

Chinese troops, stunned by their orders, performed badly. The people no longer trust them, and that's only the beginning of the PLA's problems.

The Losses in Tiananmen Square

BY HARLAN W. JENCKS

WITH its June massacre of 3,000 civilians in Beijing, the People's Liberation Army betrayed a special trust that the people of Communist China had always placed in their armed forces.

The loss of popular faith in the PLA—the single most profound effect that the massacre has had on China's civilian-military relations—has significant strategic implications. In the aftermath of the shootings, the PLA faces not only worsening morale but also new barriers to further professionalization of the Chinese officer corps and acquisition of modern weapons.

When PLA units approached Tiananmen Square late on June 3, they were prepared to shoot, although few in China on that night could have guessed that the troops would use deadly force.

Faith in the PLA was evident to anyone in China at the time. In Nanjing on May 21, the day after China's hard-line leaders declared martial law in Beijing and ordered the PLA to clear Tiananmen Square, banners could be seen declaring "Long Live the Liberation Army!"

The PLA had not resorted to bloodshed, and everyone agreed it would not. It was, after all, the *people's* army.

Thus, it came as a huge shock when PLA armored units brutally crushed the Beijing student demonstration. Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping perceived a serious threat to his regime and used the only tool powerful enough to defeat it: military force.

When civilian leaders use military force, military leaders do not always achieve new political influence. In China, the signs are that they have not.

While PLA soldiers patrol the streets, it is the People's Armed Police (PAP) and Security Police who are entrusted with conducting arrests and executions.

Authorities have moved soldiers into some government agencies deemed to have been too "bourgeois liberal" during the demonstrations. Shao Huaze, Director of the Propaganda Department of the PLA General Political Department, has taken over as editor of *People's Daily*, the leading national newspaper.

The Type-69 tanks faced by this demonstrator probably belong to the "pro-democratic" 38th Army. To deflect public resentment from troops still occupying Beijing, Deng Xiaoping and the PLA have encouraged confusion as to which units actually suppressed the "counterrevolutionary" demonstration.



At the national-elite level, however, the military's power has changed remarkably little. The new ruling Politburo, elected in late June by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, contains no new military men. Even President Yang Shangkun and Defense Minister Qin Jiwei, Politburo members with PLA backgrounds, are both career political commissars.

decade's military reforms. Within the uniformed military, political indoctrination and commissar influence have risen.

Defense Minister Qin and three military region commanders reportedly were arrested on August 15. So far, however, post-massacre purges within the PLA have been mild. Deng, Li Peng, and Yang Shangkun have lost too much face to rule with-

son, the Commander of the prestigious 38th Group Army, Beijing's elite garrison unit, demurred and then resigned when ordered to crush the demonstrations.

A decade ago, raising the issue of legality would not have occurred to a Chinese officer. During the crisis in the spring and summer, it was one of several ways senior soldiers tried to keep the military out of the political arena.

On May 21, the day after the declaration of martial law, the two surviving Marshals of the PLA, Xu Xiangqian and Nie Rongzhen, published statements which, while calling for civil order, warned that the PLA should not resort to bloodshed.

Then 150 active and retired commanders submitted a cautionary letter to Deng and the Central Military Commission. Signatories reportedly included Defense Minister Qin and Chief of the General Staff Chi Haotian, as well as senior retired soldiers. They declared that the PLA should not kill protesters. This was an explicit rejoinder to Deng's earlier injunction that the PLA must be willing "to spill some blood" to restore order.

The PLA's disinclination to crush the demonstrations does not mean it supported the students' ideas. Many officers who opposed violent suppression also opposed the political reforms. There may be some liberals among junior and field-grade officers, but there are few, if any, in the high command. For the most part, the generals and senior officers want law and order. They opposed violent repression principally because they knew it would lead to new problems.

In the end, few commanders disobeyed. Despite their reservations, the vast majority of officers fell in line once the "gang of elders" gained control and gave unambiguous orders. PLA officers believe that a unified army, even one enforcing bad policy, is still preferable to a divided army at war with itself.

Spreading the Involvement

In the US, there is a popular notion that President Yang Shangkun is installing a "Yang family dynasty" at the helm of the Chinese military establishment. This is a clear overstatement.

—Reuters/Bettmann Newsphoto



Beijing residents offer bread to PLA soldiers after barring them from reaching Tiananmen Square. Chinese citizens believed that the people's army was on the side of the people. Now the PLA faces disastrous morale problems and formidable barriers to officer professionalization and weapons modernization.

Over the past decade, foreign observers have noted a tremendous increase in professionalism within the Chinese officer corps. There has been modest but significant modernization of its hardware and logistics. Also noted were improvements in doctrine, training, and—especially—the personnel and educational systems.

Back to Politics

This trend saw a major decline in PLA political indoctrination and a marked reduction in the influence of Chinese political commissars over professional commanders.

From the perspective of the hardliners, however, one of the major shortcomings of the PLA during the Tiananmen crisis was that it was not politicized enough. The massacre and the return of the PLA to the center stage of Chinese politics have turned back the clock on the past

decade's military reforms. Within the uniformed military, political indoctrination and commissar influence have risen.

out the support of professional senior officers, and economic reforms cannot continue without senior civilian moderates. But the growing demand for political orthodoxy is clear. The military high command avoided taking sides in the internal political debate that preceded the massacre and seemed to hesitate about whether to obey orders from authorities other than the Central Committee. There were instances of military and police commanders refusing orders from supposedly retired Party elders ("proletarian revolutionaries of the older generation") who took *de facto* control of the government.

In late May, reports circulating in China had it that one senior PAP commander in Beijing refused to suppress the student demonstrations because, in his view, the order was illegal. Partly for the same rea-

President Yang has close ties to the Chinese military. His brother Yang Baibing, who is Director of the PLA's General Political Department, also sided with the hardliners. Even so, the "Yang dynasty" thesis rests mainly on the belief that the 27th Group Army, commanded by the President's nephew, Yang Jianhua, singlehandedly rescued the regime and suppressed the demonstrators after the 38th Group Army refused.

In fact, the 27th Army was not the only force in the streets. By June 3, Deng had brought elements from all over China into the capital, probably to prevent any one army or regional commander from dominating Beijing. Some 200,000 troops, representing fourteen of the PLA's twenty-four Group Armies, were in the area.

Most of the carnage was wrought by tanks and mechanized infantry. In the now-famous news footage, a lone unarmed student demonstrator faced down a column of new Type-69 tanks. The 27th Army has few armored vehicles and no Type-69s. The tanks probably belonged to the "pro-democratic" 38th Army. The regime and the PLA have encouraged the misperception. This deflects popular resentment away from troops occupying city streets and bolsters President Yang's side in political infighting.

The troop buildup in Beijing in May was smooth and professional, but troop behavior and fire discipline during and after the massacre were terrible. The troops, who never expected to be in such a situation, were confused. So, it appears, were military leaders at all levels. Command and control was inadequate.

Neither the troops nor their officers had any idea how to suppress a civil disturbance with minimum bloodshed, and there is little indication that they tried to minimize it once the shooting started. There was very little tear gas in evidence and no shields, batons, water cannons, or other riot-control equipment. Nor was there any indication of riot-control training or tactics.

Soldiers had been kept ignorant about the demonstrations, forbidden access even to official national news media. They were told there was a "counterrevolutionary rebellion" in Beijing, but they found

only common people demonstrating. The hard-line leadership took steps to prevent the troops from talking to citizens. Troops in the lead were ordered to advance rapidly and shoot anyone in their way. Those in the rear were ordered to fire on any troops in front who hesitated.

It seems that once they had blood on their hands, the soldiers became committed to their work. Old revolutionaries like Yang and Deng had exploited this psychological dynamic decades before in Communist campaigns against internal rivals. In fact, one reason for bringing in units from all over China may have been Deng's desire to bloody the hands of senior commanders.

Many soldiers, especially those turned back by the citizenry before June 3, probably realize now that the senior leaders lied to them. In any case, the high command quick-

ly withdrew from the city those troops that did the shooting. A current campaign praising the PLA for "defending the capital" is intended as much to repair military morale as to fool the people.

Even before the spring crisis, the PLA had serious morale problems. Military modernization was assigned the lowest priority among the nation's "Four Modernizations." The official 1988 defense budget was the equivalent of \$5.87 billion. That is about six percent of China's national economic output, down from a high of fifteen percent. The PLA cut manpower levels from 5,000,000 in 1979 to 3,000,000 today.

Because of the low budget levels, most PLA units went into business in the mid-1980s, creating what the *Economist* has termed an "entrepreneurial army." Units are expected to "operate at a profit" by



A worker is helped through the crowd in Tiananmen Square after a clash with soldiers outside the Great Hall of the People last June 3. He is carrying one of the soldiers' helmets, perhaps as proof of the PLA's active role in suppressing the protest.

—Reuters/Bettmann Newsphoto



US development of electronic upgrades for the Chinese F-8II (above) has been suspended. PLA weapons and training programs continue to suffer as a result of post-massacre international economic sanctions. International financing and contacts have also been lost to Chinese power, transportation, and industrial development.

peddling various kinds of commercial production and services.

The Policy Backfires

This policy is backfiring. Soldiers are routinely shunted aside in favor of paying customers by the PLA's own hostels, transportation units, and even hospitals. An Army photographic unit is reported to have sold pictures revealing state secrets. Some soldiers have been allowed to take more profitable civilian jobs, provided they forfeit their military pay and funnel kickbacks to the unit.

Waste and corruption are growing. The pay of officers and soldiers was raised in 1988, for the first time in years, but even officers' pay still lags behind that of Chinese factory workers. Soldiers are impoverished, deprived of food, lodging, and basic services. Units conduct scant training because they spend most of their time and energy on self-sufficiency production and commercial enterprises. This lowers the prestige of the Army and hampers recruiting and retention. PLA units are vulnerable to local authorities and state enterprises, which extort illegal taxes and fees for goods, services, and real estate.

PLA regulations prohibit individuals from engaging in business but encourage units to do so. The boundaries are unclear, and the legal guidance is vague. Discipline and morale suffer in a climate of semiofficial bribery, profiteering, and "bureaucratic racketeering." Corruption almost certainly extends to the highest levels of the military.

For PLA professional commanders, the trend is worrisome. "If we permit such phenomena to develop," *Liberation Army News* recently stated, "what will happen to our PLA's discipline, style, and order of life? Is such a military worthy of its name? Will there be any combat effectiveness at all?"

The international community's post-massacre economic sanctions are already hurting PLA weapons programs and are going to hurt worse.

In the United States, electronic upgrades for China's F-8II have been suspended, as have sales of AN/TPQ-37 counterbattery radars, artillery-shell manufacturing technology, Mk 46 antisubmarine torpedoes, and CH-47 helicopters.

Grumman Aircraft has suspended work on an engineering fea-

sibility study on upgrading the F-7 (based on the MiG-21) to a "Super-7" with American engineering and components. Chinese engineers working on the F-8II and Super-7 projects were excluded from Grumman facilities within days of the massacre.

China had been importing military electronics, missile technologies, naval guns, and automotive technologies from Switzerland and many NATO countries. All of this has been indefinitely suspended. Britain has banned further shipments of GEC head-up displays and weapon computers for the Chinese F-7M Airguard export fighter-interceptor. F-7M sales, a significant source of foreign exchange, will be lost. So will sales of the A-5M attack aircraft, for lack of French or Italian components.

A likely arena for further China-bashing is COCOM, the sixteen-member committee on control of exports to Communist countries. COCOM, whose membership includes all NATO members except Iceland, plus Japan, had liberalized restrictions on technology exports to China for ten years, but will likely tighten them again.

Financing and Contacts Lost

International financing is drying up. World Bank loans worth the equivalent of \$780.2 million have been suspended, as has a \$5.8 billion aid program from Japan. All that money was earmarked for Chinese power, transportation, and industrial development.

Contacts between the PLA and the US military have been suspended, cutting off training and educational and technical help. Two years ago, the PLA activated a major training range modeled on the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif. A US Air Force training delegation visited the PLA and influenced Chinese pilot training.

In sum, the events of June were a disaster for the Chinese military. The PLA hoped that, within a decade, the economy and industrial base would be sufficiently modernized to permit improvement of weapons and equipment. The Beijing massacre changed that. The PLA will have to wait longer now, and things will never again be the same. ■

Harlan W. Jencks, a colonel in the US Army Reserve, is a research associate of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He last visited China in May of this year. This is his first article for AIR FORCE Magazine.