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CRACKDOWN IN BEIJING; An Army With Its Own Grievances

By FOX BUTTERFIELD JUNE 6, 1989

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American experts on the Chinese Army say its morale has been badly affected over the last year by the same problems of inflation and corruption that have created widespread dissatisfaction among the public with the Communist Government.

In addition, the specialists say, many of the younger army officers are relatively well-educated people from China's cities, unlike their senior officers, who came from peasant families with little schooling.

As a result, many junior officers are sympathetic to the demands of the pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing, the experts believe. The Discontent Spreads

Harvey Nelson, a professor at the University of South Florida, said that on a trip to China last month a veteran army officer told him, "many field-grade officers have been infected by the democracy movement."

This split between younger and older officers raises the prospect of a serious breakdown in discipline in the People's Liberation Army, Mr. Nelson said, with some military units rebelling against others. Mr. Nelson has written extensively about the Chinese Army.

Harlan Jencks, a research associate at the University of California at Berkeley, said, "There is a grave danger that the P.L.A. will start shooting at each other. This is threatening the existence of the People's Republic."

Mr. Jencks said television pictures of the troops occupying Tiananmen Square indicated they were among the best-armed units in China. Some of the tanks used in the crackdown, for example, are of the T-69 type, a brand new model with an Israeli-made 105-millimeter gun and a laser site. Quickly Provided

So far, only a very few of the T-69 tanks have been manufactured, said Mr. Jencks, who is regarded as a leading authority on the Chinese military. They are advanced versions of the T-59, which was based on the old Soviet-made T-54.

In addition, he said, the helicopters used in reconnaissance over Tiananmen Square and for the dropping of leaflets on demonstrators before the shootings began last weekend are new French-made craft that had not been seen publicly in China before. A special army unit was created to fly the helicopters, known as Gazelles.

"This shows what a mess the Government is in because it goes against everything the P.L.A. has been trying to work for in the past few years," Mr. Jencks said. "They have been told to get out of politics and to become more professional and modernized."

Under Mao Zedong, the army had been highly politicized, being heavily involved in Communist Party factional battles and had fallen far behind world standards in equipment and training. Inflation and Corruption

Of late, morale in the army was particularly hurt by inflation, raging at close to 30 percent last year, because soldiers are on fixed salaries, unlike peasants and those urban residents who have started their own businesses.

To make matters worse, Mr. Jencks said, the army has been ordered to become self-supporting as part of the Government's cost-cutting measures, forcing military units to go into business for themselves. As a consequence, some units have used their trucks to start transportation companies, their repair depots to serve as commercial garages and their hospitals to admit private-paying patients.

Sometimes, ill soldiers have even been turned away to cater to patients who can pay, Mr. Jencks said. This has created wide demoralization.

It has also opened the door to serious corruption because it is impossible to draw a clear line between army units going into business legitimately and officers going into business for themselves, Mr. Jencks added. A Family Business? Another source of contention in the army has been the growing power of Yang Shangkun, China's conservative 82-year-old President. Mr. Yang, a veteran of the Long March of the 1930's, has in effect been running the Communist Party's Central Military

Commission as its vice chairman for several years, said June Teufel Dreyer, a professor of political science at the University of Miami.

In theory, Deng Xiaoping, China's senior leader, is head of the commission, but Mr. Yang had become so powerful that some Chinese jokingly referred to it as the "Yang family village."

Mr. Yang's younger brother, Yang Baibing, is head of the General Political Department of the army and Chi Haotian, believed to be Mr. Yang's son-in-law, is Chief of the General Staff.

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