



BACKGROUND TO THE 1989 DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

Fifteen years ago the Chinese government ordered the suppression of a peaceful protest movement that had been carried out by students and civilians in China's major cities over a period of two months in the spring of 1989. The center of the protest movement was Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where tens of thousands of students camped out to press their demands for democratic reform and a halt to China's escalating corruption problem, and where more than one million people marched carrying banners and shouting slogans. On the night of June 3, 1989, the government ordered the People's Liberation Army to clear the square. On the afternoon of June 3rd, martial law troops moved into Beijing and clashed with civilians trying to block their way to Tiananmen Square. In the early hours of June 4th, the troops cleared the square and opened fire on unarmed students and civilians in the surrounding area who resisted the suppression.

According to an internal Chinese document, more than 2,000 people died in various Chinese cities on June 3rd and 4th and the days immediately following. The Tiananmen Mothers have documented the names of 182 victims, including three who died at Tiananmen Square.

In addition, in the follow-up to June 4th, more than 500 people were imprisoned in Beijing's No. 2 prison alone, and an unknown number were imprisoned in other Chinese cities. An additional unknown number were executed. Some 130 people are believed to remain in prison serving long terms for crimes connected with the 1989 protests.

However, the total number of dead, wounded, imprisoned and executed remains unknown, because the Chinese government has consistently refused to carry out a thorough investigation or accounting of the events of June 1989.

The Tiananmen Mothers, along with Human Rights in China and many other groups and individuals, have over the past 15 years repeatedly called for an independent investigation into the June 4th incident, a thorough official accounting of the dead, injured and disappeared, appropriate redress to surviving victims and families of the dead, and accountability on the part of the officials who ordered the crackdown. China cannot make genuine progress in its domestic development or as a world power until it addresses this stain on its history.

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUNE 4TH CRACKDOWN

SUMMER 1988	Democracy salons flourish at Peking University and other universities. Speakers include astrophysicist Fang Lizhi and his wife Li Shuxian, and veteran Democracy Wall activist Ren Wanding.
DECEMBER 1988	In an essay, Ren Wanding, the founder in 1979 of the China Human Rights League, urges the Party to "let the people decide their future through the ballot box" and to release Wei Jingsheng, sentenced in 1979 to 15 years' imprisonment.
JANUARY 6 1989	Fang Lizhi's open letter to Deng Xiaoping -- Fang Lizhi, expelled from the Party in 1987 following student protests in 1986-87, writes an open letter to Deng Xiaoping asking for an amnesty for Wei Jingsheng and all political prisoners.
FEBRUARY 13	Poet Bei Dao organizes a petition to the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Party Central Committee in support of Fang Lizhi's letter, to which 33 intellectuals sign on. The letter leads to a petition campaign that collects over 3,000 signatures. Fang is prevented from attending a reception in honor of visiting U.S. President Bush.
FEBRUARY 27	Bei Dao protests this incident in a letter. From early March onward, posters in support of Fang, freedom and democracy appear at Peking University.
MARCH 17	Another 43 intellectuals, including Dai Qing, call on the National People's Congress to declare an amnesty for political prisoners.

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- APRIL 5 **13th anniversary of the 1976 Tiananmen Incident** -- Wang Dan publishes an article in The New May Fourth, an independent student magazine: "Only if China sets its steps on the road of development of Eastern European countries in the near future will it be possible for her to successfully build a highly democratic and advanced country."
- APRIL 15 **Death of Hu Yaobang** -- Party General Secretary from 1981 to 1987, Hu was accused of being too liberal with intellectuals and students and of promoting "bourgeois liberalization" during 1986-1987 protests. Forced to resign in January 1987, he was replaced as Party Secretary General by Zhao Ziyang.
- APRIL 16 Several hundred students lay a large wreath for Hu at the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, accompanied by numerous white flowers and poems placed there by Beijing residents.
- APRIL 17 **Students and workers gather at Tiananmen Square** -- Thousands of students from various campuses rally at Tiananmen Square, where they stay the whole night. Groups of workers gather on the square. Labor activist Han Dongfang reminds the crowd that although the Constitution guarantees the right to organize, in practice this right has been usurped by the official All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU).
- APRIL 18 **Students petition the NPC** -- Students from various campuses convey a petition to the NPC. Their requests are read aloud at a sit-in near the Great Hall of the People. Mourning Hu's death and asking that the verdict against him be reversed, they call for the elimination of corruption and nepotism, and the ending of the campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization." They also appeal for a free press and freedom of speech, increased democratic participation in decision making and better conditions in universities. People put out wallposters praising Hu's positions in favor of political and economic reform.
- APRIL 19 Prevented by the students from joining the rally, workers settle outside the square, under the West Reviewing Stand. A poster on the wall invites people to join their new, independent workers' organization.
- That night, the students stage a sit-in by the entrance of Zhongnanhai until 3:30am. Demanding that Li Peng come and talk to them, they chant "Down with the Communist Party!"
- APRIL 20 At a Politburo meeting, Li Peng expresses his view that the students' movement has been instigated by "a small group of people" behind the scenes. The workers print their first poster in support of the students. Demanding wage increases and price stabilization, they also denounce corruption among Party and government officials.
- APRIL 21 **Petition by intellectuals, students occupy Tiananmen Square** -- A group of intellectuals tries to deliver an open letter to the government. Guards refuse to take it. Signed by more than 200 intellectuals and some NPC members, the letter is the first public statement from the intelligentsia in support of the students' movement. It is released to the Hong Kong press.
- Student Wu'er Kaixi announces the establishment of the independent Beijing Federation of Autonomous Student Unions at a gathering of 60,000 at Beijing Normal University.
- That night, tens of thousands of students enter Tiananmen Square to prevent the authorities cordoning it off in preparation for Hu's state funeral. Some intellectuals join in.
- APRIL 22 **Hu Yaobang's funeral** -- On the morning of Hu's funeral, thousands of Beijing residents defy the ban on demonstrations and converge on the square in support of the students. "Those who should have died live; those who should have lived have died," is one of their slogans.
- Kneeling on the steps of the Great Hall of the People, in the manner of petitions to the emperor, three students appeal to Li Peng to listen to their requests.
- APRIL 23 **Formation of the Provisional Student Federation of Capital Universities and Colleges** -- The Federation is constituted at a secret meeting of some 30 student leaders held at night in Yuanmingyuan gardens. Its steering committee includes Wang Dan and Liu Gang. Chen Ziming, a member with Wang Juntao of a reformist private research institute, hands the Federation its first financial contribution.
- APRIL 24 **Internal report advocates crackdown** -- In an internal report, Beijing Party Secretary Li Ximing and Mayor Chen Xitong call the demonstrations an "anti-Party and anti-socialist political struggle" and advocate a crackdown. Other conservatives such as Chen Yun convey similar assessments to Deng Xiaoping. Students begin a mass boycott of classes in an attempt to pressure Party and government leaders into hearing their requests.
- APRIL 25 National radio and television broadcast Deng Xiaoping's condemnation of the student movement. Blaming the influence of opposition movements in Eastern Europe, he calls the protests a "planned conspiracy" and concludes with: "We must quickly put an end to this turmoil."

- APRIL 26 **People's Daily editorial** -- Deng's accusations are printed in a *People's Daily* editorial, which also proclaims that all further demonstrations are illegal. In a rare challenge, the official Chinese Democratic League calls on the government to refrain from using force.
- APRIL 27 In angry reaction to Deng's condemnation, some 150,000 students peacefully break through police cordons on Chang'an Avenue and make their way to Tiananmen Square. From that day on, workers make daily attempts to legally register their new organization. Each time their applications are denied. Public Security Bureau (PSB) officials issue threats of arrest. In Shanghai, Jiang Zemin, the then Party Secretary, bans that week's edition of the *World Economic Herald*, which had printed speeches from a forum of writers and intellectuals discussing the legacy of Hu Yaobang. The *Herald's* director, Qin Benli, is fired.
- APRIL 29 At a Politburo meeting, Zhao Ziyang makes suggestions to curb official corruption in response to popular discontent. Li Peng opposes them.
- MAY 1 A directive from the Beijing Party Committee urges workplaces to sever the link between students and workers.
- MAY 3 Journalists draft a petition to the Party Central Committee asking for a dialogue with the government. They collect more than 1,000 signatures and resolve to demonstrate on the next day to call for freedom of the press.
- MAY 4 **70th anniversary of the 1919 May Fourth Movement** -- Initiated by students, more than 100,000 march through Beijing. In addition to the students, workers and journalists express their demands. Similar rallies are held in cities across the country. Speaking at a meeting of the Asian Development Bank, Zhao Ziyang denies that the country is experiencing "turmoil," thus making apparent the divisions within the government on how to respond to the students' movement. In the following days, students are divided on questions of strategy, with some advocating a return to classes and the setting up of a Dialogue Delegation to press for a debate with the government that would be broadcast live, while others opt for a more radical course of action.
- MAY 11 **Zhao Ziyang advocates acceding to demands** -- Zhao suggests in a Politburo meeting that the Party accede to students' demands on corruption and that press freedom be expanded.
- MAY 12 Party leaders eventually agree to an "informal discussion" with the students' Dialogue Delegation on May 15 but refuse for it to be broadcast. In the evening, at Peking University, Chai Ling advocates the beginning of a hunger strike as a strategy to force the government to listen to their pleas. "We, the children, are ready to die," she says.
- MAY 13 **Dialogue and hunger strike** -- In the first dialogue with the students, Yan Mingfu, a member of the Central Committee Secretariat close to Zhao Ziyang, and Wang Juntao urge the students to be more moderate and to renounce the hunger strike. Yan and Wang are concerned that the upcoming visit by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev could move the hardliners to crush the demonstrations. The summit meeting between Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping is to put an end to a 33-year freeze in Sino-Soviet relations. The students are represented by three groups: the Dialogue Delegation, the hunger strikers and the Students' Autonomous Federation. Their demands have by now been reduced to two: that the government recognize their movement as legitimate and patriotic; and that the April 26 editorial be withdrawn. All three groups reject the appeals to moderation. The hunger strike begins, eventually drawing over 3,000 participants.
- MAY 14 A second meeting between Yan Mingfu and the students breaks down with no result. A delegation of intellectuals again fails to convince the students to call off the hunger strike and to vacate the square for Gorbachev's visit, a position the Dialogue Delegation decides to endorse.
- MAY 15 **Summit meeting between Deng Xiaoping and Mikhail Gorbachev** -- Instead of an official welcome on Tiananmen Square, Gorbachev enters the Great Hall of the People by a back entrance. Thousands of intellectuals, teachers and scientists march to Tiananmen Square.
- MAY 16 **300,000 people take to the streets in support of the hunger strikers.** Yan Mingfu again urges the students to call off the strike. Wang Dan and Wu'er Kaixi, who are in favor of this suggestion, are outnumbered by other leaders. **May 17th Declaration** -- Drafted by prominent intellectuals including Yan Jiaqi and Bao Zunxin, the Declaration states, "History proves: suppressers of student movements come to no good end," and urges the government to recognize the legitimacy of the Autonomous Students' Federation, to promote political reform and eliminate corruption, and to respect freedom of the press, of thought and of assembly.

- MAY 17 **More than one million march in the capital**, including workers, ACFTU officials, journalists, doctors and nurses.
- MAY 18 At 8:00pm, **China's top leadership decides to impose martial law in Beijing. Zhao Ziyang resigns.** At dawn, Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng visit fasting students at the hospital. Again, more than one million people demonstrate their support for the student movement. Bus and taxi drivers, railroad employees, factory and construction workers, peasants from the outskirts roam through the capital. At noon, Li Peng holds inconclusive talks with student representatives in the Great Hall of the People.
- MAY 19 **Zhao Ziyang visits the Square** -- During a surprise visit to the students, Zhao says tearfully. "We have come too late. We deserve your criticism." Li Peng accompanies him. In the early evening, Chen Ziming and Wang Juntao's group is alerted by an unidentified source that martial law is about to be declared. Politburo secretary Bao Tong will later be blamed for the leak. Warned by an anonymous Letter to the People and by bikers' squads calling themselves the Flying Tigers, Beijing residents block the army at all major intersections. During the two weeks that follow, they erect barricades to stop the advance of the troops towards central Beijing, urging them not to enforce martial-law restrictions and not to turn their guns to Chinese people. On the square, the students call off the hunger strike. In a late night television address, Li Peng blames the conspirators behind the students for instigating turmoil.
- MAY 20 **Workers organize, martial law imposed** -- The workers give themselves a name: the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation (BAAF). Han Dongfang and Li Jinjin, BAAF's legal adviser, write an appeal for workers and students to join forces. Martial law takes effect at 10:00 a.m.: "Demonstrations, petitioning, class boycotts, strikes... are prohibited... armed police and People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers have the right to exercise any force necessary to stop or prevent any violation of martial law orders." PLA units are to clear Tiananmen Square and return order to the city.
- MAY 21 **One million march** -- More than one million people defy martial law and successfully block soldiers from entering central Beijing.
- MAY 23 Mao Zedong's portrait on the Tiananmen Gate is defaced by three men who throw eggshells filled with paint at it. It is soon removed and replaced with another, identical one. Participants try to coordinate their efforts, which leads to the creation of the Capital Joint Liaison Group, made up of students, intellectuals, workers and the Beijing Residents' Autonomous Federation.
- MAY 25 Representatives of students vote in favor of remaining in the square, while the intellectuals propose that they withdraw.
- MAY 26 Zhao Ziyang is formally ousted from power, and replaced by Jiang Zemin.
- MAY 27 The Capital Joint Liaison Group agrees in a statement to end the occupation of the square on May 30, when students will return to their campuses. However, the Command Headquarters, headed by Chai Ling, Li Lu and Feng Congde, believes that a withdrawal without any concession from the government is tantamount to surrender. Breaking the agreement, they announce their refusal to abandon the square unless the NPC Standing Committee convenes before its regular June 20 session.
- MAY 28 **Arrests begin** -- Bao Tong, Zhao Ziyang's former aide, is arrested in one of the first of tens of thousands of arrests in which protest leaders, participants and sympathizers are detained across the country.
- MAY 29 Goddess of Democracy erected -- During the night, students of the Central Academy of Fine Arts assemble the 37-foot-high statue of the Goddess of Democracy, built in two days out of plaster and styrofoam. It stands opposite the giant portrait of Mao Zedong.
- MAY 30 As the statue is unveiled, an announcement says: "We have made this statue as a memorial to democracy." Three leading members of the BAAF are detained by the PSB who, the night before, ordered the workers to vacate the place they were occupying. Li Jinjin denounces the arrests at a press conference on the Monument to the People's Heroes. The BAAF moves its headquarters to the north west of the square.
- MAY 31 The Flying Tigers are rounded up.
- JUNE 2 **Hunger strike by Capital Joint Liaison Group** -- The Liaison Group, now composed solely of intellectuals, decides to stage a series of 72-hour hunger strikes to show the students that others too are ready to put their lives at risk. Literary critic Liu Xiaobo, rock star Hou Dejian and economist Zhou Duo are among the first to start fasting. In an open letter, Liu proclaims his opposition to the

martial law, appeals for the "birth of a new political culture" and criticizes the students for their lack of organization and democratic process.

JUNE 3

Soldiers occupy the Square, violent confrontations begin -- In the morning, soldiers take up positions on the square. In the afternoon, violent clashes occur between soldiers and Beijing residents. In the evening, smashing barricades, PLA troops force their way into the capital and converge on Tiananmen Square. An unknown number of Beijing citizens die, succumbing to gun shots—sometimes at point blank — or crushed by tanks and armored personnel carriers. In angry retaliation, civilians throw stones at the soldiers, who shoot back. Some soldiers are attacked and beaten up. Buses and cars are set on fire.

"Counterrevolutionary rebellion is now taking place," announces a government broadcast. "Ruffians are violently attacking PLA soldiers... They aim to overthrow the People's Republic of China."

June 4

1:00 A.M.

The troops have blocked off all the approaches to Tiananmen Square. Various people who have witnessed the killings of civilians, like Wuhan student Cai Chongguo or writer Bai Hua, report to the BWAFF and to the students' Command Headquarters, urging them to withdraw. Chai Ling asks the protesters to stay still.

2:00 A.M.

The first troop transport trucks enter the square.

3:00 A.M.

Hou Dejian, Zhou Duo and Liu Xiaobo entreat the students, who have gathered on the Monument to the People's Heroes, to discard whatever weapons they have and not to oppose the soldiers. Zhou and Hou negotiate with army officials to give the students time to vacate the square. Withdrawal will be unconditional, officials reply, adding that it must take place before daybreak. They indicate the southeast as the safest way to exit.

4:00 A.M.

On the square the lights go off. The statue of the Goddess of Democracy is toppled by a tank.

4:30 A.M.

A member of BWAFF warns through the students' loudspeaker: "We must leave here immediately, for a terrible blood bath is about to take place." The students still refuse to go. The tanks and the troops stationed in the north corner begin to move forward.

Li Lu organizes a voice vote, in which the students eventually agree to leave. Led by Chai Ling and Feng Congde, they walk away from the Monument to the People's Heroes towards the southeast part of the square.

A row of armored vehicles moves slowly towards the Monument. The soldiers shoot out the students' loud speakers. Other troops arrive from the west, squeezing the crowd. As the students leave, army tanks crush tents on their way. The student guards are the last to leave, with soldiers about 18 feet behind them firing warning shots.

5:00 A.M.

As the students pass Qianmen, residents line the streets and applaud. The army throws tear gas and shoots at students and citizens near the square and in other areas of the capital. Some people are crushed under tanks. The number of victims is not known. Later, Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping will publicly praise the courage of PLA officers and soldiers, and thank them for clearing Tiananmen Square.

JUNE 5

A lone man stops a tank convoy heading for Tiananmen Square.

JUNE 9

In a speech, Deng Xiaoping states that the government has suppressed a "counterrevolutionary rebellion... determined by the international and domestic climate" where the "dregs of society" had sought to "establish a bourgeois republic entirely dependent on the West."

JUNE 13

The Chinese authorities broadcast the names of the 21 most-wanted student leaders.

SEPTEMBER 19

"There were no deaths in the square," reads an article in the People's Daily.

List of abbreviations:

- ACFTU: All China Federation of Trade Unions
- BWAFF: Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation
- NPC: National People's Congress
- PLA: People's Liberation Army
- PSB: Public Security Bureau