

## Upheaval in China; Army May Be Trying to Avoid Crisis

By CHARLES MOHR and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES MAY 23, 1989

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The active-duty leadership of China's army is a "transitional generation" that in recent years has stressed the goal of becoming a professional military force removed from politics, and it is anxious to avoid direct involvement in the Beijing democracy protests, several American experts said today.

These analysts added, however, that it seemed premature to describe the army's reluctance to use force as insubordination. A former United States Ambassador to China, Winston Lord, expressed the belief that the army was "stalling" against orders it felt could not be successfully carried out.

Paul Godwin, a professor at the National Defense University in Washington and an authority on the Chinese Army, said that since the army was cut by about a million men and an older generation of generals and marshals retired in the 1980's, the army has been struggling to become a "professional, modern military force dedicated to national security objectives and to get out of politics."

That was the goal of Deng Xiaoping, the foremost Chinese leader and chairman of Central Military Commission, but it may have backfired when Mr. Deng needed troops to restore order in the capital, several experts said.

'Reasonable Speculation' Aplenty

Most analysts admitted to doubt about what was actually occurring in the

army hierarchy.

A senior China expert at the Pentagon said: "What's transpiring is still unclear. It's just that there is all kinds of reasonable speculation that the army's behavior could be due to a lot of reasons."

He added that many key military figures "clearly don't want violence" and that it appeared that the army was trying hard to stay out of the crisis, which they regard as "not their business."

Another expert who has frequent contact with younger Chinese officers at the field-grade level, like lieutenant colonels, said they had told him that they had complained of "corruption in our ranks" and older officers who are guilty of a "continuation of feudal practices," including comfortable personal perquisites. "Even more important, they have expressed a high degree of sympathy with the students," the expert added.

There was speculation as to why the 38th Chinese Army, stationed close to Beijing, did not follow apparent orders to move on the city and had been replaced by units normally stationed much farther away.

"Many conscripts in the 38th are from Beijing and some of the protesting students in the capital have done military service in its units," Mr. Godwin said. He and others added that leaders in the Beijing Military Region had probably argued that it was foolhardy to send Beijing-born soldiers into the city on a repressive mission.

President Yang Shangkun, a member of the Central Military Commission, the body that oversees the country's military affairs, is a former commander of the Beijing Military region. Mr. Godwin and others speculated that the region's officers had probably argued strongly to Mr. Yang against the use of troops from close to the city. Past Leaders' Role

Several analysts attached great significance to reports that more than 100 active and retired officers had signed a letter saying the army "cannot confront the people" and "will never shoot the people." One report was that the letter had been drafted by two older, retired officers: former Defense Minister Zhang Aiping and a former army Chief of Staff, Yang Dezhi.

This would indicate that any splits in the army are not so much between generations as between the army and China's political leadership, some experts said.

Doak Barnett, a China expert at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced

International Studies in Washington, also thought it significant that two of China's living retired marshals, Ni Rongchen and Xu Xianghen, had held discussions with student protest leaders. Mr. Barnett said it seemed clear that important elements in the army and its retired leaders wanted the martial law imposed by Prime Minister Li Peng withdrawn.

"It is very possible we will see a reversal of hard-line policies," he said, "and if that happens, Li Peng will be seriously discredited." 'Serious Morale Problem'

"I don't believe the army is trying to defy the Government," Mr. Barnett said, but they are "showing grave doubts about the wisdom to use the army in the crisis."

Harry Harding, an expert at the Brookings Institution here, said it seemed clear that the army had a "serious morale problem" growing out of orders to intervene against protesters.

Mr. Zhang retired as Defense Minister in April 1988. Seventy-eight years old, he held various army commands and became the first commander and political commissar of the navy in 1949. He is an expert on military industry and research and has been seen as a protege of Deng Xiaoping.

Mr. Yang supported Mr. Deng's policies that put a lower budget priority on military spending. He served under Mr. Deng in both the Japanese and civil wars. Mr. Yang, who is at least 77 years old, commanded a corps that badly defeated United States forces at the Imjin River in the Korean War, and later became deputy commander of Chinese forces in Korea. He was deputy commander of Chinese forces in the 1979 conflict with Vietnam.

A version of this article appears in print on May 23, 1989, on Page A00014 of the National edition with the headline: Upheaval in China; Army May Be Trying to Avoid Crisis.