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# TURMOIL IN CHINA: Reporter's Notebook; Civil Warfare as a Spectator Sport

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When the cacophony of submachine-gun fire broke out for a solid five minutes two blocks away from him, the old vendor turned his back, pushed his cart toward a small crowd, and went on selling his wares.

He was not interested in watching anyone be shot, and he had work to do. The back of his bicycle wagon was covered with neat piles of broccoli, peppers, zucchini and scallions, and there were three more burlap sacks of green vegetables by his feet.

"My luck has been good so far," said the old man, a shiny green pepper in one hand and a wad of cash in the other. "As long as I stick to selling vegetables, I won't be bothered."

A man selling watermelons nearby complained, "I wish I were selling soy sauce. That stuff is really in short supply now."

Life goes on in Beijing. It is a different kind of life than it was a few days ago, before troops entered the center of the capital and massacred hundreds or thousands of demonstrators, but people are finding ways of coping with the city's paralysis.

For those who cannot get to work because there are no buses, they have turned

their absence from work into a holiday. One couple was playing badminton on the street today, laughing with their children, and another strolled, hand in hand, through the park.

"I walked to the office today, but we had no work to do so I just came back," said a short, thin man smoking a cigarette. "But life is boring. There's nothing but lies on the television these days, and we can't go where we please."

The young man says that he has not dared to walk two blocks to look at the troops, and that by dusk, he is back at home. During the day, he wanders on the streets near his home and talks to his neighbors, or just stands in silence watching the odd car or bicycle go by. Essential Services Vanish

The capital is in a state of suspended animation. This is a week of Sundays, in which most of the city is closed down. The doors have not opened this week at most banks, schools and large stores, and even though the newspapers continue publishing, not many people can read them because they are not being distributed.

Postal service has been disrupted, and there is no public transportation in a city that depends on buses and subways to move people to their work places. Fear also keeps people indoors.

"I'm afraid to go out now," a middle-age man said. "If they tell you to stop and you take a step forward, then they shoot you."

As for food, people are hoarding all sorts of goods when opportunities arise. When a gasoline station opened for a few hours, the line stretched around the corner. People not only filled their gas tanks, but also spare gas cans.

Station attendants could not guarantee that they would be open the next day because they feared they would run out of fuel.

Taxis are also scarce so that when someone finds one, he tends to cling to it the whole day. A shopper found himself in a dilemma. He had found a grocery store that was open, but he was afraid that if he purchased a few bagfuls, he would not find a taxi and would have no way of getting the groceries home. He ended up finding a taxi, but not buying the food.

Rail service also appears to have been disrupted, at least for students. When two students from an eastern province, Shandong, tried to purchase train tickets to go home, they said they were told that only students with Beijing residence cards were allowed to buy tickets. They said they were sure that the reason was that the authorities did not want people to go to other cities and spread word about the killings of students in Beijing.

Another group of non-Beijing students was able to purchase tickets to the provinces. But when they showed up at the train station, which has been guarded by troops since last week, they were escorted to freight trains. Fearing that they might never emerge from those freight cars, they abandoned the thought of travel and went back to their university friends. Rooftop Strategists

A recent pastime in Beijing has been troop-watching: climbing to the rooftops of tall buildings to peer at the soldiers and tanks below. At first it appeared to be a relatively safe hobby. Diplomats, journalists and even business executives brought their cameras, binoculars and even supplies of beer to the rooftops of the Jianguomenwai diplomatic compound and discussed the puzzling movements of the troops below.

"They must be the 27th Army, you know, the one that did the damage on Tiananmen Square," a diplomat said.

"No, I heard they were the 40th Army," a journalist replied. "That's what everybody down there is saying."

When gunfire is heard in the distance, the military attaches flick out their walkie-talkies and communicate with their colleagues on rooftops throughout the city, as well as with their embassies.

"Sounds of machine-gun fire due east about three kilometers," one man barked into his walkie-talkie.

The experts also exchanged their analysis and intelligence on the troops, for what it was worth.

"There must have been more than 200,000 troops to retake Tiananmen Square from the students," an attache said.

Another disagreed. "You don't need that many troops to retake Tiananmen Square," he said. "A few thousand soldiers with submachine guns will get the message across."

The building maintenance people were furious when they found out that foreigners were peeping from the rooftops. They locked the doors to the roofs and pulled away the wooden stepladders. But the foreigners kept coming. They punched a hole in the door and jumped where the ladder had been taken away.

Then the maintenance authorities put on stronger locks. And just to be sure, the doors to the rooftops are now constantly guarded. Rumors and Guesswork

Many journalists and diplomats normally resent the armed police who guard the diplomatic compounds and restrict Chinese guests from walking in freely. But

today, they could hardly have been more relieved when People's Liberation Army soldiers carrying AK-47's closed the gates and sealed the entrances to the compound.

A few hours earlier, troops had fired on two of the diplomatic compounds as they marched down the major thoroughfare just outside the compound. As the troops arrived, many residents were asking the question: Should we have evacuated yesterday?

"They're probably going to escort us all to the airport," a resident said. "Go pack your bags." "Fill the bathtubs with water, lest they cut the water supply," a journalist suggested.

"Don't take the elevator. The troops may shut off the electricity, and you won't be found there for weeks," another said. Then the phones started ringing. "They are looting Building No. 12," a caller from a hotel nearby said. "Those troops haven't eaten and they are famished. They know foreigners have a lot of good food. They're not rational and will shoot. Lock your doors and keep quiet."

In fact, the tale of looting was apparently unfounded. The troops maintained that they were looking for a sniper. But not many people knew that at the time.

Another caller said: "Those troops shot at the buildings facing the highway, so don't go poking your head out of the terraces."

"They also robbed some diplomats at gunpoint along the third ring road," she added.

A few brave foreigners marched up to the gate and politely asked why they were being locked in their residences. "It's just a temporary measure," came the reply.

The phone lines at the embassies were tied up as residents all began at once to dial for help. Some of the embassies were mildly reassuring.

"We've sent out a team of negotiators," a diplomat said. "Everyone should meet in front of Building 6 and try to walk in a group to the embassy. We don't know if it will work, but we will try."

Other embassies were less comforting. "We just got word of this and haven't yet decided what action to take," a diplomat there said. "Call us back soon."

A version of this article appears in print on June 8, 1989, on Page A00012 of the National edition with the headline: TURMOIL IN CHINA: Reporter's Notebook; Civil Warfare as a Spectator Sport.