

From the Archives Growing Protests in China Threaten to Topple Premier

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BEIJING -- Embattled Chinese Premier **Li Peng**, unable to enforce a four-day-old declaration of martial law in Beijing, stood Tuesday on the verge of losing power.

As the military refused to use force to enter the capital against the resistance of its citizens, demonstrators fiercely demanding Li's resignation staged a massive parade led by establishment intellectuals.

"Li Peng, step down! Li Peng, step down!" chanted more than 100,000 protesters who streamed into Tian An Men Square. They joined tens of thousands of students already in the square who had provoked the crisis with a series of unyielding pro-democracy protests that began in mid-April.

Politburo Decision Reported

A Hong Kong radio station reported that the ruling **Communist Party** Politburo met Tuesday and decided that Li should lose both his position as premier and his place on the five-member Standing Committee of the Politburo. The report could not be immediately confirmed, but there was strong evidence that Li cannot remain in power.

Communist Party General Secretary **Zhao Ziyang**, who favors rapid economic and political liberalization, appeared best positioned to emerge as **China's No. 1** leader. But someone else might come out on top when the current crisis is resolved.

"Truth Triumphs Over Power," declared a banner hanging on the side of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences building along Tuesday's parade route. At the head of the march were intellectuals from the influential think tank, which is controlled by the Communist Party but also is a center of reformist sentiment. Some described Li's action last week in declaring martial law as an attempt at a military coup.

The official New China News Agency, caught up in the hyperbole that has characterized some foreign estimates of the size of recent protests in Beijing, reported Tuesday that 1 million demonstrators had swept into the streets.

"The overwhelming majority of the slogans of the parade were directed against the chief leader of the State Council," the government-controlled news agency reported, in its first acknowledgment that protests have been

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Other slogans, the agency reported, were: "Safeguard the constitution and guarantee human rights!" and "Withdraw the troops and lift martial law!"

Demand Pair Step Down

Li imposed martial law here in the capital Saturday morning after escalating demonstrations demanding that he and senior leader Deng Xiaoping step down. Deng, 84, chairman of the Central Military Commission, is believed to have personally ordered the attempted military crackdown.

Most of an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, held at bay on the outskirts of the capital for four days by barricades erected by students and other citizens, have now pulled back a few miles.

One of Zhao's key allies, National People's Congress Chairman Wan Li, was cutting short an official visit to the United States to return to Beijing to add his weight to the battle of reformists to win firm control of the Communist Party and the army.

Wan was widely expected to call for an emergency session of the National People's Congress, China's Parliament, which has the constitutional power to impose or revoke martial law and to dismiss and replace the premier.

"It's clear Li's out," a senior U.S. official specializing in Asian affairs told the Associated Press shortly before Wan's departure from Washington. He predicted that Li's removal would open the way for Zhao to resume his duties as head of the Communist Party.

Military statements reported by the official media Tuesday took on a self-pitying and extremely conciliatory tone.

The People's Daily, official newspaper of the Communist Party, published an interview with an army colonel who frankly admitted that the soldiers had been "blocked by masses of people."

"I think our soldiers have behaved well, despite hunger, thirst, heat and lack of sleep," the officer said. "But they felt they have been greatly humiliated.

"The masses of people don't understand us. Yesterday morning many people abused us, but we ignored such misunderstandings in a bid to avoid clashes. In this regard, the students have helped us a lot."

A spokesman for the army's Martial Law Enforcement Headquarters complained that "some people do not understand the situation or are unaware of the truth, or are even instigated by a handful of people with ulterior motives."

Because of this, "Some troops have been hampered and even suffered abuse and beatings," the spokesman said. "Some have been injured, critically in some cases."

While few serious clashes have been reported between troops and the mass of protesters who blocked their way into the city, there was at least one incident in the southwestern suburb of Fengtai early Tuesday morning in which troops and demonstrators clashed. No shots were fired, but bricks were thrown.

'Will Never Shoot the People'

State-run nationwide television broadcast an interview Tuesday evening with an army officer who sat amid his heavily armed troops and declared: "We will never shoot the people. We are very tolerant."

The local Beijing television station carried news Tuesday evening of the first death related to the attempt to crush the protests: a soldier who was killed when another military vehicle struck the one in which he was riding.

The People's Daily reported Tuesday that some troops had been withdrawn while others remained in place awaiting orders.

During Tuesday's protest march, three men threw paint on the famous portrait of Chairman Mao Tse-tung that hangs on Tian An Men--the Gate of Heavenly Peace--overlooking the square.

A Chinese journalist said that students apprehended two of the men. The New China News Agency later reported that three men charged with the vandalism were in police custody. Tuesday evening, a large crane hoisted a replacement portrait into place.

By the pre-dawn hours today, a sense of impending victory was sweeping through a group of about 5,000 university students who spent the night camped in an increasingly squalid squatters' settlement of plastic tarpaulins and parked city buses in central Tian An Men Square.

One slogan painted on the side of a bus was addressed to Deng Yingchao, widow of the late Premier Chou En-lai, who still exercises great influence among elderly former leaders. It referred indirectly to the fact that she and Chou had informally adopted Li as a child--which gave him connections that helped his rise to the premiership.

"Mama Deng," pleaded the slogan, "Quickly Bring Little Peng Home."

Student leaders, worried that premature optimism might hurt their cause, urged protesters to avoid overconfidence.

"The situation remains serious. Do not be too optimistic," one leader warned through a loudspeaker. "Raise your guard!"

Another speaker reflected the mixture of sentiments felt by many protesters, respect for Deng's accomplishments along with determination that he step down: "Deng has marched the people to the first step of democracy. Now the people won't march back."

The determination of the most reformist elements of the Communist Party to use the present crisis to oust Li was further reflected by officials at the Foreign Ministry, one of the key centers of reformist sentiment within

the government. Hundreds of Foreign Ministry employees, carrying a banner identifying their workplace, marched in Tuesday's demonstration. In addition, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen told a group of European diplomats Tuesday that Zhao still heads the party, according to one of the envoys.

Rapid relaxation of controls on the mass media, whose reporters and editors generally favor speedy political and economic reform, was a further indication of a shift in political momentum toward Zhao.

A woman protester appeared at the residential and work compound of the People's Daily on Tuesday evening, a few hours after a fierce dust storm and thundershower, with an appeal for donations of clothing for the students huddled in the square.

In half an hour, according to a witness, employees of the newspaper and their families filled a small school bus with dry clothing for the protesters, whose removal from the square had been a basic purpose of Li's martial-law declaration.

Although a variety of unenforceable martial-law restrictions on foreign correspondents remain technically in effect--including an official ban on photographing or videotaping demonstrations--Chinese authorities Tuesday allowed foreign television crews to resume satellite transmissions. American viewers were able to see live telecasts from Beijing on Tuesday morning for the first time since Friday evening.

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