



Remembering Tiananmen

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Introduction

For more than six weeks during the springs of 1989, Chinese people from all walks of life, young and old, rose up to demand greater freedom and an end to official corruptions.

The protests on Beijing's Tiananmen Square and the eventual military crackdown are recalled here by Dan Southerland, The Washington Post bureau chief at the time.

His wife Muriel shot the video and many of the still photos included in this book.

What followed for three student leaders as well as other central figures is the subject of a final section titled "Where are they now?"

Prelude to Protests



By Dan Southerland, RFA Executive Editor

As a reporter for The Washington Post, I had covered student demonstrations and unrest in China in the mid-1980s. But I could never have imagined at the time that those early pro-democracy protests would become the precursors of the much larger uprising at Tiananmen Square that occurred in April 1989.

In retrospect, many of the signs that such a major movement could emerge were already there a year earlier.

In early May 1988, in an article headlined “China foresees turmoil,” I wrote that inflation and social disorder appeared to threaten the nation’s highly acclaimed moves away from a centralized economy.

The Party had helped to raise living standards by loosening central government controls and giving farmers a chance to make their own decisions.

But that decentralization had also led to corruption and nepotism, growing disparities in income, and a sense that new and uncontrollable forces had been unleashed.

Economic crimes such as bribery and embezzlement were on the rise. Government officials in China’s poorest

regions were accused of embezzling tens of millions of dollars intended for relief aid.

Price inflation

But price inflation was perhaps the greatest immediate threat to the government. Over the previous year, the Chinese people had faced the steepest price increases since the Communists took power nearly 40 years earlier.

In 1988, the Party's leaders had gone only halfway with a key reform—changing China's centrally controlled pricing system—leaving state-enforced prices for some commodities in place while allowing free market prices for others.

This allowed party officials and profiteers to buy commodities at low, state-set prices and then sell them at higher prices on the free market.

A Chinese think tank had warned at the time that most public complaints were focused on unequal opportunities. "If this state of affairs continues for long," their report said, "the discontent will be further aggravated."

It was against this background that the first student demonstrations erupted in Beijing in April 1989 and quickly gathered popular support from ordinary citizens throughout the country.

Demonstrators at Tiananmen reflected popular anger and concerns when they called for a more open and accountable government, a free press, and an end to official corruption.

But in the beginning at least, slogans calling for an end to corruption were more prominent than any other.

As my friend and colleague James Miles, a BBC correspondent in Beijing, pointed out, a song frequently sung by the protestors was one that began with the words *Dadao guandao* (down with profiteering officials), *fan fubai* (oppose corruption) *fan fubai*, sung to the tune of a French nursery rhyme.

Dissident intellectuals

Among dissident intellectuals, the beginnings of the Tiananmen movement could be seen as early as 1986.

In that year, student demonstrators were taking advantage of then Communist Party chief Hu Yaobang's talk about "democracy." Hu had declared that there could be no modernization without democracy.

But I discovered at the time that the students were inspired by something more than calls for democracy as defined by a Party leader.

In several locations, an astrophysicist and vice rector of a provincial university was visiting campuses and urging students to think more independently.

His name was Fang Lizhi.

He excelled in physics, and his scientific discipline led him to question authority not only in his own field but also as it was wielded by the Communist Party.

Marxism-Leninism, he had daringly stated, was "a worn-out dress that should be thrown away." Fang was urging students not to wait for democracy to be handed down to them by the Party.

"Democracy should be won by the people's own efforts," Fang said.

As the writer Orville Schell later explained, Fang's "call to intellectuals to throw off party domination by straightening out their 'bent backs' stunned students with its boldness even in the relatively open political

environment of 1986.”

But it was still “a society long accustomed to self- censorship and public silence.”

In the summer of 1988, Fang and his wife, Professor Li Shuxian, engaged university students in “democracy salons” that involved key student leaders.

The stage was set for a major challenge to the Communist Party.

The Protests Begin



April 15th to April 26th

Hu Yaobang, an outspoken reformer who was forced from power as leader of China's Communist Party in 1987 died in Beijing on April 15, 1989.

Soon after hearing the news of Hu's death, students at Beijing University plastered university bulletin boards with posters mourning the former leader as a champion of democracy.

Some of the posters took an even more daring tone, indirectly attacking the country's leaders.

"A true man has died, but false men still live," said one poster.

Hu, who died at age 73, had been removed as party chief after being accused of allowing student demonstrations to get out of control in 1986 and again in 1987.

The Party accused Hu of promoting “bourgeois liberalization,” or Western democratic ideas.

But many students and intellectuals saw him as their champion.

<http://pressbooks.bbg.gov/remembertiananmen/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2016/06/01Parade.mp4>

At first, students at the prestigious Beijing University engaged in spontaneous mourning activities which could not be taken as a direct challenge to Communist Party rule.

But within days they organized demonstrations at Tiananmen Square.

Corruption becomes an issue

Their protests appeared to reflect a deep yearning by the students for more political freedom and more accountability by the government.

They shared a widespread belief that top Party and government leaders were depositing large sums of money overseas and placing their relatives in favored positions.

The demonstrators in the center of Beijing seemed to be using their idealized view of Hu to repudiate the entire Chinese leadership.



Student protesters hold hands as they march toward Tiananmen Square. Photo by Muriel Southerland

“Hu Yaobang didn’t have a foreign bank account,” said one demonstrator.

The students proclaimed a number of demands, the chief one being the rehabilitation of Hu.

But they also demanded freedom of speech and the press, more money for education, the removal of restrictions on street demonstrations, and, perhaps most significant, the public disclosure of the Party and government leaders’ incomes.

At first the authorities appeared to be relatively tolerant of the protests. But they also used truck-mounted loudspeakers to stress that such demonstrations were illegal.

By April 20, more than 150,000 students had staged a sit-in in Beijing's vast central square. The students, from at least 30 universities, marched in defiance of government warnings to keep the square clear during a memorial service held to honor Hu Yaobang.

Students well organized



Onlookers climb trees for a better view of the protests. Photo by Muriel Southerland

A demonstration in such strength on the 100-acre square—the symbolic center of the nation where Mao Zedong had declared the People's Republic of China—marked a dramatic escalation of the challenge to the Party authorities.

For the first time, students from outside Beijing, and from as far away as Dalian in northeastern China, participated.

And in an unusual display, ordinary citizens in Beijing applauded the students as they made their way through the city to the square.

“Well done!” shouted a middle-aged woman. “You’re the future of China!” Onlookers responded with a round of applause.

Most important, the students displayed a high degree of organization not seen in previous years.

The Beijing students were well organized partly because they had been planning to mark the 70th anniversary of the May 4th movement of 1919, when large numbers of Chinese students had first mobilized to call for freedom and democracy.

Beijing students also began boycotting classes in order to focus entirely on achieving their goals. Student demonstrators over the previous several years had failed to achieve their goals because of a lack of organization as well as a lack of popular support.

An editorial backfires

Following clashes between the police and some of the demonstrators, a People's Daily editorial read over the Party-controlled national evening news program accused some of the protestors of aiming to “overthrow the government and Party.”

The April 26 editorial had an effect opposite to what was intended. It created more anger among the students, even as demonstrations were spreading to other cities.

Chinese sources close to the government told me that Deng Xiaoping, the country's paramount leader, had decided that the Party had been too lenient in dealing with the students.



Protesters hold up signs that read, "Speaking for the people even at the cost of our lives." Photo by Muriel Southerland

Deng was reported to believe that "black hands and provocateurs," such as dissident Professor Fang Lizhi and his wife, an associate professor at Beijing University, were behind the demonstrations.

Two other things apparently alarmed top Party leaders: First, some of the protesters had made direct attacks on several leaders, including calls for the resignation of Premier Li Peng.

Second, factory workers began appearing on Tiananmen Square to voice support for the students.

The Chinese leaders were particularly sensitive about worker participation in street demonstrations, fearing that it could lead to even more serious challenges, such as a Polish-style Solidarity movement.

The students, meanwhile, had formed student unions, organizations that also reminded the leaders of the rise of the Solidarity movement, in which workers took the lead to overthrow Poland's communist regime.

The Politburo Splits



April 27th – May 19th

Following an eruption of student anger against a Party- backed editorial of April 26 attacking student leaders, party chief Zhao Ziyang signaled that he wanted to reach a compromise with the students.

On May 3 and 4, Zhao made conciliatory statements that were well received by many students, partly because he acknowledged that the students had legitimate concerns.

Zhao declared that students didn't question the underlying system but were asking the Party to correct its mistakes.

But hard-liners in the Politburo leadership were not pleased.

A book titled *The Tiananmen Papers* that appeared years later in 2001 revealed Party documents showing a severe split at the time among party leaders.

In a clash with Premier Li Peng during a Politburo Standing Committee meeting on May 1, Zhao had “stressed the need to respond to the students’ legitimate concerns with accelerated political reforms.”

But Li Peng argued that establishing order had to be the highest priority before further reforms could be considered.

Seemingly contradicting Zhao, a top government spokesman on May 3 rejected conditions set by student leaders who had threatened to stage a mass demonstration in Beijing if their demands for a dialogue with Chinese leaders were not met.

Yuan Mu, spokesman for the State Council, China’s cabinet, charged that the students were being incited from abroad.

Yuan also said that the students had laid down an “ultimatum” to the government that showed them to be “naïve and impulsive.”

Students react in anger

Students around the country were angered by Yuan’s remarks and resented his allegations that they were being manipulated from behind the scenes.



Thousands of protestors crowd Tiananmen Square, forcing Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev, who visited the capital, to enter the Great Hall of the People from the back entrance. Photo by Muriel Southerland

On May 4, tens of thousands of students broke through police cordons and gathered on Tiananmen Square.

Several hundred Chinese journalists also marched to the square, applauding the students and shouting, “We want

a free press.” The journalists had petitioned for the right to report openly on the protests, and journalists from leading Chinese media organizations, including The People’s Daily, the mouthpiece of the Party, joined in.

For a brief period before martial law was imposed, Chinese journalists reported objectively on the student protests.

Other Chinese showed their support in more disorganized ways by lining roadways, clapping, giving students free rides, and donating money and food to the students.

In the end, people from all walks of life, including thousands of workers, farmers, teachers, and members of research academies, appeared on the square to offer their support to the students.

Hunger strike begins

On the night of May 13, more than 1,000 university students began a hunger strike on Tiananmen Square, pressing their demand for a dialogue with the government less than 48 hours before Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was to arrive for a state visit.

<http://pressbooks.bbg.gov/remembertiananmen/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2016/06/03HungerStrike.mp4>

Party chief Zhao Ziyang, whose position was weakening as Party hard-liners pushed for a tougher line against the students, warned the demonstrators not to impede the first Sino-Soviet summit meeting to be held in 30 years.

The students were demanding that the government hold a substantive dialogue “on an equal basis” with a newly formed student group that had organized a class boycott and many of the demonstrations.

Convinced that the Gorbachev visit gave them bargaining power, the students also demanded that the government recognize their movement as “patriotic.”

The hunger strike, which some students described as a “last resort” rapidly gained support from around the country.

A mass movement is born

On May 17, more than a million Chinese flooded the streets of the capital in support of the students—the biggest display of popular defiance in the 40-year history of Communist China.

This peaceful uprising, one of the most extraordinary events to be witnessed in any communist country, forced visiting President Gorbachev to radically alter his schedule.

For much of the day, the authorities lost control of several square miles in the center of the city, when Chinese from all walks of life, including government workers, marched festively and chanted for democratic reforms and the removal of top Chinese leaders.



Protestors gather around the Monument to the People's Heroes on Tiananmen Square. Photo by Muriel Southerland

Demonstrations in support of the Beijing protesters were reported in Shanghai and 21 provincial capitals.

Beijing's most famous comedian, schoolchildren, bankers, Foreign Ministry staff members, railroad and crane factory workers, and even a few soldiers were in the streets.

Calls for Deng to resign

The demonstrations caused a near paralysis of the police and Chinese central government, with many protesters calling for the resignation of top leader Deng Xiaoping.

Deng, who had launched major economic reforms a decade earlier, was now being accused by the students of opposing political liberalization and blamed by workers for China's more than 30 percent inflation rate.

The conservative Premier Li Peng agreed to meet with a dozen student leaders at the Great Hall of the People.

Li intended to lecture the students on the "state of anarchy" that they had created. But instead two of the student leaders cut the prime minister off and lectured him.

It was an amazing spectacle, broadcast on national television.

When top Politburo leaders met the next night, they began planning a crackdown.

<http://pressbooks.bbg.gov/remembertiananmen/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2016/06/04Visit.mp4>

Now isolated and exhausted, Zhao Ziyang made a predawn visit to the hunger strikers at Tiananmen Square.

It was to be his last public appearance.

“We have come too late,” said Zhao, now close to tears and holding a loudspeaker. “I am sorry. No matter how you have criticized us, I think you have the right to do so.”

Tension Builds



May 20th – June 2nd

On the night of May 19, Premier Li Peng announced that the authorities had decided to take decisive steps to put an end to the “turmoil” in Beijing.

President Yang Shangkun announced that the government had no choice but to move troops to “the vicinity of Beijing.”

Troops soon began to close in on the capital from all sides.

After the initial shock wore off, the students reacted defiantly.

They had massive support from more than a million Chinese citizens who took over sizable areas of Beijing in a widening, nonviolent revolt against the communist government.

Workers and ordinary citizens throughout the city blocked the incoming troops at every turn.

In the meantime, demonstrations in support of the Beijing protesters were reported in numerous other Chinese cities.

In Xian, more than 300,000 protesters packed the streets. In Shanghai, thousands of students flanked by sympathetic workers thronged the waterfront.

Peaceful encounters with troops

At first most encounters with the incoming troops ended in a peaceful standoff, with students offering sodas, Popsicle, and bread to the soldiers in an apparent attempt to minimize the confrontation.

A madcap band of some 400 motorcyclists raced about the city as a kind of reconnaissance force, warning citizens of the army's approach and passing messages back and forth among groups of citizens and students.

<http://pressbooks.bbg.gov/remembertiananmen/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2016/06/05Goddess.mp4>

The bikers, most of them older than the students, became overnight heroes.

With the roar of their engines and beams of their headlights heralding their approach, the bikers gave many in Beijing a sense of fun and spontaneity.

But it was partly through them that the students on Tiananmen Square acquired accurate information on the troop movements and attempts by citizens to block them.

Difficult to cover

Foreign journalists now had major problems covering events because confrontations—still mostly peaceful ones—were occurring all around the city, particularly in nearby outskirts.

On May 20 and 21, I spent part of my days on Tiananmen Square and my evenings trying to follow the motorcyclists, who were nicknamed “The Flying Tiger Brigade, or “feihudui.”



*People begin living and sleeping in the pedestrian underpass leading to Tiananmen Square, The Square becomes a small city. Photo
by Muriel Southerland*

One night, in my office car I followed the Tigers to a suburb several miles to the west of Tiananmen Square.

There hundreds of citizens had surrounded army trucks loaded with troops and vehicles carrying water cannons. The citizens had surrounded the soldiers to such an extent that the troops couldn't move.

A young man stood above the crowd and played the Socialist "Internationale" on a trumpet.

At that moment, most students and many of the citizens seemed to be confident that they would prevail.

Little violence at first

What was amazing to me was the extent to which confrontations remained largely nonviolent in first week or so following the imposition of martial law.

The first time I reported any violence was on May 20 when 10 students suffered serious wounds and more than 20 were slightly injured.

Riot police had attacked them while they were lying on a road trying to halt army trucks heading into the city from the south.

Early in the day, throngs of citizens, some of them in a festive mood, surrounded troops of the 27th Army at six or more points around Beijing.

To confront the troop convoys, protesting civilians mustered a ragtag cavalcade of vehicles made up of horn-honking cars, trucks, taxis, minivans, dump trucks, garbage trucks, cement mixers, commandeered buses, and even motorized vehicles for the handicapped.

Others simply surrounded army trucks in the streets and bombarded grim-faced soldiers with appeals to support the students.

In southwest Beijing, protesters blocked 20 tanks from moving, and soldiers allowed children to climb onto the turrets.

Student radicalization

But attitudes were hardening on both sides.

Some students who had previously argued for dialogue with the government and reform of the existing system began to talk openly about ousting the regime.

Workers began calling for a 24-hour, citywide strike, while hundreds of workers from one of the Beijing's major industrial complexes, turned up in the streets.

Military helicopters flew over the city, drawing chants and raised fists from many protesters.

On May 27, the Party elders decided to appoint Jiang Zemin, the Party secretary in Shanghai, to replace Party Chief Zhao Ziyang.

The numbers of students on Tiananmen Square had begun to decline.



The Goddess of Democracy is erected and brings renewed vigor to protesters on the square. Photo by Muriel Southerland

But on May 29 the students' spirits revived with the appearance of a statue dubbed the Goddess of Democracy, a huge plaster figure modeled on the American Statue of Liberty.

At the same time, the student movement was beginning to splinter.

One leader, Wang Dan, advocated a temporary withdrawal from the square.

Other leaders, such as Chai Ling, argued for holding the square at all costs.

On May 30 the students got word that hard-liners in the Beijing city government, allied with Li Peng, had arrested 11 motorcyclists in the Flying Tiger Brigade, including the group's leader.

According to a senior diplomat, the arrest of the bikers signaled the beginning of the Communist Party's attempt to retake control of Beijing.

On the morning of June 2, Li Peng opened a meeting with six Party elders led by Deng Xiaoping.

According to *The Tiananmen Papers*, Li Peng quoted reports from the Beijing Party Committee and the State Security Ministry alleging domestic and foreign manipulation of the student movement.

The group then decided to clear Tiananmen Square.

Crackdown



May 20th – June 2nd

The Chinese army's first major attempt to break through roadblocks and enter the center of Beijing ended in failure.

Before dawn on June 3, more than 5,000 unarmed troops surged toward Tiananmen Square but were thrown back by city residents who were protecting the square and defying martial law.

The exhausted troops had jogged in formation more than 10 miles from the eastern side of Beijing.

Once the troops got near the edge of the square, they showed little willingness to try to break through the wall of civilians who confronted them.

<http://pressbooks.bbg.gov/remembertiananmen/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2016/06/06Blockade.mp4>

Having been tipped off by students that the army was closing in, workers and other civilians had poured in the darkness from the side streets onto Changan Boulevard, the main avenue leading to Tiananmen Square.

In one location, civilians screamed at the troops “Go back!” and “Don’t do it!” They tore off some of the soldiers’ uniforms, hats, and shoes and paraded the items around as trophies.

Here as in other areas, many of the troops retreated on foot or by bus, leaving behind shoes, canteens, rice bowls, backpacks, and trucks.

The crowds, swept by a feeling that they were invincible, celebrated and cheered as the army retreated. But the festive atmosphere didn’t last long.

Tens of thousands of troops, led by tanks, were ready to move from the outskirts of Beijing.

In Tiananmen Square, the remaining students camping out there learned that troop movements were imminent.



A truckload of PLA troops drive toward Tiananmen. Photo by Muriel Southerland

Student leaders told their followers to stay in tents pitched in the square.

Meanwhile, city residents near the square gathered in clusters to await the soldiers. Their numbers included many workers, both office workers and factory workers, but very few students.

Massacre on the Boulevard of Heavenly Peace

Late on the night of June 3, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) fired its first shots.

Three miles west of the square at the Muxidi intersection, citizens were trying to block an armored column heading toward the square via Chanregan Boulevard, the Boulevard of Heavenly Peace .

Taking shelter behind a barricade of buses, civilians hurled rocks, bricks, and pieces of concrete at soldiers carrying only truncheons, riot shields, and stun grenades.

After the unarmed troops failed to break through, several hundred soldiers armed with AK-47 rifles then ran for-

ward firing at the barricade and killing unarmed civilians.

Two soldiers were then killed by the angry crowd.

Tanks and armored personnel carriers smashed through burning buses blocking the intersection.

“Tiananmen massacre” has become the shorthand term used to describe the killings carried out that night. But the biggest massacre actually occurred as troops and Avenue of Eternal Peace armored vehicles shot their way through the three miles between Muxidi and Tiananmen Square.

Tiananmen Square

Chai Ling, the top student leader remaining on the square, called on the students to gather around the Heroes’ Monument.

She implored the students not to use weapons to defend themselves, although some, including workers, picked up planks and iron bars. And a few grabbed captured weapons.

At 2 a.m. the first trucks carrying troops reached the square.

Hou Dejian and Zhou Duo, two men who had supported the students through a hunger strike of their own, negotiated with army officers to secure a safe exit for those remaining on the square.

An army political commissar offered Hou Dejian only one choice: Get the students to leave by daybreak through an opening on the southeast corner of the square or harm might come to them.

Hou Dejian pleaded with the students to leave in order to avoid bloodshed.

But the students were divided.

Many argued to stay on the square.

Li Lu, the deputy commander of the students at the square, called for a voice vote and then announced over the objections of many that those who favored leaving the square had won.

<http://pressbooks.bbg.gov/remembertiananmen/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2016/06/SoundofJune31.mp3>

Between 4:30 and 5 a.m., troops began to move from north to south down the square.

Commandos armed with rifles and bayonets forced students off the Heroes’ Monument, shot out loudspeakers, and seized microphones used by the leaders.

Students who failed to move quickly were beaten.

Tanks smashed through tents and toppled the Goddess of Democracy, the plaster and styrofoam figure that had been erected by art students a week earlier.

As the students made their way from the southeast corner to the west of the square, armored personnel carriers smashed into a group of people, killing 11 of them.

Later in the morning crowds gathered near the Beijing Hotel, located a short distance to the east of the square.

Crowds of angry and distraught people had gathered there, some of them relatives of students who had been on the square.

As the crowd edged forward, soldiers armed with auto- matic weapons opened fire.

Dozens fell before the fusillade. Some were shot in the back as they fled.

How many died?

And the government played down the number of civilian deaths while appearing to exaggerate the number of military deaths.

Yuan Mu, a government spokesman, denied that the army had killed or wounded a single student or other citizen when clearing Tiananmen Square.

But Yuan failed to mention the killings that had occurred around the square or on its edges.

Yuan said that according to incomplete statistics close to 300 soldiers and civilians died in Beijing, including 23 students from area universities.

To this day it is still not clear exactly how many people were killed or injured on June 3-4 because the dead and wounded were taken to a number of hospitals and other locations.

But witness accounts and visits to hospitals where the dead or severely wounded were taken indicated that the total civilian death toll came to at least 700.

Officials forbade the hospitals from issuing exact statistics.

Various officials offered estimates of the military dead and wounded that tended to grow as the week went on.

But they failed to offer a detailed breakdown that might have documented this.

A book published in 2009 by Zhang Wanshu, a former senior journalist with China's official Xinhua news agency, states that based on an actual body count, a total of 727 people died, including 713 civilians and 14 military personnel.

But that number may exclude the dead who were not taken to hospitals.

And none of the numbers mentioned here include those killed in clashes in numerous provincial cities and towns outside Beijing.

Aftermath



AFTERMATH

June 5th - Present

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June 5th – Present

On June 5, 1989 a single, unarmed man stood in front of a column of more than a dozen tanks rolling near Tiananmen Square.

The lead tank tried several times to go around the man in a white shirt who was holding two shopping bags. But he blocked the tank each time.

In the end the tank stopped, and the man climbed up to talk with the crew.

Finally two men, possibly friends, came out to hurry him away.

Photos of the unidentified man circulated widely around the world, making him an iconic symbol of the struggle for freedom.

But due to censorship in China itself, Tank Man isn't widely known among many people in his own country.

And more than two decades later, his ultimate fate is still unknown.

Arrests begin

On June 9, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping appeared on state television addressing a gathering of senior leaders.

Deng praised the army's actions, signaling that he and the hard-line old guard had retained their grip on power.

Not shown with Deng was Zhao Ziyang, the Communist Party chief who had opposed martial law and sympathized with the student protesters who had occupied Tiananmen Square.

Zhao was now under house arrest.

Bao Tong, Zhao's top political advisor, had already been arrested in late May.

Bao was later sentenced to seven years imprisonment for allegedly "leaking secrets" about the Party's decision to implement martial law.

Speaking on television, Deng stated that the aim of the student leaders and their supporters had been to overthrow the Communist Party and establish a "Western-dependent bourgeois republic."

But in the coming weeks, it became apparent that not only students but also numerous ordinary workers who had supported the students and helped to block army advances into Beijing had been arrested.

On June 13, the authorities broadcast a "most-wanted" list of student leaders, with Wang Dan, Wuerkaixi, Liu Gang, and Chai Ling at the top of the list.

Chai Ling and Wuer Kaixi went into hiding and eventually made their way to Europe and the United States.

Wang Dan, listed as number one on the most-wanted list, was arrested in July, 1989 and spent two terms in prison for a total of four years.

The government also began announcing the executions of "hooligans" who had been arrested outside Beijing. State media, meanwhile, said that the student leaders

But foreign reporters who covered the students' activities and statements noted that Wang and other student leaders had consistently counseled nonviolence and called for reform, not the overthrow of the Communist Party.

Crackdown on workers

Han Dongfang, the spokesman for the workers at Tiananmen Square, turned himself over to the police after going into hiding for a short period and was imprisoned for nearly two years.

Party documents later revealed that Deng Xiaoping considered workers like Han to be a much bigger threat to the Party than the student leadership.

In prison, Han was placed in a cell with prisoners suffering from contagious diseases, acquired tuberculosis, and lost a lung as a result.

The crackdown was widespread

Chinese sources with access to Communist Party documents said that by July 7, police and soldiers had arrested or detained about 10,000 people nationwide—four times the number officially acknowledged.

The crackdown affected not only students and workers but also many people in other sectors of society as well, including farmers, teachers, civil servants, and restaurant employees.

More than a dozen journalists from at least eight media organizations, most of them newspapers, were detained or arrested.

And by the end of 1989, New York-based Freedom House reported that a total of 56 Chinese journalists had been arrested during the year.

Many more lost their jobs and quit voluntarily after censorship was reimposed.

And a number of prominent television anchors were taken off the air.

Relatives of Communist Party members were also among those who were arrested.

In the Fuxingmen area, several miles west of Tiananmen Square and inhabited by many privileged Party members, relatives of senior and middle-level Party officials had turned out to support the students during their demonstrations.

Soon after June 4, police began a search for subversives there, moving from one apartment to another.

Arresting “black hands”

In an effort to find “black hand” conspirators behind the pro-democracy movement, the government focused on two leading intellectuals, Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao.

Chen ran a network of think tanks and had attempted to mediate the conflict between the student protesters and the Party.

On June 30, Chen Xitong, the hard-line mayor of Beijing, listed the *Economics Weekly*, a newspaper run by Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao as a hostile organization that had been working with the student leaders and plotting behind the scenes to overthrow the Party and government.

In February 1991, Chen and Wang were jailed for 13 years on charges of sedition.

Chen and Wang both argued during their trials that they had not sought to overthrow the regime but had instead urged the student leaders to compromise with the government.

Their verdicts had clearly been determined even before the trials.

The Party also blamed Fang Lizhi, the dissident astrophysicist sometimes described as “China’s Sakharov,” and his physicist wife Li Shuxian for inspiring key student leaders to call for democracy and an end to corruption.

But on June 5 Fang and his wife had taken refuge in the U.S. embassy in Beijing .

Tiananmen today

Following the June 4 massacre in Beijing, Chinese censors managed to erase from the country’s textbooks and state-run media all mention all details of the day when the People’s Liberation Army opened fire on unarmed civilians.

Even today, more than two decades after the crackdown, the Tiananmen issue is still so sensitive that the police tighten surveillance in the days leading up to the anniversary of June 4.

And the police are also particularly vigilant around April 5 when Chinese families gather during the annual “Qingming” festival to tend the graves of departed loved ones.

But cracks began appearing in China’s “Great Wall of Silence” on the subject of Tiananmen when Chen Xitong, widely known as the Beijing mayor who had advocated the Chinese army crackdown on the protesters in 1989, broke his silence and said the tragedy was regrettable.

Chen asserted in a series of interviews in a book published in 2012 that, contrary to Party documents and most independent analysis, he did not push for the use of force.

With proper handling, the ex-mayor said, the loss of hundreds of lives during the crackdown could have been avoided.

But it was Chen who delivered a lengthy report to the National People’s Congress on June 30, 1989 that constituted the Chinese government’s definitive statement on “checking the turmoil and quelling the counter-revolutionary rebellion.”

Chen said in his book that he was forced to read this statement prepared by Party leaders but that he did not support it.

This marked the first time in 23 years that a high-ranking Party official associated with the Tiananmen crackdown had openly expressed regret over the loss of hundreds of lives in 1989.

Could Chen’s book become a precursor of a Chinese government reassessment of its own official verdict condemning the pro-democracy movement of 1989?

Most experts think it is still too early to expect such a reassessment.

Where are they now?

Ten Key Players

Wang Dan



A history student at prestigious Beijing University, the soft-spoken Wang Dan came to prominence in 1988 when he organized campus “democracy salons.” He went on to set up the Beijing Students Autonomous Federation (BSAF). At the top of a list of “most-wanted” student leaders after June 4, Wang went into hiding but was arrested on July 2, 1989. In 1991, Wang was imprisoned for two years. He was jailed again in 1996 but freed on medical parole in 1998 and went into exile in the U.S. He obtained a Ph.D. in history at Harvard University. He now teaches at National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan and does regular commentaries for Radio Free Asia.

Wuer Kaixi



A member of the Uyghur ethnic minority, Wuer Kaixi was second on the most-wanted list of student leaders. Wuer was a powerful and often entertaining speaker. He and Wang Dan opposed staying on Tiananmen Square once it became clear that the army would clear the square. Wuer Kaixi found his way to Hong Kong and eventually to the United States. He now lives in Taiwan and does regular commentaries on ethnic issues for Radio Free Asia.

Chai Ling



As commander-in-chief of the students on Tiananmen Square, Chai Ling left the square with her followers before daybreak on June 4, 1989. After nearly a year in hiding, she escaped from China and finally settled in the United States. She acquired an MBA from the Harvard Business School, founded an Internet company, and in 2009 converted to Christianity. She subsequently founded a new organization called “All Girls Allowed,” which campaigns against forced abortions and discrimination against girls under China’s one-child policy.

Han Dongfang



Han Dongfang, the spokesman for the workers at Tiananmen Square, was imprisoned for nearly two years in 1989. He acquired tuberculosis while in prison and was allowed to travel to the U.S. for medical treatment in 1992. In 1994, Han founded China Labour Bulletin, a Hong Kong-based NGO that promotes workers’ rights in China. He also does regular interviews with workers for Radio Free Asia, supports lawyers providing legal aid to Chinese workers, and is producing a film on Chinese miners who have suffered lung damage without gaining adequate compensation.

Fang Lizhi



Fang Lizhi, an astrophysicist who inspired student leaders, was designated early on as a troublemaker by the Chinese authorities. He was expelled from the Communist Party in 1958, rehabilitated two decades later, and expelled once again for inspiring student demonstrations in 1986-87. Although Fang played no direct role in the 1989 protests, he had apparently `offended paramount leader Deng Xiaoping earlier in that year by appealing in an open letter to Deng to release all of China’s political prisoners. Few Chinese would have dared to do this. After June 4, Fang and his wife, Li Shuxian, were accused of being part of the “behind-the-scenes planning and direction of the counterrevolutionary riots in Beijing.” After the couple were placed on a wanted list, they sought refuge in the U.S. embassy in Beijing, where they stayed for a year before being allowed to leave the country. Fang Lizhi died in Tucson, Arizona in April 2012. He was active until the end of his life as a physics professor at the University of Arizona.

Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao

Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao, two Chinese intellectuals labeled by the government as key “black hand” conspirators plotting to overthrow the Communist system, had in reality been seeking a compromise between the government and prodemocracy student demonstrators.



Chen Ziming

Chen and Wang had counseled the students to avoid extremism and embrace moderation. The two had also organized a representative group that included intellectuals, students, and ordinary citizens. This was what apparently most upset the government. In 1991, Chen and Wang were given 13-year sentences for allegedly inciting an insurrection against the state. In the spring of 1994, both Chen, who suffered from cancer, and Wang, who had acquired hepatitis in prison, were released on medical parole. Their release came just weeks before the U.S. decided to renew China’s Most Favored Nation trading status. China was eager to ensure that its trading status wasn’t held up in the U.S. Congress by human rights concerns.



Wang Juntao

Wang traveled to the United States, obtained a master’s degree from Harvard and a Ph.D. at Columbia. He currently lives in New Jersey, serving as co-chair of the national committee of the Chinese Democratic Party. Wang does regular commentaries on RFA’s “Democracy Salon” call-in show. China prevented him in early 2013 from flying to Beijing to see his dying father. Chen Ziming was sent back to prison in 1995 but was again released for medical reasons two weeks prior to a visit to China by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. But Chen was kept under house arrest until the end of his sentence in 2002. Then for four years, Chen wasn’t allowed to publish anything under his own name. Chen started a website in 2004, but the government shut it down without giving a reason for doing so. In a 2006 interview with Radio Free Asia, Chen said that he had been shunted back and forth between three government departments to try and find out whose decision it was to close his website. “They wouldn’t give a reason for the closure,” he said. “They just pull the plug on you, because they can.” Chen Ziming died of cancer in late October 2014, having spent more than a decade in prison or under house arrest.

Li Peng



Li Peng, a Soviet-trained engineer, became China’s premier following the ouster of Communist Party chief Hu Yaobang in early 1987. Although the army crackdown in Beijing involved a collective decision by several top leaders, Li Peng appeared to be the chief enforcer, particularly because it was he who declared martial law in May 1989. Li retired as the chief of the National People’s Congress in 2003. In 2010, a diary purportedly written by Li Peng was leaked to New Century Press in Hong Kong. Although the diary proved impossible to authenticate, it laid the primary blame on paramount leader Deng Xiaoping for ordering the

be in ill health. use of military force against the Tiananmen protesters. As of this writing, Li, 85, is reported to

Chen Xitong



Chen Xitong, the Beijing mayor who advocated the June 3-4 army crackdown, later delivered the official report justifying military action. He subsequently won promotion to the ruling Politburo. But Chen was fired from his job as mayor in 1995 and in 1998 became the most senior Party official ever to be jailed for corruption. After serving eight years of a 16-year term, Chen

was released for medical reasons. In a book published in 2012, the former mayor expressed regret for the 1989 crackdown and asserted that he did not advocate military action but was forced to read the official document justifying it. Chen died on June 2, 2013 at the age of 83.

Bao Tong



Bao Tong, Party chief Zhao Ziyang's top political aide and speech writer and a staunch advocate of political reform, was arrested on May 28, 1989. Bao was the most senior Party official to be jailed during the turbulent events of 1989. He was accused of leaking state secrets concerning the imposition of martial law and engaging in counter revolutionary propagandizing." In 1992, he was sentenced to seven years in prison. He served those years in solitary confinement in a cement cell. He is currently under house arrest in Beijing but occasionally gives interviews and does regular commentaries for Radio Free Asia.

Those Who Helped

By Dan Southerland, RFA Executive Editor

While writing the six chapters in this e-book, I was constantly reminded of how difficult it was for any one reporter to grasp all that was happening in China in the spring of 1989.

Though Beijing was at the center of attention, prodemocracy protests reached some 400 cities nationwide as well as countless towns.

As Beijing bureau chief for The Washington Post I was helped in covering the widely scattered events in Beijing itself by a small team of three Chinese-speaking American reporters.

In addition, several talented reporters from The Post were in Beijing to cover the mid-May visit of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Moscow bureau chief Michael Dobbs was there for the Gorbachev visit and stayed on for days afterward.

Veteran China hand Jay Mathews was also there, and was particularly helpful in keeping an eye on the student demonstrators.

Assistant Managing Editor Jim Hoagland, also there for the Gorbachev visit, provided analysis and perspective.

And my colleague John Burgess was sent to Beijing from Washington to help me out after the shooting started. He immediately began filing first-rate reports.

Stringers

I had hired the Chinese-speaking Americans to assist me because I feared that hiring local Chinese—whether researchers or aspiring journalists—to do the job might result in their being imprisoned.

The Post called them “stringers,” a term which I felt in retrospect did not grant them the status they deserved, particularly when you consider the risks they took during the crackdown.

At one point on June 3 and 4, one of these young Americans was keeping an eye on Chinese army troops near Tiananmen Square.

Another, on the morning of June 4, watched troops gunning down unarmed civilians near the Beijing Hotel.

A third helped keep me in touch with students, citizen protesters, and crowds blocking troops in trucks several miles east of Tiananmen Square.

Beaten and detained

Jonathan Moses was in an alleyway next to Tiananmen Square at 2:30 a.m. on June 4 when Chinese secret policemen dragged him away, grabbed his notebooks, and began kicking him in the head.

In the end the unidentified men blindfolded Jon, took him to an empty barber shop, and made him think that they

might kill him.

But they freed him once he signed a “confession” that he had, among other “crimes,” spoken to Chinese people when such interviews were unauthorized.

Finally, they dropped him off at an unfamiliar location several miles north of Tiananmen Square.

With Jon in captivity, I had lost my “eyes” on Tiananmen Square just before the army drove the students off the square.

I had already asked another member of my team to move off the square because I thought it was too dangerous for him.

Accurate information then became harder to get.

I’ve always regretted that I didn’t go onto the square myself at that point, but in the pre-cell phone era I feared losing communication with Washington.

Incomplete accounts

When I tried to sort rumor from fact in the aftermath of the shooting on June 3–4, some of the witnesses to the events could only provide incomplete or biased accounts.

One source who was well connected to Communist Party officials told me that bodies were being burned on Tiananmen Square.

I couldn’t find a second source to confirm her account and fortunately didn’t report it, because it turned out to be false.

The army had been burning trash on Tiananmen Square.

Chinese doctors and nurses who had openly sided with the students on the square, and who had allowed reporters into operating rooms to view the dead and wounded, came under pressure to conceal casualty figures.

Friends and false allies

One brave doctor at a hospital not far from Tiananmen Square led me and my colleague Sarah Lubman to a makeshift morgue, where we saw some 20 bullet-riddled bodies laid out on a cement floor. I later learned that the doctor was “disciplined” for allowing us to view that scene.

People in a crowd outside the hospital had urged the doctor not to allow us into the hospital, but he did.

When I tried to get back into the hospital a day later on the pretense of being sick—actually I was exhausted—another doctor questioned me and then politely threw me out.

A Chinese journalist whom I considered a friend tried to convince me that the government estimates of fewer than 300 killed were correct and that these included a large number of military and police casualties.

I later learned from Chinese colleagues that this journalist was working for state security.

Memorable moments

But I also treasure memories of the weeks leading up to June 3–4 when Beijing citizens of all professions and classes of society were suddenly opened up, spoke out, and said what they really thought.

It's impossible to forget early May, when Chinese journalists bravely petitioned for the right to report openly on the Tiananmen protests, which on May 17, swelled to more than a million people peacefully marching in the Chinese capital.

Many people were suddenly displaying a kind of generosity that I had never witnessed before in Beijing.

Taxi drivers were giving free rides to students. Doctors and nurses rushed to the aid of the students who went on a hunger strike. As far as I could tell, the crime rate had dropped. My wife Muriel felt perfectly safe in taking videos of the scene at Tiananmen Square and elsewhere on a daily basis, often with our 15-month-old daughter along for the ride in a baby carriage.

This was the case from mid-April up until the evening of June 3.

Things started out quietly that evening.

At around 7:30 p.m., crowds on the Avenue of Eternal Peace were still trying to convince soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, the PLA, that they should not harm the people.

China's capital had been under martial law for two weeks. But the people of Beijing had formed human barriers to block the troops from reaching Tiananmen Square.

Citizens from the neighborhood near our apartment compound which was located several miles to the east of the square were handing out food and soft drinks to soldiers packed into army trucks.

Muriel and an American friend, who was pushing her son along in another stroller, saw someone in the crowd lift a little boy, perhaps five years old, into the back of one of the trucks filled with troops.

A soldier placed an army hat on the boy's head. The boy then saluted the crowd. Everyone cheered. It was sweet moment before the storm.

At that point, just an hour or two before the army opened fire west of Tiananmen Square, a few people in a crowd not far from our residential compound began to sound a note of caution.

One person told Muriel that because our baby was asleep she should return to our apartment.

Shortly thereafter, another person made the same remark, a hint that things might take a bad turn.

After Muriel returned to the apartment, I got word from one of our team, Sarah Lubman, that an armored personnel carrier had run over a man near the Jianguomenwai overpass near where Muriel had been watching people talk with the troops.

Families evacuated

On June 5, Muriel and our two children moved to a hotel near the Beijing airport to join foreigners being evacuated from the city.

They rented a taxi and took back streets to avoid troop positions. The cab passed burned-out buses that had been used to slow the Chinese army's advance to Tiananmen Square.

They flew to Hong Kong on June 6.

Shortly before noon the next day, PLA soldiers opened fire on our apartment complex.

I was grateful that my wife and children were not there to hear the sound of automatic weapons pounding a

building near us that housed diplomats and their families.

The Chinese martial-law command later claimed, without providing evidence, that a sniper had been firing at a column of PLA soldiers from a building inside the Jianguomenwai housing complex.

But Western diplomats concluded that the troops were under orders to fire into the apartments of military attaches and others in order to discourage them as well as foreign reporters from observing and photographing PLA maneuvers.

A foreign diplomat shared with me information showing that the soldiers had been firing in a calculated way from positions across the street from the compound known as Jianguomenwai.

No one in the apartments was injured, but bullets smashed into the window of a unit where two children were watching television.

A Chinese maid, acting quickly when the shooting started, threw herself on top of the children. The maid and two children survived the attack without injury.

I later learned that the U.S. embassy had received a tip from a young PLA officer urging officials and family members to stay out of that particular apartment building during certain hours that day.

Not everyone seemed to get the message. But many of the apartments were empty at that moment. And some embassy officials' families had already left Beijing.

Our apartment was not hit during the attack. But later that day, when I stood on the balcony of a friend's apartment looking down at the troops, an officer shouted over a loudspeaker that I should step back or the troops would shoot.

I stepped back.

Once things calmed down and my family got back to Beijing, my son and I counted several hundred bullet holes in the apartment building facing the Avenue of Eternal Peace.

It was a miracle that no one was injured.

By the time that Muriel and our two children returned to Beijing, the crackdown was complete, and the government was blaming foreign "hostile forces," including the West and Taiwan, for having incited the Tiananmen protests.

Some of the Chinese who had openly expressed their views to us before were now avoiding us.

But I'll always be grateful to those who had helped us even though there were now limits on what they could say.

Helpful books

In trying to piece together a broader picture than was available to us at the time, I've relied heavily on several books written by former colleagues and academics whom I respect.

Tiananmen: The rape of Peking, a compact book written by journalists Michael Fathers and Andrew Higgins and published by The Independent newspaper in 1989, has stood well the test of time.

Another book that I consulted frequently was *Black hands of Beijing: lives of defiance in China's democracy movement* by George Black, a foreign editor of *The Nation* magazine at the time, and Robin Munro, a

researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Munro was one of the few foreigners who spent the entire night of June 3-4 on Tiananmen Square.

The authors managed to unearth useful information on the workers who participated in the Tiananmen protests as well as new insights into the roles of Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao, two intellectuals who were branded as key conspirators behind the protests.

I'm also indebted to the late James Lilley, the U.S. ambassador in Beijing in 1989, for his insights into developments during the Tiananmen crackdown, including the shooting incident that occurred at the Jianguomenwai housing complex. His views are summed up in his autobiography, titled *China Hands*.

The Tiananmen Papers, compiled by Zhang Liang, and edited by Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link were helpful in providing internal government and Communist Party documents that revealed the thinking of top decision makers at the time.

Finally, *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, a memoir that Zhao recorded in secrecy, provided further insights into top-level thinking in 1989.

The book was translated and edited by Bao Pu, Renee Chiang, and Adi Ignatius.

I can also recommend *Tiananmen Moon*, by Philip Cunningham, a book published in 2009 that captures the atmosphere of openness and sharing that swept through the student movement of 1989 and also affected many of the citizens of Beijing.

The author combines descriptions of his personal experience in helping to cover the protests with an historical perspective gained from his study of Chinese history.

Louisa Lim's book *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*, which was published in 2014, offers a broader, more up-to-date perspective that takes the reader beyond Beijing.

Lim describes in great detail a brutal crackdown on protesters by the police and People's Armed Police that occurred in the central Chinese city of Chengdu in June 1989.