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ARMY RIFT REPORTED IN BEIJING; SHOOTING OF CIVILIANS GOES ON; BUSH BARS ARMS SALES TO CHINA

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Chinese troops took up what seemed to be defensive positions here on Monday that suggested they feared attack from other army units, and there were reports that clashes between units had already occurred on the outskirts of the capital.

The troops continued to fire on civilian protesters all day Monday. But the reported clashes between units, this morning in the city's western reaches and on Monday night at the military airport in southern Beijing and on the city's northern outskirts, seemed to refocus the troops' attention primarily on defensive measures rather than on attacks on demonstrators. [In Washington, Bush Administration officials confirmed reports of an armed clash between army units on the outskirts of Beijing. Page A16.] 'Threat of Civil War' Seen "The threat of civil war can no longer be excluded," a Western diplomat said.

Clashes between military units would probably reflect cleavages in the nation's political leadership. Different armies sometimes have loyalties to different political figures, and actual combat would represent a new dimension in the power struggle that has been under way for nearly three weeks between rival factions in the Communist Party leadership.

Some troops still fired on unarmed citizens on Monday and early this morning,

but mostly they fired in the air. Fewer casualties were reported, with the number seeming to be in the dozens on Monday, well down from the figures on Sunday.

Several Hundred Believed Dead

The total number of fatalities may never be known, but it seems likely that a minimum of several hundred people were killed, and it is possible that the true number of deaths might be 1,500 or more. Thousands more are recovering from bullet wounds or beatings.

The forces that were responsible for most of the bloodshed are also the ones that now appear to be preparing against attack. They are from the 27th Army, which was summoned to Beijing from Inner Mongolia to quell the democracy movement. This army has a long association with the family of President Yang Shangkun, the 82-year-old military figure who has taken a hard line against student protests. The attackers probably are from the the 38th Army, based in Baoding, 90 miles southwest of Beijing. The 38th Army is not clearly linked to any particular political leader, but it is widely reported to have refused to attack student demonstrators earlier. Diplomats said the 38th Army was more modern and better equipped than the 27th Army and would probably prevail in a battle, although television pictures of troops in Beijing have shown that the 27th Army has tanks and helicopters that are among the most modern in China's arsenal.

According to other reports, the clashes at the military airport involved the 27th Army and the Beijing-based 16th Army.

In addition, there were rumors that units from Shanghai and the northeastern city of Shenyang were on their way to the capital to join the battle. While it was not clear whom the units from Shenyang would support, both the 38th Army and the troops in Shanghai have tenuous connections to the Communist Party General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang.

Thus it was possible that a conflict was under way between the forces of President Yang and those connected with Mr. Zhao. Alternatively, General Yang might be in a conflict with Deng Xiaoping, China's senior leader.

But in a capital thick with rumors, those saying that Mr. Deng was taking on President Yang conflicted with other rumors that Mr. Deng, who is 84 and the only man in the nation with clear control over most of the army, was in a coma or had already died. While such rumors are suggestive of the confusion and alarm in the Chinese capital, they are impossible to confirm, and similar rumors of Mr. Deng's ill health have proved untrue in the past.

Both Beijing and the economic capital, Shanghai, were paralyzed on Monday as almost nobody went to work. In the capital, almost no shops or offices or factories were operating, and there was no public transportation.

Some people ventured out on bicycles or private cars, but many roads are blocked by barriers put up by residents. In addition, those on the roads must drive around the smoking remains of military vehicles that people have seized and burned.

Many people were also wary of going out because troops continued to fire at random as they drove or marched down the streets. 'Nobody's in Charge'

With China's top leaders all avoiding public appearances, it was unclear who was running the country. Asked who was in charge of the Government, an Asian diplomat paused. "Nobody's in charge, as far as we can tell," he answered.

Large convoys of Red Flag limousines and other vehicles were seen on Monday leaving the Zhongnanhai compound where China's leaders live and work, and so there was some speculation that it was being evacuated in anticipation of an attack. On the other hand, it was possible that the cars were simply taking officials to a meeting, and that the evacuation theory was just the product of the atmosphere of crisis.

The evening television news included no reference to any of the nation's leaders, and it ended four minutes short of its allocated time. Later at night, television broadcast a videotape of what it described as "thugs" attacking an army truck. The scenes showed a crowd of young men throwing rocks at an army truck whose engine had stalled. They hurled rocks through the windshield, apparently killing two soldiers inside.

"Thugs swarm toward it," the announcer said. "They attack with rocks and bricks. They are crazy, and they kill two soldiers most cruelly."

The news program reported that the "thugs" had killed several dozen soldiers, but it did not mention the deaths of civilians. No Copies of People's Daily

As a sign of the confusion and paralysis, no copies of People's Daily, the Communist Party newspaper, could be found. The newspaper's office said papers had been printed Monday, but inexplicably added that none were available. Normally, newspaper distribution is handled by the Post Office, but there has been no postal distribution for several days.

In Shanghai, students and workers drove public buses across major roads as barricades and built other barriers to bring what traffic there was to a complete

standstill, in protest against the shooting of students in Beijing.

Other protests were held in several major Chinese cities. Perhaps most important, students for the third day occupied and halted traffic on a major bridge in the central city of Wuhan, said an American now in the area. The bridge crosses the Yangtze River and is a crucial transportation link between northern and southern China. News Spreads Beyond Capital

News of the violence in Beijing seems to have spread to most cities in the country, principally by short wave broadcasts from Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation, and then by word of mouth. While Chinese-language broadcasts are jammed on some frequencies, they are still usually understandable.

Word of mouth has also magnified the scale of the violence, and it is now common to hear that tens of thousands of people were killed by troops.

Students and workers continued to attack army vehicles and set them afire whenever they had the opportunity. Army trucks seemed more careful about venturing out of their convoys, and so there were fewer seized on Monday.

The bitterness in Beijing toward the authorities can be seen everywhere: in the knots of elderly residents who stand in street corners and exchange tales of the soldiers' latest barbarousness; in the angry posters that are put up on walls all over town, denouncing the shootings, and on the streets, where particularly brave or foolhardy men and women march up to troops and denounce them for cruelty. 'It Will Never Be Forgotten'

"This is the stench of violence," a young woman said angrily as she pointed to the body of a young man who had been shot by troops and taken to the University of Politics and Law. "It will never be forgotten. For hundreds of years, people will remember this."

One of the most vivid scenes in the protest movement came Monday when a man in a white shirt walked in front of a convoy of tanks and forced them to a halt. He denounced them for their cruelty and even jumped on the lead tank. He was not shot, and after several minutes, several people in the crowd rushed out to pull him away.

The clearest sign Monday of preparation against attack on Beijing came in the evening when 21 tanks and 4 armored personnel carriers arrived at the Jianguomenwai bridge in the eastern part of the city, near the embassy district. Some of the tanks were positioned to face north and south on Beijing's second ring

road, a major traffic artery, but most faced east.

It was not clear if this meant that attack from the east was considered most likely. Because of circular outer roads, it would be possible for troops coming from one direction of Beijing to attack from another direction.

There were also reports, which could not be confirmed, that Beijing troops had put up anti-aircraft batteries around the city in anticipation of attack from the air.

Power Struggle Under Way

These signs of preparations against an attack on Beijing were the clearest indication yet of conflict among military units, apparently reflecting the conflicts among political factions. After the student pro-democracy movement began in mid-April, one wing of the leadership led by Mr. Zhao favored conciliation, while another represented by Mr. Deng, President Yang and Prime Minister Li Peng favored a hard line against the "turmoil."

Mr. Zhao has disappeared from view since martial law was declared early on May 20, and he is believed to have been stripped of all his powers. His closest assistant, Bao Tong, has not been seen by friends since he attended a meeting early last week, and he is believed to have been detained.

Defense Minister Qin Jiwei was widely reported to be in political trouble as well, presumably because some forces in the Beijing Military Region were unenthusiastic about enforcing martial law. Mr. Qin, a former head of the Beijing Military Region, may be the key link in troop movements against those now holding Beijing.

Mr. Zhao himself has few ties to military commanders and would probably be unable to persuade them to support him. But if he is linked with Mr. Qin, it is possible that Mr. Qin could win their support. There had been initial signs of disagreements in the military when martial law was declared more than two weeks ago, but then they appeared to have been resolved. One interpretation is that the shooting of protesters rekindled the dissatisfaction in some elements of the military.

Qin Linked to 38th Army

The 38th Army is linked to Mr. Qin because it is part of the Beijing Military Region, which he used to lead. In addition, he is a close associate of Xiang Shouzhi, the head of the Nanjing Military Region, which controls the troops in Shanghai.

If additional troops from Shenyang are approaching Beijing, to join some from Shenyang who are already in the capital, it is less clear whom they would support. But there is at least one link with Mr. Qin: The present political commissar of the

Beijing Military Region, Liu Zhenhua, was previously the political commissar of the Shenyang Military Region. Mr. Liu is now likely to be affiliated with Mr. Qin, and he may have been able to win support from the forces in Shenyang.

The 27th Army, while also in the Beijing Military Region, is linked to President Yang. The man believed to be his son-in-law, Chi Haotian, was for some time its deputy political commissar and probably still retains ties to it. There are still said to be some frictions between the 27th and 38th Armies dating from 1971, when the 27th Army was transferred from the Nanjing Military Region to the Beijing Military Region, intruding on the 38th Army's area.

In another sign of tensions, a Western diplomat quoted some military officers as saying they were extremely upset that soldiers had shot unarmed civilians. The officers reportedly said the troops' commanding officers should be court-martialed and shot.

Correction: June 8, 1989

Thursday, Late Edition - Final A map on Tuesday showing sites of major developments in Beijing misidentified one of two military groups reported to have clashed at an airfield south of the city. The clash was said to involve units of the 27th Army, not the 17th. A military analysis article on Tuesday misidentified the home base of the 27th Army. It is normally based at Shijiazhuang, southwest of Beijing, not in Inner Mongolia.

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