

Upheaval In China; STANDOFF PERSISTS IN BEIJING; 7 TOP EX-COMMANDERS WARN ARMY 'MUST NOT ENTER CITY'

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 23, 1989

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems. Please send reports of such problems to archive_feedback@nytimes.com.

In a major blow to the authority of Prime Minister Li Peng, seven senior military figures formally objected on Monday to the Government's plan to bring troops into the capital and suppress China's democracy movement.

The signers of the strongly worded letter, among them a former Defense Minister and a former army Chief of Staff, command great prestige and influence, although they are no longer on active duty.

"In view of the extremely serious situation, we as veteran soldiers demand that the People's Liberation Army not confront the population, nor quell the people," the letter said. "The army must absolutely not shoot the people. In order to prevent the situation from worsening, the army must not enter the city of Beijing." Rebuke to Li and Deng

The letter was the clearest indication yet of the opposition within the military to the crackdown begun early Saturday by Prime Minister Li and Deng Xiaoping, China's senior leader.

It was not clear if the Government would still be able to muster enough compliance in the army to bring troops into the center of the capital. For more than three days, troops have stood idly at barricades put up on the edge of the city by

ordinary citizens.

In another blow to Mr. Li and Mr. Deng, newspapers and television seemed on Monday to criticize the leaders' call to bring troops into the capital. The tone of the criticism was indirect but its point was unmistakable. Propaganda Purge

Still, Mr. Li was in sufficient control of the Communist Party on Monday to replace the entire leadership involved in propaganda work, including those who control mass communication, Chinese officials said. They said Mr. Li personally took charge of propaganda, which had been the responsibility of Hu Qili, a member of the Politburo.

It was not clear whether that move would lead to a tightening of controls on the television news programs and of the newspapers, which have grown much more independent in recent days.

The reorganization of the propaganda bureau may also make it more difficult for the official party newspaper, People's Daily, to publish the letter from the seven military leaders. Although the letter has not been publicly released, copies are circulating among officials in the capital, and People's Daily has received a copy.

Crowds Grow Thinner

Enormous crowds continued to demonstrate for more democracy on Monday afternoon and Monday evening, but the numbers seemed to be thinning.

On Monday night, fewer than 50,000 people spent the night in the area around Tiananmen Square, half the number of two days ago. As the risk of a direct military confrontation seemed to ease, many Beijing residents apparently decided to sleep instead of staying up all night to challenge tanks that might never arrive.

"They are tiring us out," warned a new poster that students pasted all over the center of the city. "Now they plan to attack us by surprise." But the army did not attack, and there appeared to be little military enthusiasm for a fight that would draw swarms of citizens.

On Monday, military helicopters buzzed Tiananmen Square and several university campuses, dropping leaflets urging demonstrators to cooperate with the army and leave the square. Each time the leaflets dropped, the crowds seemed to surge in every direction as demonstrators frantically grabbed at the sheets of paper. But after reading them, they mostly threw them down in disgust.

The signers of the military letter include Zhang Aiping, a former Defense Minister; Xiao Ke, a former Deputy Defense Minister; Yang Dezhi, a former army Chief of Staff; Song Shilun, a former commandant of the Academy of Military

Sciences; Chen Zaidao, a former commander of the Wuhan military region; Ye Fei, a former commander of the navy, and Li Jukui, a former leading member of the military academy. Well-Known Figures

The seven leaders are among the best-known figures in military circles, and their influence seems likely to make itself felt through networks of fellow officers in high military commands.

In addition, about 100 military officials and members of the Communist Party Central Advisory Commission have signed the letter, said a Chinese familiar with the efforts to prevent martial law from being carried out. Their names were not listed on a copy of the letter obtained in Beijing, and their identities could not be determined. It could not be learned how many of those signers were on active duty.

Ever since his call on Saturday morning for a military crackdown was essentially ignored, there has been growing doubt about Prime Minister Li's hold on power.

Although some troops entered the capital, they were stopped and in some cases turned back by large numbers of students and workers who blocked their way. Most of the troops seemed content to be held up, and none tried very hard to keep going. Stalemate in Capital

For the last few days, there has been an uneasy stalemate in the capital. Tens of thousands of university students are occupying Tiananmen Square, in the center of the city, and each evening hundreds of thousands of Beijing residents turn out to guard local intersections and keep back army troops in the case of an attack.

Police and army troops are nowhere to be seen in the center of Beijing, except for a few traffic policemen. At several locations in the suburbs, convoys of army trucks and armored personnel carriers have been sitting for the last few days, held hostage by large crowds who refuse to let the soldiers advance or retreat.

Many of the students in the square are showing the wear of more than a month of pro-democracy demonstrations, and splits seemed to appear on Monday among the student leaders. One leader, Wuer Kaixi, now seems to be widely criticized after trying twice on Monday to convince students to leave Tiananmen Square. Parley Falls Apart

Negotiations between the students and the Communist Party collapsed on Monday afternoon when Mr. Wuer failed to persuade other students to support an agreement to leave the square, said an official familiar with the negotiations. The party proposal called for the students to leave the square in exchange for a pledge

that troops would not enter the capital, the official said.

Student morale seems to be waning slightly, partly because of growing exhaustion and partly because of the increasing squalor on Tiananmen Square. Most of the tens of thousands of students who sleep each night on the square have not taken a bath or changed clothes in a week or so, and some are beginning to think of exams.

Now that the hunger strike by 3,000 students has ended, there is not quite the sense of urgency that there was a few days ago, and the romance of living in the filth of the square is fading.

Nevertheless, many students and workers are clearly determined to continue indefinitely. "Almost all of us want to keep going," a woman who is a student leader said late Monday night. "Some will go home, but more are coming all the time."

Power Struggle Grows

The crisis seems more likely to be resolved by the highest levels of the party or the military than by what the students decide in the square. The power struggle seems to be continuing between Mr. Li and the party leader, Zhao Ziyang, but neither side has made any statement lately.

There has been no indication that Mr. Zhao's situation has changed, even though senior party officials say that in fact he has been stripped of his authority, although he retains his title as General Secretary of the party.

Mr. Zhao has requested a "vacation" but remains in Beijing to plan what he hopes will be his comeback, officials close to the party leadership say. Mr. Li is also in the capital, and Mr. Deng may be as well, although there are scattered rumors about trips he is making to other parts of the country.

Mr. Li has been vulnerable to several criticisms for his decision, with President Yang Shangkun and Mr. Deng, to call in the People's Liberation Army. The most obvious is simply that the army fills a hallowed role in China as helper of the people, and it is extremely reluctant to be used by one political faction to suppress the opposition.

A senior Chinese journalist said that the military is also upset about the use of field armies in the capital because of a long tradition, dating back to imperial times, that the capital would be protected only by the palace guard. The modern equivalent of the palace guard is the Beijing Garrison Command, and military leaders are said to feel that intrusion of field armies into the capital suggests military interference in the political process.

The reorganization of the propaganda structure, traditionally one of the most important areas of the party, suggests that Mr. Li is still calling the shots at the central party level. The loser in that power play appears to be Hu Qili, a reformist who now is believed to be supporting Mr. Zhao on the five-member standing committee of the Politburo.

Prime Minister Li was said by the Government official to have dismissed two top party officials associated with Mr. Zhao - Bao Tong and Rui Xingwen - from the working group on propaganda. As new members of the group he has appointed two of his own associates, Yuan Mu and He Dongchang, as well as Zeng Jianhui, a deputy president of the official New China News Agency.

The group will have its work cut out for it, as there were signs today that news organizations were opposing Mr. Li's call for a military crackdown. 'Quite Reasonable'

The television news broadcast a long interview on Monday evening with an army officer whose convoy had been blocked by local citizens. The officer said he had reported the problem to his superiors and was awaiting orders.

"Since we arrived, we have seen that the students are quite reasonable," the officer said. "Those of us on both sides share the same feelings."

A version of this article appears in print on May 23, 1989, on Page A00001 of the National edition with the headline: Upheaval In China; STANDOFF PERSISTS IN BEIJING; 7 TOP EX-COMMANDERS WARN ARMY 'MUST NOT ENTER CITY'.