, 1989, 39–40.
42See "It Is Said that Old Marshals Have Telephoned Deng Xiaoping, Pointing Out that Force Should Not Be Used," Hong Kong Wen wei po, May 22, 1989, in FBIS, May
the outskirts of Beijing toward the square. The main force got within several hundred yards of the square but were soon blocked by large crowds, who pushed them and shouted insults. The soldiers were visibly frightened and quickly retreated without resisting. No casualties were reported. An estimated one million people had turned out in the streets to defend the student protesters. Although the troops had nearly managed to reach the square, they had been unarmed and easily overwhelmed by the protesters and their supporters. The incident produced confusion and anger among protesters and their supporters, but ultimately the authorities had again failed to suppress the movement.43

It seemed to most protesters and observers that the authorities could not suppress the movement. Hardliners continue to offer a different explanation of their actions: under the circumstances they chose not to suppress the movement. In their account, from the time the movement began until June 3 they acted with great restraint. In retrospect, their version of events is obviously the more accurate one. Nonetheless, it is also true that the massive crowds that came out to support the students at each threat of suppression made it logistically impossible to suppress the movement without using tremendous force, but politically embarrassing to suppress it with such force.

**Perspective of Hardliners: Concessions**

From the perspective of hardliners, in the three weeks from April 27 to May 20 when they declared martial law, they had responded to the students with concession after concession to end the protests. Each time, protest organizers had rejected the concessions as inadequate, confirming the hardliners' view that the real objective of the movement was to overthrow the party and destroy the system. On May 18 the Minister of the State Education Commission voiced the following opinion on the protesters' demand for dialogue: "We have already held dialogue and consultations between us several times now. It seems that the wishes of our fellow students [sic] can no longer be satisfied merely by holding dialogue."44 As early as the afternoon of April 27, State

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43'he incident was confusing because although the soldiers were unarmed, students later discovered trucks and buses with weapons, and a large number of plainclothes police also entered the city center. Many people (myself included) thought the incident was a provocation, to incite the crowds to use violence.

Council spokesman Yuan Mu had announced that the government welcomed dialogue with the students: "We are ready for conducting dialogue with the students at any time. At the same time we urge them to return to school immediately and assume a rational and sober attitude in demanding dialogue through normal channels instead of resorting to extremist actions." The All-China Student Federation and the Beijing Student Federation were commissioned to make arrangements for dialogue. On that day the federations set up a reception office and telephone hot line to listen to student views. They began to send representatives to the various universities to solicit opinions and work out conditions for dialogue that would be acceptable to both sides.

On April 28 the state-controlled newspapers and television broadcasts carried fairly detailed coverage of the previous day's demonstration. Accurate and comprehensive reports of the protests were also given in the third week of May.

On April 29 and 30 the All-China Student Federation and Beijing Student Federation organized a "candid dialogue" with Li Ximing (Politburo member and Beijing party leader), Chen Xitong (State councillor and Beijing mayor), Yuan Mu, and other officials and students from sixteen universities. The authorities attempted to respond to a number of student concerns, and the talks were shown on national television. Yuan Mu affirmed the patriotism and good intentions of most of the protesters and identified their objectives as no different from regime objectives: "The broad masses of students, filled with patriotic enthusiasm, hope to promote democracy, strengthen the reform, punish those guilty of embezzlement, and overcome corruption. All those wishes are in complete accord with the wishes of the party and the government." He also assured students that the editorial of April 26 was not directed at the vast majority of student protesters. On the issue of corruption, Yuan Mu enumerated cases of corruption already handled by the courts and welcomed students to provide information on suspected official corruption to centers set up by the Ministry of Supervision. On the issue of press legislation, he reported that State Council departments were currently in the process of drafting a publication law and a law on journalism, which would probably be ready for consideration that year.

In the first week of May leaders in the State Council, the Beijing government, and various government ministries engaged in a number of smaller dialogues with students. These were also arranged by the All-China Student Federation. From May 11 to 13, Hu Qili (Politburo Standing Committee member in charge of propaganda work) and Wang Renzhi (Central Propaganda Department head) went to a number of press offices to hear the views of journalists and editors.

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47 See ibid., 25-49.
On May 13 the government responded to a petition submitted by student protesters by announcing it would hold another dialogue with students on May 15. On May 13 and 14, to counter allegations of insincerity in the offer, Yan Mingfu (Central Committee Secretariat member and Central United Front Department head) and Li Tieying (Minister of the State Education Commission) held informal talks with over forty students, including student protest leaders Wu'er Kaixi and Wang Dan. On May 15 Yan and Li held the formal dialogue with over fifty students from twenty-two universities.

On the morning of May 18, four of the five members of the Politburo Standing Committee (Zhao Ziyang, Li Peng, Qiao Shi, and Hu Qili) paid a nationally televised visit to students who had collapsed during a hunger strike and were being treated in Beijing hospitals. Later in the day, hardliners made another concession: Li Peng invited representatives of the hunger strikers, including Wu'er Kaixi and Wang Dan, to the Great Hall of the People for a dialogue on how to end the strike. The hour-long encounter, shown on national television the same day, was remarkable. Wu'er Kaixi rejected the premier's welcome, asserting that the meeting was "not only a little late, but too late." He went on to put Li in the position of guest rather than host: "In fact, it is not that you asked us to come for discussion, but that the great number of people at the square asked you to come out for a talk. The topics of discussion should be decided by us." Li found himself interrupted by students a couple of times, as they assertively lectured him about the situation and their movement. Obviously angry, Li nonetheless affirmed again the patriotism of the broad masses of students and that they and the government shared many of the same goals. He tried to finesse the demand for a retraction of the editorial of April 26: "Neither the government nor the party Central Committee has ever said that the broad masses of students are creating disorder. We have never said such a thing. We have unanimously affirmed the patriotic fervor of the students." In the same meeting, other officials avoided labeling the student movement per se as a disturbance or turmoil. Instead, they argued that regardless of subjective intentions, the movement had developed to a point beyond student control. Thus, objectively, the protesters were responsible for creating a disturbance.

On May 19 Li Peng and Zhao Ziyang visited hunger strikers who were occupying the square. Again, the event was televised nationally. Later that evening Li and President Yang Shangkun announced that the army had been called on to enter Beijing and restore order. On the following day Li signed the declaration of martial law.

48 Perhaps as an even more subtle sign of concession, the meeting was held in the Xinjiang Hall. Xinjiang is the home of Wu'er Kaixi.
49 "Li Peng Holds Dialogue with Students," 15.
50 Ibid., 20.
51 See especially Li Tieying’s comments in ibid., 18.
Perspective of Protesters: No Concessions

From the perspective of student protesters, hardliners had made virtually no meaningful concessions. By contrast, they considered that they themselves had made several concessions, and they grew frustrated by the apparent lack of response.

The visits with hunger strikers in the hospitals and on the square were short encounters, in which the authorities did practically all of the talking. The extraordinary May 18 session between hunger striker representatives and Li Peng was longer and much more of an exchange. It was not, however, the broad dialogue on issues that the protesters had demanded, but rather a crisis session about the hunger strike. At the end of the session a student representative concluded: "This is not a dialogue. This is a meeting." All the other exchanges organized by the authorities were arranged by the All-China Student Federation and the Beijing Student Federation. Most of the student participants in those dialogues were affiliated with those official organizations rather than the newly created autonomous student unions. Many student protesters viewed the federations as puppet unions, because of their organizational affiliation with the Communist Youth League.

By contrast, protest leaders could point to their own important concessions. On May 2 they had petitioned the government with new preconditions for holding a dialogue, dropping the very sensitive demand for a reassessment of the 1986 student movement and 1987 campaign against bourgeois liberalization. On May 5 protesters had ended the boycott of classes in most universities. Only Beijing University students had voted not to resume classes. On May 6 they had presented a new petition with further concessions: they no longer listed specific demands as preconditions for a dialogue, but only discussion topics for the dialogue. They also no longer insisted that the very highest political decision makers participate in the dialogue. Further, they had attempted to take into account the regime's principled objection to holding talks with an "illegal organization." They had formed the University Student Group for Dialogue, an ad hoc group with much overlapping membership but no formal organizational link to the autonomous student union.

Many protesters did not consider the official affirmation of their patriotic intentions as a concession, although they certainly welcomed it. A student representative presented the following argument on the issue to Li Peng on May 18: "The vast majority of students are indeed launching a movement. They indeed are fairly consciously launching a democratic movement, trying to fight for the rights given to

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52 Indeed, it was defined as such by both Li Peng and the student representatives.
them by the Constitution. I would like to have this point clarified. If we today call our action simply an act of ardent patriotism, then there is no way to explain the reason, coolness, orderliness, and observation of law characteristic of the movement. Many things can be done in the name of ardent patriotism.  

Many also rejected the claim that objectively their movement had produced a disturbance. Indeed, students reacted strongly to that label because they had gone to great lengths to be peaceful and orderly in their demonstrations and because the term recalled the official verdict on the Cultural Revolution. One lectured Li Peng: "A disturbance in a country or society is not caused by student demonstrations, but by the social system in existence, the ills of society. . . . The very purpose of student demonstrations is to expose the ills of society at an early date so that the government can deal with them and overcome the ills without delay. Thus the student movement or the movement to promote democracy will indeed serve to prevent society from falling apart and avoid a real disturbance. The argument is quite simple."  

By May 13 the demands of student protesters were only two. These remained the demands of the movement until the end: dialogue with the authorities and an official affirmation of the protests. On May 18 Wu'er Kaixi explained to Li Peng what these demands specifically implied. Dialogue was to be between regime leaders with major decision-making powers and the unofficially elected student representatives; Chinese and foreign reporters were to be present; and it was to be televised live. Official affirmation of the protests was to consist of a retraction of the editorial of April 26, a statement that the protests were not a disturbance, and a positive evaluation of the movement's place in history.  

The stipulated conditions for dialogue provided an opportunity for the students to embarrass the regime while the nation watched and the world listened. To affirm the protests would require Deng Xiaoping personally to concede a serious error and grant the students legitimacy: in Communist systems, those with history on their side are the progressive forces, a major qualification for leadership. But most important, both demands required the authorities to accept a compromise on the basic issues of party monopoly and social stability.

_Escalation of Protests_

From the perspective of protesters, the response of hardliners from April 27 to June 3 can be summed up as no suppression, no concessions. More confident but
frustrated, protest leaders continued to organize demonstrations and adopted more extreme forms of protest, both to promote their demands and to restore momentum to the movement when enthusiasm flagged. Further, after the declaration of martial law, they adopted a more extreme protest agenda—the downfall of Li Peng. Student protesters were also joined by other intellectuals, ordinary citizens, and workers, who formed their own autonomous organizations. The protest movement escalated to a level and kind of mass political participation unprecedented in the history of the PRC.

The most ingenious and successful of the protest tactics was the hunger strike. On May 13 about one thousand students began the strike at Tiananmen to support their demands. By May 16 the number of hunger strikers occupying the square had grown to over three thousand. Tiananmen, normally a rather sterile backdrop for tourist photographs and the stage for rigidly rehearsed celebrations of important events in Chinese Communist history, became the setting for a real drama, featuring students (young enough to be considered by the Chinese as mere children) prepared to die for what seemed to many to be trivial demands. The hunger strike radicalized Beijing society by transforming the protesters into victims. It provided a compelling reason (or pretext) for practically everyone to participate in the exchange between authorities and protesters. Without explicitly opposing the regime by expressing support for the demands of the protesters, people in nearly every social group urged the authorities to engage in dialogue with the students, for humanitarian purposes if nothing else. On both May 17 and 18, over a million people demonstrated with the hunger strikers in the square. Many student protesters wore headbands identifying them by university, department, class, and name. Their boldness seemed justified: how could the hardliners suppress a million people?

During the May demonstrations student protesters were joined on the square by normally submissive journalists from the state-controlled media, secondary school students, cadres from party and government departments, and the Beijing police—as well as other intellectuals, ordinary citizens, and workers. Students from the provinces, about 172,000 from May 16 to 26 alone, traveled to Beijing to show their solidarity and participate in the occupation of the square. Supportive hunger strikes were staged in Shanghai, Xi'an, Chengdu, Shenyang, and Harbin. Demonstrations were held in major cities in every province except Tibet. Li Peng described the situation as one of “complete chaos,” in Beijing and throughout the country.62

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59 The number of demonstrators was relatively low in the second and fourth weeks of May. By the end of May many of the students on the square were from outside Beijing.

60 Many Chinese expressed to me their dismay at the imbalance between the protesters’ objectives and the sacrifices being made to obtain them.


For hardliners, the size and scope of the protests were already a great embarrassment and a grave threat. The timing made them particularly embarrassing for the regime: Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in Beijing on May 15 for the first meeting between top Chinese and Soviet leaders in thirty years. For the event the Chinese had welcomed the largest Western media contingent ever to assemble in Beijing. The hunger strike and massive demonstrations were transmitted by satellite to viewers all over the world, and the protests shunted the summit meeting to second place. But most threatening to the hardliners was the institutionalization of the movement in autonomous organizations—the Beijing Autonomous Union of Students, Local Autonomous Union of Visiting Students, Beijing Autonomous Union of Residents, Beijing Autonomous Union of Intellectuals, Beijing Autonomous Union of Workers, and Headquarters to Defend Tiananmen Square (whose members pledged to defend the square with their lives). In establishing independent mass organizations the protesters upset the party political monopoly. Understandably, hardliners labeled the “illegal organizations” an attempt “to lay a foundation for opposition factions and opposition parties in China.”

The earliest of the organizations—the Beijing Autonomous Union of Students—already had a corps of student leaders, functionally specialized departments, elected representatives from more than twenty universities, domestic and foreign financial support, its own flag, an independent broadcasting station at Tiananmen, and a primitive press.

In his talk on April 25 Deng Xiaoping had characterized the Chinese protests as potentially less threatening than those encountered by the Polish Communists, because “China only has [to worry about] students.” But on May 19 the newly established Beijing Autonomous Union of Workers issued a declaration supporting student demands and announcing a general strike on May 20 if the authorities did not unconditionally accept those demands. The temporary halt of public transportation (on which many workers depend) in the first few days of martial law makes it difficult to assess support for the autonomous union. Nonetheless, the Polish experience had demonstrated to everyone that independently organized workers presented a serious challenge to the party monopoly.

A final irritant to the authorities was the erection on May 30 of a large plaster “goddess of democracy,” obviously resembling the American Statue of Liberty. Students positioned the statue in the place on the square reserved for a

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64“Text of a Document Circulated Among Senior Party and Government Officials Earlier This Month,” 36.
65While a large crowd greeted the unveiling of the statue, many people expressed to me their disapproval of it, for esthetic reasons and because it recalled an American rather than Chinese symbol.
portrait of Sun Yat-sen, father of the republic, and facing the national flag and portrait of Mao Zedong.

When Li Peng declared martial law on May 20, protest organizers made him a public target of the movement. Some protesters also called for the resignation of Deng Xiaoping, but that was never openly part of the organized protest program, and anti-Deng slogans were by far overwhelmed by anti-Li slogans. By conventions established in the Cultural Revolution, naming names amounted to a significantly more extreme protest agenda, and hardliners saw in it indisputable evidence that protest activists were out to topple the regime. Protesters regularly gathered in front of the Great Hall of the People and Zhongnanhai and shouted clever rhyming slogans calling on Li to resign, hang himself, or commit suicide.

Even with the attack on Li Peng, from the perspective of hardliners content was essentially less threatening than the public support for the protesters and the unprecedented forms of protest: for two years the authorities had allowed Fang Lizhi to express to Chinese and foreigners views far more critical and radical than anything promoted by protest organizers. For hardliners, Fang was a serious annoyance. The protests, however, were a pressing crisis.

Zhao's Soft Line

On May 24 President Yang Shangkun delivered the hard-line verdict on Zhao Ziyang, holding him responsible for the continuing protests: "The present problem is that two different voices in the party have been completely exposed in society. The students feel that there is a person in the party Central Committee who supports them and, therefore, they stir up greater trouble." That accusation to the contrary, Zhao cannot be blamed for the adoption of more extreme protest positions and tactics. Indeed, on at least two occasions his soft line led to immediate concessions from protesters and a brief de-escalation of the movement. After a conciliatory May 4 speech to the Asian Development Bank meeting in Beijing, all schools except Beijing University called off their boycott of classes and formed the ad hoc group for dialogue with the authorities. After Zhao's May 19 visit to hunger strikers on the square, students called off the hunger strike and substituted an ordinary sit-in to continue their protest.

66In his speech of May 19, Li Peng noted that the spearhead of the protest movement had been directed at Deng Xiaoping. In fact, Deng was far less the target of attack than Li Peng himself. See "Comrade Li Peng's Speech at the May 19 Meeting of Party, Government, and Military Cadres," 8.

67See note 22 above.

Nonetheless, during the protests Zhao clearly broke with party discipline to reveal conflict in the top elite. On May 16 he publicly distanced himself from the unpopular inflationary policies of the previous year and from Deng Xiaoping. In a televised discussion with Mikhail Gorbachev, Zhao revealed a secret 1987 party agreement by which leaders had agreed to consult Deng on all major policy decisions. The disclosure caused a sensation among the politically savvy Chinese, because Deng had formally retired from all positions except Chairman of the Military Affairs Commission. While no one had doubted Deng’s influence in policy making, the institutionalization of that influence in a secret agreement seemed a cynical act, treating ordinary Chinese as dupes, and another example of the hypocrisy of their leaders.

Clearly, before the declaration of martial law, Zhao’s conciliatory stance encouraged protesters to hope for a more positive response to their demands. For example, Zhao’s May 4 speech at the Asian Development Bank meeting offered the most conciliatory view of the movement presented publicly by a top leader since the protests had begun. Zhao spokeoptimistically of the prospects for accommodating some “reasonable demands.” Students who heard the speech broadcast that evening noted the difference in nuance between it and the editorial of April 26, and the favorable student reaction was recorded in the Chinese press the next day. An official news agency quoted a Qinghua University student: “If the government had taken such an attitude right from the very beginning, the mess could possibly have been avoided.”

In his May 19 visit to hunger strikers on the square, Zhao was visibly emotional, weeping as he admitted that the visit had come “too late.” Again he suggested that the movement’s demands would or should be met: “I know your fasting is aimed at obtaining a very satisfactory answer to the issues you put forward to the government and the party. . . . Some issues can be solved only through a process. Some issues—for example, the nature of your action—I feel can be eventually solved. We can reach a consensus.”

In short, Zhao did indeed reveal to the general public “two different voices in the party,” of which his own appeared to be truly receptive to the demands of protesters. Zhao’s views and the negative reception of them among most of the

70The impact of the revelation should not be underestimated. Some people thought at first that Zhao was trying to curry favor with Deng with his references to Deng as the great leader. Only when Zhao revealed the agreement did people begin to understand that Zhao was distancing himself from Deng.
72“Zhao Ziyang’s Speech Welcomed by Students,” 3.
top political elite were also revealed to student protesters by Bao Tong, Zhao's aide, who kept in touch with protest activists on the square. Obviously, the victory of Zhao's soft line was tied to resolving the elite conflict in his favor. For whatever reasons, Zhao chose to seek his constituency among the people in the streets. In that sense, he made the protest movement even more threatening to hardliners: at the top was a leader who had formed a tacit coalition with the protesters. It was a bold and probably foolish gamble, but a victorious Zhao might have become the Gorbachev of Chinese politics. The potential danger of the situation must surely have been appreciated by Deng Xiaoping, the leader who, more than ten years earlier, had manipulated the 1978 prodemocracy movement to put himself in a position of greater strength to promote reformist policies.

But without underestimating Zhao's role, it is important to point out that the protests were by no means initiated because of Zhao: indeed, Zhao was a target of the movement at the beginning and only gained favor among protesters as he distanced himself from hardliners. Zhao contributed to the escalation of the movement only indirectly, because he presented an alternative to the hard line. Zhao's soft line offered hope to protesters before martial law was declared, and after May 20 hardliners seemed all the more objectionable by contrast. Finally, although the current official interpretation of the protest movement assigns considerable blame to Zhao, it is clear that the regime needs a scapegoat. To overestimate Zhao's importance in the calculus of hardliners is to treat the protests as a mere backdrop for yet another instance of top-level elite struggle and to ignore the obvious: the people on the square and in the streets presented the regime with one of the greatest threats to its power and policies encountered in the forty years since the Communists came to power.

No Retreat

The process of exchange and escalation pushed protesters and hardliners to a point of no retreat. For the protesters, that point probably came soon after the evening of May 19, when Li Peng and Yang Shangkun announced that martial law would be imposed. Martial law signaled the defeat of Zhao Ziyang's soft line, and Zhao was conspicuously absent from that meeting. Protesters expected

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74 It seems that Zhao was in disfavor among hardliners even before the protests began. Thus his actions may have been an effort to save his position by appealing to another constituency.

75 For example, students held up a photograph of Zhao playing golf (as an example of the decadence of top officials) during the April 29 dialogue with authorities. Many people were also critical of the business activities of Zhao's sons.

76 Two days earlier, following a demonstration by over one million people on May 17, protesters and their supporters were far more optimistic about possible outcomes. For example, among 423 people polled on the square late that night, responses to the question
RELUCTANT DUELISTS

no concessions from hardliners alone, and consequently they openly took a position to work for the downfall of the Li Peng regime. On May 24 Wang Dan and Chai Ling, leaders of the newly established Headquarters to Defend Tiananmen Square, described the situation as "a decisive battle between light and darkness." They concluded somewhat pessimistically: "We do not want to say that we will never fail but we have no way of retreat." 77

For a few days it seemed that violent confrontation could be postponed, that a withdrawal from Tiananmen was possible. Six weeks after occupation of the square had begun, enthusiasm for continued occupation was decreasing and the movement was in financial trouble. 78 Protest organizers announced a plan to abandon the square and continue the "battle" through other means. Withdrawal would not mean the end of the protest movement: "This is a long-term movement." 79 But student representatives voted on May 26 to remain at Tiananmen. 80 One explained her rationale as follows: "Some of us wonder if our presence here is very important any more. But I don’t want to leave; the wasted effort would be too great." 81

For hardliners, too, the point of no retreat probably came in the days immediately after the declaration of martial law. For the first time, the protest movement had publicly declared the regime its enemy. A large proportion of Beijing’s population had flaunted martial law and openly sided with the protesters. Three days into martial law, over a million people were demonstrating at Tiananmen once again.

On May 22 Li Peng expressed the view that the protests were no longer a matter of one or two months, that the students had made long-term plans. He also observed: "We have come to the stage where there is no retreat. If we retreat still further, we shall have to give China away to them." 82 Two days later Yang Shangkun confirmed Li’s view of the situation and drew the logical conclusion

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78 At a press conference on May 27, students revealed they were in debt. By their calculations, the movement required fifty thousand yuan daily to maintain itself. See "Beijing Students Urge End to Protest," Hong Kong AFP, in FBIS, May 30, 1989, 66.

79 "Beijing Students Set Up Headquarters to Defend Tiananmen," 26.

80 Apparently, students from Beijing were willing to withdraw from the square, but students from the provinces wished to stay.


for hardliners: "A retreat would indicate our collapse and the collapse of the PRC. . . . We can no longer retreat and must launch an offensive." 83

Massacre

The official Chinese version of events alleges that no one died at Tiananmen on 4 June, that student protesters marched off the square unharmed. 84 The latter assertion accords with several reports of Chinese and foreign observers, although many facts remain to be clarified and conflicting versions have also been presented. But in the actions of protesters and soldiers on the edges of the square and farther to the east and west, along the broad boulevard leading to the square, there is evidence enough to counter the regime's claim that the massacre is a myth. The army used excessive and indiscriminate violence as it eliminated obstacles preventing it from reaching Tiananmen.

Earlier in the evening, the authorities had broadcast repeated warnings to the public to stay indoors. They had warned that personal safety could not otherwise be guaranteed. Large numbers of people had responded to those warnings by hurrying into the streets, gathering at bridges and intersections, setting up barricades, waiting for the army—as had been done several times in recent weeks in response to similar warnings, one as recently as the previous day. 85

For the hardliners and the army, the strategically placed buses and concrete and metal barriers were an inconvenience. The crowds, standing between the army and the square, were a major dilemma. For many, presumably, it was a conscious stand in defense of the student protesters. To that end, some had armed themselves with primitive weapons—bricks, rocks, homemade gasoline grenades. But armed or unarmed, militant or simply curious, all were obstacles to an army determined to clear the square. Despite warnings, they had chosen to be in the streets, in front of the army. In that sense, they were indeed forces hostile to the army, preventing it from reaching the square, some prepared to use weapons against the army.

The crowds were hostile, but their hostility was directed at the regime's hardliners and their supporters. On the night of the massacre the crowds waited for the army but for the most part did not prejudge it. As before, they were prepared to lecture, harass, and turn back the soldiers. Certainly, some in the crowd were armed against the army. Undoubtedly, the events of June 3 and

83"Yang Criticizes Zhao," 17.
85Perhaps because troops had fled from the crowds during the abortive attempt to reach the square on June 3, the atmosphere that night did not initially seem as tense as it had immediately after the declaration of martial law, for example.
previous weeks had left many of the young peasant soldiers feeling humiliated, frightened, and angry. But the ultimate weapon of the crowds was simply their choice to be in the streets—indisputable evidence of the extent of social support for the students. The crowds could stop the army only if the army treated them as inviolable. If the hardliners chose to suppress the movement and if the army cooperated, the streets of Beijing could be cleared.\(^8^6\)

In what sense can army actions be characterized as a massacre? The regime has retrospectively described the situation as a riot. The failed attempts to end the protest movement since mid-April indicated that the army could not reach the square without using force against the crowds. Clearly, riot control instruments and techniques were required to eliminate the crowds. Yet the army eliminated obstacles in their path with tanks, machine guns, assault rifles, and real bullets. The violence inflicted was excessive, in the sense that more force was used than was reasonably required to execute the order to clear the square that night. Moreover, the violence was indiscriminate. Soldiers shot into the crowds, at chest level, and continued shooting from their vehicles as they moved toward the square. Bystanders were shot and killed.

We know practically nothing about the actual decision making that preceded the massacre. It is almost certainly wrongheaded, however, to consider it as anything but a conscious choice by those who ordered the army to clear the square. Presumably, this includes at least Deng Xiaoping and Yang Shangkun (who were in charge of the Military Affairs Commission), Li Peng, and the other two members of the Politburo Standing Committee who emerged politically unscathed—Qiao Shi and Yao Yilin.\(^8^7\) Whoever they are, those who ordered the army to clear the square that night, and those who acquiesced in that decision, must have known that force would be required to disperse the crowds. The exercise of June 3, which pitted an unarmed army against the crowds, was only the most recent demonstration of that. Knowing that force would be required to execute the order, they sent in an army armed with weapons of lethal destruction. The outcome was predictable.

It is easy enough to understand why the regime’s hardliners ultimately chose to suppress the protest movement with force. But what explains the use of weapons of war rather than simply instruments of riot control? It is not completely inconceivable that the Chinese do not have sufficient riot control forces to deal with a movement of the unprecedented size of the Beijing

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\(^8^6\)This is obvious in retrospect but was not obvious at the time. Most people felt safety in numbers.

\(^8^7\)Deng has also acknowledged the influence of “‘veteran party cadres,’” a reference to the very senior veteran revolutionaries who emerged from retirement in the course of the movement. See “‘Text’ of Deng Xiaoping Speech Delivered on June 9,” 8. See also “Yang Criticizes Zhao,” 18.
protests.\textsuperscript{88} It is also possible that the Chinese do not have sufficient riot control equipment to put down such a movement.\textsuperscript{89} Soldiers trained and equipped to fight a war might have seemed to the hardliners as the only available means to achieve their end.

From another angle, consider the mass response each time the hardliners threatened to suppress the movement: visible support for the protesters grew almost immediately. Judging from this response, I find it highly probable that even had riot control measures cleared the streets on the night of June 3, they would not have ended the protest movement. Large crowds would probably have appeared on the following day.\textsuperscript{90} The protests were not a mere riot, they were a mass movement. At a minimum, protesters would have retreated only temporarily, to rally in even greater force at a later date.

This last point is suggestive of the rationale for the massacre: unlike the medium-level suppression of riot control, the force used on June 4 promised to end the movement immediately, certainly, and once and for all. As that was both the point of the effort and its actual outcome, the massacre is in retrospect a logical choice for hardliners—given their assumptions, estimates, and the circumstances they faced. From their perspective, the probable loss of international prestige and foreign investment could conceivably be recouped, but the collapse of their rule would mean irreparable damage. Deng Xiaoping had said as much on April 25: "We must not be afraid of people cursing us, of a bad reputation, or of international reaction. Only if China truly develops, and implements the four modernizations [of agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense], can we have a real reputation."\textsuperscript{91}

The massacre was effective precisely because the violence was excessive and indiscriminate. The excessive use of force demonstrated that the potential costs of protest were prohibitive: the regime was willing to sanction the killing of protesters in the streets. The indiscriminate use of force demonstrated that those

\textsuperscript{88}The total numbers in the riot control forces (the People’s Armed Police) are much smaller than the army, and they are under the separate operational commands of the provincial governments. Forces as large as the separate armies actually deployed on June 4 could perhaps have been put together from several provinces. But these would not have had experience under a unified command and would have left the provinces without the appropriate forces to handle protests in the localities.

\textsuperscript{89}Li Peng has mentioned the shortage of tear gas as one reason for its limited use against the protesters, but that is obviously not sufficient evidence for the hypothesis. See "Why Beijing Used Bullets," \textit{New York Times}, July 3, 1989. Tear gas was used prior to June 4 to disperse smaller crowds and thus was part of the repertoire of the People’s Armed Police.

\textsuperscript{90}In fact, crowds returned to Tiananmen to do battle with the army on the morning of June 4, many hours after the tanks and troops had installed themselves on the square.

\textsuperscript{91}"Text of a Document Circulated Among Senior Party and Government Officials Earlier This Month," 35.
costs would not necessarily be keyed to levels of participation: they could be imposed on mere bystanders. The most prominent and radical of protesters feared for their lives on June 4. But when the army opened fire, any person in the streets had good reason to fear no less. Prior to June 4, people could assume that the potential costs of protest were roughly predictable and that they would vary by degrees of involvement. The massacre invalidated those assumptions. It introduced unprecedentedly high costs and left virtually to chance the question of who would bear them. This combination of severity and near randomness is the essence of political terror.92

Conclusion

The logic of the 1989 protests and massacre is one of players pressed into a duel. Protesters and hardliners began with mutually contradictory assumptions and estimates about the implications of mass political participation. Responses from hardliners and the existence of an alternative soft line drove protesters into more extreme positions and tactics; these in turn confirmed the hardliners’ view that the protests were deliberately malevolent. With better information about the actual norms and costs of protest, it is almost certain that students would not have chosen to escalate the protests. Although massacre ultimately dominated other choices for hardliners, it is clear that they too were “reluctant duelists.”93

The protests are often described as a prodemocracy movement, although democracy was only one of many issues aired. Yet it is not an inaccurate characterization of the movement, as it sums up the real point of contention: how do the people rule? The protests assumed the existence of a new and thoroughly unorthodox kind of politics at the same time as protesters borrowed from orthodox notions and rhetoric to voice their demands. Their forms of protest assumed the legitimacy of bottom-up mass politics, institutionalized in real mass organizations, rather than the elite-dominated mass mobilization of the past, the mass consultation of post-Mao reform policy, and the “mass organizations” of the Communist Party.

Could Chinese leaders have offered more significant concessions to the protesters? Obviously, yes—if they had been prepared to abandon basic assumptions and the old politics of elite monopoly for a new kind of leadership. The protesters might be appeased for a time, but the new mass politics would be strengthened. Concessions to end the protests would probably have signaled nothing less

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than a fundamental change in the nature of Chinese politics—an acceptance of mass initiatives, accountability to the masses, a mass market for solutions to political problems.

In the recent political reforms in Poland and the Soviet Union, we can see examples of what the new mass politics might eventually have become. That Chinese hardliners rejected these models is unsurprising: the Communist leader prepared to legitimate and promote this kind of politics must himself become a new kind of politician. The skill, creativity, and courage that this challenge requires and the crisis of authority needed to force this option onto the agenda should not be underestimated. From the perspective of Deng Xiaoping and other elders who had made revolution and gained power in China, bottom-up politics must have looked far less appealing than it had half a century ago. What we saw in the 1989 protests was the necessarily short-lived practice of new mass politics without a successful elite sponsor.
This map shows sites of “disturbances” and confrontation between the public and the PLA as mentioned in a variety of official and non-official descriptions of June 3–4. Clearly, conflict and confrontation was more widespread than initially understood.