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TURMOIL IN CHINA; ARTILLERY FIRING IN SUBURBS ADDS TO TENSIONS IN BEIJING; MYSTERY ON LEADERS GROWS

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Artillery fire reverberated through the capital Tuesday, and there were continued reports of clashes among rival military units.

The security situation seemed to continue to deteriorate, and today there were the first direct moves against foreign residents of the capital. Troops fired at the Qijiayuan Diplomatic Compound, where many diplomats and foreign journalists live, witnesses said, but no one was known to be injured.

This afternoon, troops sealed off the nearby Jianguomenwai Diplomatic Compound, which also houses thousands of foreign diplomats and journalists. Several soldiers with submachine guns guarded each entrance and refused to allow people to enter or leave.

Embassies of several countries were trying to arrange evacuations of their nationals in the compound, but it was not immediately clear if they would be successful.

Witnesses also said that soldiers had stopped two diplomatic cars on Beijing's third ring road, forced the foreign occupants of the car out at gunpoint and robbed them of all their belongings.

The sounds of artillery fire appeared to be coming from the western outskirts of the

city, the general direction of the headquarters of the Beijing military region. But it could not be determined if the headquarters was involved in the fighting or who was firing the shells. Most diplomats and Chinese said they assumed that the shelling involved competing army units seeking a military solution to China's power struggle.

The evening news program denounced as "purely rumor" the reports of fighting between military units near the military airport in southern Beijing. It also offered an unusual denial of a report that Deng Xiaoping, China's senior leader, had died. No Explanation on Deng

"That's a sheer fabrication intended to poison people's minds," the newscaster said, without shedding any light on Mr. Deng's situation or whereabouts.

Not since the end of the Maoist period more than a dozen years ago has there been such confusion about the situation in the world's most populous nation. Today, even the most basic information - such as whether anyone at all is running China, or whether Mr. Deng is alive - is contested. None of China's leaders have been seen for 12 days or more, and there have been rumors of coups or assassination attempts against both Mr. Deng and Prime Minister Li Peng.

Late this morning, several thousand soldiers left the Jianguomenwai Bridge, traveling east in trucks and on foot out of the city center. They fired continuously into the air for several minutes, sending civilians running for cover and diplomats in their apartments diving for the floor.

It was not clear if the troops, who were singing and seemed in excellent spirits, were withdrawing from the city center. Nor was it certain where they were going.

Cryptic Message

This morning's radio news programs offered a hint that a little-known Politburo member in charge of security matters, Qiao Shi, may emerge to lead the Communist Party. The news broadcasts reported matter-of-factly that the Supreme People's Court had sent a message to "Comrade Qiao Shi and the standing committee of the Politburo to express support for the actions to suppress counterrevolutionary riots."

By singling out Mr. Qiao as representing the five-member standing committee, the message gave him a special status and could be interpreted as suggesting that he will succeed Zhao Ziyang as Communist Party General Secretary. Mr. Zhao is believed to have been stripped of his powers, though not of his post, more than two weeks ago.

The selection of Mr. Qiao, a 65-year-old proponent of strict law and order, would have to be ratified by the party's Central Committee. The reference on the broadcast, however, might merely have cited Mr. Qiao because of his special responsibility for security.

Chinese Communist Party officials say that Mr. Qiao has pushed for an end to the current turmoil while also trying to avoid violence as much as possible. He ordered the police and soldiers not to use force against a large student demonstration on April 27, and it is not clear what role he has played in the violent suppression of the democracy movement. Talk of New Class Struggle

On Tuesday night, in a comment sure to alarm an already jittery population, one of Prime Minister Li's closest aides, Yuan Mu, appeared on television and implied that China should pay more attention to "class struggle." In the Maoist era, a call for class struggle usually heralded large-scale purges in the party and often mass arrests.

The concept of class struggle is now tainted in China because millions of people were either killed or were badly disadvantaged in their careers because they were deemed to be members of a social class that had to be struggled against in the first three decades of Communist rule.

"For a long period of time," Mr. Yuan said, "no one has paid attention to class struggle, or even to political struggle - as if there is no class struggle at all and the world is filled with love. But the fact is, there are bad elements."

Mr. Yuan, whose appearance suggested that Mr. Li is still in power, also estimated today that 300 people had been killed and 6,000 wounded in the military crackdown in the capital. Most independent estimates are higher, ranging from several hundred to 1,500 or more, and the accepted wisdom among many Chinese is that tens of thousands of civilians were shot or beaten to death since troops attacked Tiananmen Square, in the heart of Beijing, early Sunday morning.

The official estimates were also regarded as suspect because Mr. Yuan said that most of the injuries were suffered by troops, rather than by the civilians whom the soldiers raked with submachine-gun fire. [A White House official said that Government cables from Beijing report the death toll at anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000, and that without knowing a specific figure, the Administration assumes that several thousand were killed.] There was further shooting Tuesday and early today in several parts of the capital, and some casualties were reported, but the numbers of deaths and injuries seemed barely more than a dozen. The troops seemed much

more intent on defending their hold on the capital from rival units than attacking civilians. Tanks in Place

More than 25 tanks continued to hold the bridge. A few tanks covered northern and southern approaches, but most faced east. They were carefully spaced, one behind the other, as if they intended to use their cannon rather than their machine guns.

Early this morning, five tanks escorted about 70 troop trucks, each carrying 16 to 20 soldiers, east from the bridge along Jianguomenwai Avenue. A few gunshots could be heard, but it was not clear who was shooting at whom.

The tanks were apparently used to open path for the trucks through barricades that neighborhood residents had put up on the road, using concrete blocks, trees, burned-out army vehicles and anything else on hand.

The tanks returned after 15 minutes and resumed their positions on the bridge. But other army vehicles then scoured the surrounding streets and seized about 25 pedestrians in the area. Although there has been no prohibition on walking outside at night, the pedestrians were forced into the center of the road and made to squat with machine guns digging into their backs. They were later put into army vehicles and driven away to the north. It was not clear what became of them.

The night in Beijing is eerie these days, with a deathly stillness because almost no one ventures out after darkness. Gunfire occasionally breaks the quiet, and blazes light the sky where citizens have seized and burned a military vehicle. But the strongest sensations are of stillness and tension.

The unrest is spreading to other Chinese cities, although reports are scattered and incomplete.

The northeastern city of Shenyang on Tuesday was the site of a demonstration involving tens of thousands of people - estimates ranged from 30,000 to 100,000. It was believed to have been the biggest demonstration in Shenyang, an important industrial city, in more than a decade, and many workers joined in. Violence in Chengdu

But the most violent incident occurred in Chengdu, a large city in central China where there were protest demonstrations on Sunday and Monday against the killing of civilians in Beijing. Some reports have suggested that 300 people were killed by troops in Chengdu on Monday, but they appear to be exaggerated.

Jan de Wilde, the United States Consul General in Chengdu, estimated that 10

to 20 people may have been killed and several hundred wounded on Sunday and Monday. He said that most or all the casualties were from fighting and beatings rather than bullet wounds, and that the turmoil principally involved young hoodlums rather than pro-democracy demonstrators.

The incident included an attack by the hoodlums on the Jinjiang Hotel, which houses the consulate, Mr. de Wilde said, but he added that they were not looking for Americans. He said that he was satisfied with the Government's handling of the consulate's security.

A lull in the fighting in the center of Beijing left an atmosphere of nervous expectation. "We're in the eye of the storm," a Western diplomat said, suggesting that the conflict between the army and the citizens was about to be replaced by a conflict between army units.

The mood in Beijing seemed mixed. Some people are convinced that "people power" will eventually triumph and the Government will be overthrown. But perhaps the majority seem to believe that guns will triumph over ideals, and that the democracy movement is finished.

"We aren't very optimistic," a factory worker said as he gathered with his neighbors in northern Beijing to discuss the latest rumors. "If the present leadership falls, then maybe we will just get more chaos. There would be no leaders at all, and China would have warlords again." Reality Proves Elusive

The air of unreality in the capital has been increased by the mysteries in the press. The newspapers have not appeared in several days, and state television has been growing increasingly peculiar. Tuesday's evening television news program never showed the faces of the news readers, for example, as if they were embarrassed to be seen. The English-language news was cancelled, and all programming ended early.

Nobody interviewed seems to believe the Government propaganda, and it is so discredited that it seems to make most people even angrier than they were.

Mr. Yuan, the Government spokesman, said in his estimate of casualties that more than 5,000 soldiers had been wounded, compared with 2,000 citizens wounded. He said that the number of 300 killed included "troops, thugs and spectators," but did not indicate which were most numerous. But he said that only 23 students were known to have died.

In the first sign of a hint of contrition from any official, Mr. Yuan said that the Government would assist with funeral arrangements of spectators who had been

killed by mistake. He also offered the first comment on the international reaction to the bloodshed, saying China could put up with any consequences, like foreign sanctions.

"We are not afraid of this," he said. "We Chinese people will not allow them to interfere in China's domestic affairs, either by condemnations or by sanctions."

LEADERS CANNOT BE FOUND

WASHINGTON, June 6 (Special to The New York Times) - The White House said today that it assumes that Chinese leaders have left Beijing, but does not know where they are.

Marlin Fitzwater, the President's spokesman, told The Associated Press that the United States Embassy in Beijing has had "no contact with the top-level people, and we've tried." He added: "The assumption has been that the top-level people have moved out to other locations. We tend to believe it."

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