

Tiananmen Square Massacre

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OVERVIEW

What began as a protest by Chinese students for more democratic freedoms mushroomed into a mass protest in June 1989. Masses of protesters crowded into Beijing's Tiananmen Square, but on June 4, China's Communist government decided to put an end to the demonstrations. Soldiers and tanks surrounded the square, and thousands of civilians were reported killed. The following emotional account of the massacre was written by three former Chinese Communists, one of whom was at Tiananmen Square that night.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following:

- How might fear and prejudice motivate a government to fire on its own people?
 - Why do you think the authors wrote about this event?
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THE MASSACRE

The political situation in China became clear at the beginning of June. The government had finished its preparations for the bloody repression. Equipped with armored vehicles, tear gas, rubber bullets, tanks, and even the dum-dum bullets that were internationally forbidden, over 300,000 soldiers were ready to slaughter the people. Deng Xiaoping had formed an alliance with the Gang of the Old. Now, they were ready to act.

On the morning of June 2, a vehicle full of armed police without a license plate was going at high speed until it got to Fuxingmenwai Street, where it hit a pedicab, killing two people instantly. Another person was wounded and sent to the hospital, but died before being treated. People surrounded the police vehicle and found uniforms and weapons.

On the morning of June 3, the Beijing Municipal Committee held what the newspapers called a "Mobilization Meeting before Going to the Front Line"—the title of an article of more than eight thousand words, "clarifying the nature of this rebellion and the necessity for martial law." Xinhua News Agency distributed this article nationwide, indicating that a major action was not far away.

Meanwhile, troop maneuvers started in an atmosphere of tension. Four tourist buses were seen heading toward Tiananmen Square from east and west at the same time. Inside sat young men wearing white shirts, looking like peasants sightseeing in Beijing. But vigilant residents stopped the buses and found that those inside were not young sightseers, but soldiers without uniform coats and caps. They also found machine guns, submachine guns, hand grenades, and clubs.

A preview of the massacre took place at noon on June 3. Three thousand soldiers and armed police with helmets and clubs rushed out of the west gate of Zhongnanhai and blocked Fuyou Street and the intersection of Liubukou Street. After they surrounded the civilians, they issued a warning. Ten minutes later, they threw twenty tear-gas bombs. While everyone was blinded by the gas, the soldiers wielded clubs, and old people and children began to fall to the ground. Meanwhile, more than three hundred soldiers rushed out of Xinhua Gate, wielding electric clubs, and beat everyone they saw. Students from the Institute of Politics and Law, who had been sitting in front of Xinhua Gate for two weeks, were taken by surprise. There was general disorder. At two in the afternoon, the western portal of the Great Hall of the People—on the side away from the square—suddenly opened to release more than ten thousand armed police, trying to link up with the soldiers and armed police in Xidan and Xinhuaamen, and thus to separate the civilians into smaller groups that could be surrounded and controlled.

But more than three hundred thousand people confronted the troops, refusing to let them advance. From the Great Hall of the People to Xidan, soldiers and people were deadlocked. Gradually the soldiers who had attempted to separate the demonstrators were themselves separated and surrounded by the people. People wearing clothes of different colors surrounded soldiers wearing uniforms and steel helmets.

Some residents who had been beaten raised blood-drenched clothes for others to see, and told of the brutality of the soldiers and armed police. There was still a smell of tear gas. The citizens became enraged. Some of them overturned an army jeep, destroyed a traffic-control tower, and smashed the windows of two tourist buses that had been used to transport weapons and ammunition.

On the evening of June 3, the darkest night of the People's Republic was under way. After six, television and radio stations broadcast three emergency announcements from the city government and the troops. They warned the people of Beijing that the soldiers could no longer tolerate the situation and would take measures to wipe out resistance. The announcements asked residents not to come out into the streets, for their own safety. But how could the residents abandon the students? Taking wet towels with them in case of tear-gas attacks, many rushed to Tiananmen Square on their bicycles from all over the city. There were already more than ten thousand people in the square—and the atmosphere was charged. While the third announcement was being broadcast, the first shot had already been fired near Huangtingzi, in the western suburbs. Witnesses say that a person fell following the shot.

At nine in the evening, huge numbers of troops began to march on Tiananmen Square. Soldiers from the eastern suburbs started down Jianguomen Street, which runs into Changan Avenue. The Jianguomen district is densely populated, so many people took part in blocking the army vehicles.

But there was an emergency in the west: The Gongzhufen and Muxidi districts were not so densely populated, so there were few people to block the vehicles of the Twenty-Seventh Division. Residents and students hurried there to help, headed by a daredevil team of workers with clubs in hand, and student guard lines holding flags.

By now, from the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution to Muxidi and Xidan, gunshots resounded and smoke filled the air. Blood was flowing and bodies were lying in the streets. Soldiers of the Twenty-Seventh Division used light machine guns and semiautomatic weapons to shoot people in the street and in buildings on either side. Workers and residents coming to help saw a long line of armored vehicles coming from the west at full speed, and hurriedly retreated to the Xidan district. They used everything they could find, from bricks to trucks, to build roadblocks. A worker set fire to the four buses and two trucks that were lying in the middle of the road, shouting, "The People's Liberation Army does not kill people!" and "Whoever suppresses the student movement will come to no good end!"

The armored vehicles stopped. Soldiers jumped out. Suddenly the shouting of slogans also stopped. For a few minutes there was dead silence. The people still hoped that the soldiers would use only tear gas or rubber bullets. But at one command, the soldiers raised their guns and fired one round at the residents and students, who fell to the ground. As soon as the gunshots stopped, other people rushed forward to rescue the wounded. The steps of a clinic near Xidan were already covered with blood.

But the struggles at the intersections did not stop. Armored vehicles ran over roadblocks, knocked over cars and buses. The unarmed people had only bricks. So stones and bricks fell on the armored vehicles like rain, but what could they do to the armored vehicles?

What they got back in return was bullets, a hail of bullets from machine guns and semiautomatics. People dispersed and ran for their lives. Soldiers ran after them, guns blazing. Even when residents ran into a courtyard or into the shrubbery, the soldiers would catch up with them and kill them.

The battle at the Xidan intersection continued for more than half an hour. How could residents prevent the war machines from advancing? Within this half-hour, more than forty people were wounded or killed at this intersection alone.

Meanwhile, a bloody battle was also taking place on Changan Avenue to the east of Tiananmen Square. Two armored vehicles roared up at full speed, regardless of roadblocks and walls formed by people. People had to run away to avoid being hit. One armored vehicle even ran into another one; at least ten soldiers were thrown out, and one died instantly. Another vehicle ran over four people. Angry bystanders used crowbars to open the lid of the armored vehicle and forced it to a stop. They set fire to it, forcing the soldiers to come out. Then they beat them up. But students who still insisted on nonviolence

pulled the soldiers from the hands of the residents and sent them to the hospital.

Troops were advancing on Tiananmen Square from east and west. Residents and students from other parts of the city, concerned about the thousands of demonstrators still in the square, walked toward it. Passing the Xinhua Gate of Zhongnanhai, they saw soldiers washing the pavement with water. The students from the Institute of Politics and Law who had been sitting there a few hours earlier were nowhere to be seen.

One female doctor in a white work uniform stood there, crying. Her ambulance crew had earlier rescued a whole truckload of wounded students. When they returned, the soldiers did not allow her to rescue students again. The soldiers actually used guns to force the Red Cross ambulance to leave the scene.

After one in the morning, about six hundred soldiers were marching toward the Great Hall of the People from the west, in formation, four or five in a row, firing random shots into the air. They arrived at the hall at one-forty. By two o'clock in the morning, soldiers of the People's Liberation Army had surrounded several thousand students and other civilians—the people—inside Tiananmen Square. The students retreated to the steps of the Monument to the People's Heroes. They all had their wills inside their pockets. They were singing the "Internationale," hand in hand, waiting to wake up ancient China with their blood.

At four, all the lights in Tiananmen Square were suddenly turned off. The "evacuation order" was again broadcast. Meanwhile, the noted rock signer and composer Hou Dejian and the young literary critic Liu Xiaobo were negotiating with the military to let the students retreat from the square peacefully.

At four-forty, just as the students were starting to retreat out of the square, a red signal flare ripped the night sky. Searchlights suddenly bathed the square. Students found that they were surrounded by armed soldiers wearing helmets. Some of them had already set up a line of more than a dozen machine guns, aimed at the students. Other soldiers rushed in among the students and beat them with electric cattle prods and rubbercovered steel clubs. They tore their way up the base of the Monument to the People's Heroes, and forced the students down, beating them until their heads were bleeding. As they reached the ground level, the machine guns opened fire.

By now the square was surrounded on three sides by armored vehicles or tanks, leaving only one exit.

The students began to retreat from Tiananmen Square, moving westward toward Xidan. A tank caught up with the students from behind. First it fired tear gas, then it ran over where people were most crowded....

As the sun rose on June 4, the morning clouds were red. The soldiers continued to fire until they reached the diplomatic area at Jianguomen. More

than three thousand people were killed in Tiananmen Square and on the streets of Beijing.

After the killing, there were massive arrests nationwide. People who were involved in the Democracy movement were executed in Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Changsha, Wuhan. The Communist Party of China boasted that it had smashed a "counterrevolutionary rebellion."

From June 4 to the beginning of August, 120,000 people who were involved with the movement were thrown into prison. And 20,000 were imprisoned in Beijing alone. Secret arrests, interrogations, and torturings were conducted in the darkness. The maniacal Gang of the Old cried in delirium: "We must catch them all! Imprison them all! Kill them all! We must pluck out the weeds by the root!"

The world must not forget China, China in the spring of 1989. If executioners like Li Peng and the Gang of the Old are not punished, how can humanity have a moment of peace?