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Turmoil In China : Protests For Democracy : Bush Deplores Troop Assault on China Crowd

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KENNEBUNKPORT, Me. — President Bush, in a deliberately strong reaction to the Chinese army's attack on demonstrators in Beijing, said Saturday that he deplores the action and warned that a continued crackdown will chill U.S.-Chinese relations.

"I deeply deplore the decision to use force against peaceful demonstrators and the consequent loss of life," Bush said in a written statement issued at his summer home.

"We have been urging and continue to urge nonviolence, restraint, and dialogue. Tragically, another course has been chosen," he said. "Again I urge a return to nonviolent means for dealing with the current situation."

In a diplomatically worded warning to the Chinese leadership, Bush noted that the United States and China had succeeded in building "a constructive relationship beneficial to both countries," and added that the quality of those ties depends on continued reform.

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"I hope that China will rapidly return to the path of political and economic reform and conditions of stability so that this relationship, so important to both our peoples, can continue its growth," he said.

The statement was Bush's strongest public comment yet on the tumult in China, where troops killed at least 100 demonstrators and perhaps many more, and reflected the Administration's alarm at reports of the bloodshed in Beijing--and growing fear that the crackdown presages broader moves to repress political and economic reforms.

Secretary of State James A. Baker III, echoing Bush's words, called the situation in Beijing "ugly and chaotic" and said the U.S. statement was intended to be "considerably stronger than what we've said heretofore."

"It's important that the Chinese people not lose the social and economic progress, the developments they've made socially and economically over the past decade," Baker said in an interview on Cable News Network.

"The United States government has heretofore expressed its concern to the Chinese government that the utmost restraint be used," he said. ". . . This is a matter of great concern to the American people. I suppose saying that is a signal."

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Blunter Terms

An Administration official said the same message--that continued repression would damage U.S.-Chinese relations--was given, in somewhat blunter terms, to Chinese Ambassador Han Xu on Saturday by Undersecretary of State Robert M. Kimmitt.

But officials acknowledged that, beyond the messages they have already sent conveying Bush's concern over the situation, there is little the United States can do. China receives no direct U.S. government aid, and its ruling Communist Party--torn by a major struggle for power between reformers and conservatives--is unlikely to place U.S. concerns at the top of its agenda.

Sen. George J. Mitchell (D-Me.), who met with Bush on Saturday, noted dryly that the government of China "tends to take decisions independently of the United States government."

Both Mitchell and Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Me.), who also visited the President, said they supported the Administration's position.

Asked if there was anything more the United States could do, Cohen said, "I think 'deplore,' coming from the President, is pretty strong language."

No Concrete Action

Baker, in his television interview, refused to say whether the Administration would consider halting military cooperation with China or stop sharing industrial technology with the Beijing government as a result of the crackdown. The United States has sold military equipment, including helicopters and warship engines, to China.

"Before we get into hypothetical situations, let's see how this most recent and extremely deplorable development unfolds," he said.

"We should keep this in mind, that both sides in this exercised a significant degree of restraint for quite a period of time," he said. "And it is our hope that they will return to restraint."

He said the Administration received reports that some demonstrators had thrown Molotov cocktails at army units, "so it would appear that there may be some violence being used here on both sides."

But he added that the demonstration "for the most part has been very peaceful."

Baker, in Washington, said he had relayed reports on the action from the U.S. Embassy in Beijing to Bush in Kennebunkport. Bush's deputy national security adviser, Robert M. Gates, was with the President at his summer retreat.

Urged Restraint

Bush and other Administration officials have urged restraint on both the Chinese government and the pro-democracy protesters since massive demonstrations for reform began in Beijing's Tian An Men Square last month.

At a news conference in Boston on May 21, Bush applauded the student protesters and urged them to "fight for what you believe in," but also said he hoped they could avoid a confrontation with the army.

"We do not exhort in a way that is going to stir up a military confrontation," he said. ". . . I do not want to see bloodshed."

Two days later, Bush told a visiting leader of China's National People's Congress that a violent crackdown on the demonstrators would chill U.S.-Chinese relations, officials said.

"We are strongly committed to democracy around the world," Bush said, according to a White house statement. "It is the underpinning of our being as a nation. I urge nonviolence and restraint in your present situation."

Gerstenzang reported from Kennebunkport and McManus from Washington.