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## UPHEAVAL IN CHINA; People's Army, Faced by the People, May Be Opening a New Chapter

By RICHARD BERNSTEIN MAY 21, 1989

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A new chapter seemed to open in the history of China's Army yesterday as students and others faced military units on Beijing's streets trying to persuade them not to interfere with the huge protests going on in the center of the capital.

The call on Friday by Prime Minister Li Peng for the army to restore order and eliminate "anarchy" was by no means the first time that the military has been summoned to restore the authority of Chinese Communist leaders.

Mao Zedong, China's revolutionary leader, relied on the army during the Cultural Revolution that began in 1966 both to assault the Communist Party itself and to restore order when national chaos was threatened. In those years, Mao's enormous personality cult was fostered above all by Lin Piao, the Minister of Defense, who was his closest political ally until a dramatic and mysterious split between the two men.

But now the events unfolding in Beijing suggest something dramatically new. Whatever the outcome, they marked the first time that ordinary unarmed civilians were competing with the party for influence over the army, pleading with it, in essence, to disobey their orders and to side with a movement that has questioned the legitimacy of the Chinese leadership. Some Units Reluctant

Beyond that, the apparent reluctance of at least some army units to move against the protesters marks a major difference with the past. In the Cultural Revolution, as Mao relied on the army to mount his assault against intellectuals and his foes in the party, military units took action against China's own people. This time, at least one day after army units converged on Beijing to suppress Beijing's mass protests, the situation did not seem the same. The summoning of the army by Mr. Li on Friday is the latest episode in a long and turbulent history one of whose main features is the centrality of the army to China's entire Communist revolution. Indeed, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the army, founded as the Red Army by Mao in the late 1920's, as a force in recent Chinese history.

One of Mao's most frequently quoted sayings was, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." He meant that for the revolution to succeed, the Communist party had to build a politically indoctrinated, powerful army able to carry out its wishes without the possibility of disobedience.

"The party commands the gun," Mao said. "We must never allow the gun to command the party."

In the early years of the revolutionary movement, when Mao and his followers were building their forces for an eventual takeover, scrupulous attention was paid to organizing the army, in particular using the Soviet system of placing "political commissars," representatives of the party, with every military unit. Put Under Civilian Control

One of the major early achievements of the revolution was the elimination of the scourge of militaristic warlords who were virtually independent of central government authority. The Red Army's early prestige and popularity were based in part on the success of the Maoist tactic of subordinating it to strict civilian control.

But after the revolutionary takeover of 1949, a deep split appeared in the Government and army. Mao, ever the revolutionary visionary, favored the concept of the "people's army," a military establishment that would place more emphasis on instilling correct ideology in its soldiers than in building a technically modern fighting force. Some of the early and most sensational divisions within the Communist Party came precisely over the question of who would control the army and what kind of an army would it be.

The conflict burst into the open in 1958 when Mao engineered the purge of Peng Dehuai, a popular professional soldier who served as the Minister of Defense.

The conflict between the two men was complicated, but high among their differences was altering conceptions of the future course of the revolution. In essence, Peng opposed Mao's attachment to the ongoing "Great Leap Forward," during which the Chairman was hoping, unrealistically, to transform China's backward economy by liberating the creative energies of an aroused populace.

The "Great Leap Forward" was an abysmal failure, which led to a tremendous loss of prestige and influence for Mao inside the Communist Party. But Mao's purge of Peng and his appointment of a loyal lieutenant named Lin Biao as the new Defense Minister gave Mao the control over the army that he was to use in the mid-1960's in the Cultural Revolution.

This event was Mao's counterattack against his rivals in the party. From very early on, he relied for support on the army, which, in a major campaign, he proclaimed to be "the mainstay of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

As the Cultural Revolution picked up steam, the army, often reluctantly and sometimes deeply divided, gained power, often merely because other institutions were being engulfed in the chaos of rampaging Red Guards. Many of the old army commanders were denounced as the movement threatened to veer into civil war. But at that point, Mao decided to call the movement off, and he ordered the army, controlled by Lin, to restore order. Army Disarmed Red Guards

For the next several years, China was virtually run by the alliance of Mao and Lin, a political radical who was officially designated "Comrade Mao Zedong's close comrade-in-arms and successor." The Red Guards were, in essence, disarmed and sent by the tens of thousands to work on rural farms. The summoning of the army to restore order was the closest thing to a military coup that China had seen under Communism.

Then, four years later, in September 1971, in one of the most mysterious episodes of recent history, Lin disappeared. He and Mao apparently quarreled over the Chairman's decision to open up ties with the United States and to restore many of the officials purged during the Cultural Revolution. Nearly a year after Lin's disappearance, China formally announced that the former Defense Minister had tried to mount a coup against Mao and had died in a plane crash over Mongolia after the attempt was foiled.

With the death of Lin, the political role of the army, fostered by the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, steadily declined. Many of the officers put into place by Lin were purged. The party was rebuilt and its previously unquestioned

"command of the gun" was restored.

Since then, while individual military commanders have considerable prestige and influence, the army as a whole has been kept out of national politics. When, in 1976, several hundred thousand people gathered in Tiananmen Square, they were bloodily dispersed by the regular police. The army was not called in to help.

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