

# From the Archives Tear Gas Fired at Beijing Protesters

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**B**EIJING -- Thousands of soldiers marched to the edge of Beijing's Tian An Men Square early today only to be turned back by protesters, but in midafternoon security forces began using tear gas against a crowd outside [Communist Party](#) headquarters.

Hundreds of riot police fired tear gas to push back a huge crowd from the gates of Zhongnanhai, the Communist Party compound where many leaders live and work, witnesses told Western reporters.

Several thousand troops appeared at about the same time outside the nearby Great Hall of People facing Tian An Men Square to confront prodemocracy protesters, the witnesses added.

The witnesses also said that at least 30 people were beaten by police outside the Beijing Hotel.

The midafternoon confrontation unfolded after an earlier attempt to move soldiers to the square during the predawn hours had failed.

A main column of about 5,000 unarmed soldiers advancing from the east was blocked at 3 a.m. by an unyielding crowd of about 8,000 people and a hastily assembled barricade of trucks. The soldiers retreated after a brief shoving match with the front lines of the protesters just a few hundred yards east of the square, which has been occupied for the past three weeks by pro-democracy student demonstrators.

The crowd was protecting the students camped in the square, who now number about 5,000, and also trying to prevent destruction of a 30-foot-high "Goddess of Democracy," modeled after the [Statue of Liberty](#), that was erected in the square Tuesday morning.

Protesters broke into applause as the sweaty soldiers, looking tired and humiliated, silently marched back in the direction from which they came. "An enthusiastic send-off!" shouted some in the crowd, made up of both students and ordinary Beijing residents.

A similar scene was repeated on the same main street, Changan Avenue, on the opposite side of the square. An American television crew reported that thousands of people massed around an army truck and several buses near the Minzu Hotel, about two miles west of the square. Although most of the troops appeared to be unarmed, citizens discovered automatic weapons and clubs inside more than one vehicle.

Additional troops, some wearing what appeared to be gas masks, had been advancing behind the vehicles, United Press International reported.

At least two busloads of troops and an officers' jeep made their way slightly closer to the square before being trapped by swarms of protesters, who let the air out of the jeep's tires, surrounded the buses and angrily lectured the troops that they should not use force against the students gathered in the square.

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from the north and was trapped by the crowd in a  
e spot where the main column of troops from the

Throughout the evening, foreign eyewitnesses shared information about what was happening, and many foreign correspondents, including a large number of television crews, moved freely through the downtown area. Authorities made virtually no effort to enforce martial-law restrictions and rules against press coverage imposed Thursday, and journalists thus could piece together a fairly broad picture of the night's events.

A young man stood on top of one of the troop buses trapped west of the square and shouted to the crowd: "People, rise up!"

"I support it," said a middle-aged man in blue workers' clothes who stood beside his bicycle, smiling and laughing at the extraordinary scene. "I simply cannot stand to have troops enter the city."

Others in the crowd said they were out in the street because they back the students' demands for freedom and democracy.

There were relatively few political chants during the confrontation. But some in the crowd shouted, "**Li Peng**, step down!" in a call for the resignation of **China's** hard-line premier, and one group carried a banner declaring, "Oppose martial law!"

Li's resignation and the lifting of martial law, which Li declared on May 20, have become the two most immediate demands of the student protests. The protests originated in mid-April with demands for freedom of the press, improved treatment of intellectuals and an attack on official corruption.

The retreating soldiers appeared bedraggled and demoralized. The Associated Press quoted one soldier as saying, "If I'm going to die, I want to die on the battlefield, not on Changan Avenue."

The true destination and purpose of the troop advance was not entirely clear. It appeared possible that the initial goal of the night-time march could have been simply to move the troops into position in secure buildings near the city center, rather than immediately confronting the students camped in the square.

Some of the soldiers who came from the east said they had marched all the way from suburban Tongxian, about 15 miles outside the city. By dawn, the lead members of this group had withdrawn nearly four miles from

downtown, but other soldiers in the group had stopped and fallen asleep near a subway station only about three miles from Tian An Men Square.

It also seemed possible that authorities expected to be able to clear the square but miscalculated the degree of public resistance. This is what apparently happened during the first weekend of martial law, when citizens first blocked the army troops on the outskirts of Beijing.

Also, the number of citizens in the square after midnight today was unusually high because of an incident Friday evening in which a police van or military vehicle traveling at excessive speed on the west side of the city ran down several pedestrians or bicyclists. Accounts of the incident varied, but it appeared that at least one person was killed and three others seriously injured.

Many people who were already in the square angrily demonstrating over this incident were in the front lines of protesters who blocked the troop movements.

Even so, observers found it hard to believe that whoever ordered the troop advance really thought the square could be cleared without violence.

"What the hell did they expect?" commented a Western defense official shortly after dawn. "If they send soldiers in unarmed and unprepared, the students are going to block them."

This Westerner added, however, that the inability of the army to enforce martial law does not necessarily show any incompetence on the part of troops and officers, but rather reflects the continuing power struggle and lack of political consensus at the top level of the Communist Party.

The mood among the students in Tian An Men Square as the troops advanced was one of quiet tension and determination, mixed with a belief that the army would not use violence against them.

"We will stay here and resist with all our strength," said one student after the troop advance was reported over student-run loudspeakers. "We will struggle for democracy and freedom."

As dawn approached and it became clear that another night would pass without the soldiers reaching the square, the loudspeaker in the square began broadcasting popular music hits.

"The students are worried, but they're excited, because so many citizens are against the soldiers," said a young university instructor who went to the square around dawn.

"They're happy," said one of the students camped in the square. "Now there have been several attempts like this, and each time the people have blocked the soldiers."

This man said that the students are strong because whatever happens now, they win--either by winning concessions leading to democratic reforms, or by being suppressed.

"Being suppressed is also victory, because it would show the whole nation that the government treats the people as the enemy," he said. "The people would see the fearsome face of the government and hate it. The people would understand. . . . The students don't care what the government does to them."

Today's pre-dawn events came after the defiant students in Tian An Men Square received a boost Friday from a popular singer, Hou Dejian, who together with three intellectuals, announced the beginning of another hunger strike in support of the demands for greater freedom.

"The students have done everything they could but now they are getting tired and they need our help," said Hou, 36, according to a report by Reuters news agency. Hou gained fame as a singer in Taiwan, but settled in China several years ago.

Hou will fast for two days and his three colleagues will not eat for three days, after which others are expected to replace them, Reuters reported.

A group of about 800 students from the East China city of Nanjing have set off on foot in a planned 625-mile march to Beijing in support of protesters here in the capital, according to foreigners in Nanjing who spoke by telephone with reporters.

A loudspeaker announcement in Tian An Men Square said the marchers were expected to arrive on June 20, the tentative date for the opening of a session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's legislature. Students are demanding that the legislative session lift martial law and dismiss Li from the premiership.

Friday also was a day of competing government-organized and student protests, some of which bordered on street theater of the absurd.

A government-sponsored rally on the outskirts of Beijing took on a sharp anti-American tone, with three Chinese men dressed up as Uncle Sam wearing top hats emblazoned with the U.S. flag. The intention, apparently, was to imply that the United States is behind the student protests.

The protest involved about 10,000 peasants, officials and school children who were brought to a sports stadium, United Press International reported. There they watched one of the men dressed up as Uncle Sam manipulate a black paper heart bearing the name of astrophysicist Fang Lizhi, China's leading dissident. Along the rope were tied pieces of white paper marked "American dollars."

UPI reported that the listless and undemonstrative crowd chanted, "Down with Fang Lizhi."

Pro-democracy student demonstrators, reaching deeper into a so-far bottomless reservoir of innovative ideas, staged a raucous parody of recent government-organized demonstrations. About 500 students, some displaying swastikas and wearing masks of pigs or demons, staged a march ridiculing martial law and chanting, "Oppose Freedom! Oppose Freedom!"

Their antics drew cheers and gales of laughter from onlookers, United Press International reported.

"Official profiteering is not a crime. Patriotism--that's a crime," shouted the students in the parody protest. "Support Li Peng. Support Dictatorship. . . . Suppress the patriotic students!"

They later bicycled to the offices of the Beijing Daily, where they burned copies of the official newspaper to express anger over state-orchestrated condemnation of their six-week-old pro-democracy movement, according to reports by the Associated Press and Reuters.

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