Chinese civilisation has a history of over 9,000 years where good authoritative governments have turned corrupt only for the civilian masses to topple them in a repeated cycle of both internal and external strength and weaknesses. Mao-Tse Tung established Communist China in 1949 with a motto of “fairness and equity for all of the Chinese population”. Mao-Tse Tung launched the “Hundred Flowers Campaign” in 1956 as part of an encouragement of “positive criticism” of its policies, which exposed a level of criticisms that the Government could not tolerate. The silencing of the opposition as a result of closed government attitudes would be a repeated as the protestor voice would not reappear in the headlines until the late 1980s. China’s “reconstruction” phase began under Deng Xiaoping with key reforms of modernisations of agriculture, industry, defence and technology, with Democracy¹ as the fifth reform desired by the Chinese people.

The 1979 Democracy Wall paralleled calls for increased political freedoms; actions deemed by Deng Xiaoping as interference with China’s modernisation and were consequently shut down. Hu Yaobang, the popular reformist Party Secretary was tasked with political and economic reforms including the “Open Door Policy” deemed too fast paced by elite Communist leaders whom subsequently blamed him for the pro-democracy demonstrations of 1987. Hu Yaobang’s state funeral was attended by many delegates along with a hundred thousand students carrying a petition for fairer government inspired by Hu Yaobang whom was viewed as a hero who had championed their rights². The government’s ignorance of the students resulted in a shift from mourning to protest in defiance of a government proclamation to disperse with the promise of negotiations which proved only to be low level dialogue with the Communist Party.

Mikhail Gorbachev’s 1989 May visit to Beijing to resume Sino-Soviet relations after nearly three decades of estrangement, escalated the tensions between the demonstrators and the Chinese government as the students were denied a meeting with the Soviet leader. Li-Peng enacted martial law after calls for the dispersion of Tiananmen Square failed leading for a lower key welcome for Gorbachev at the airport which embarrassed the Government in foreign media. Conservative Zhao-Ziyang was purged for showing “support” through a sympathetic stance towards the students. Li-Peng said that “at the bottom they want to overthrow our state and overthrow our Party”³. The demonstrators erected a statue named the Goddess of Democracy facing Mao Tse-Tung’s portrait as the PLA clashed with street demonstrators on June 3 as barricades in Beijing City were breached with reports of gunfire.

³ Barth, Kelly (2003) At Issue in History: The Tiananmen Square Massacre, Greenhaven Press p.53
By 3am the PLA had quietly assembled and cordoned off Tiananmen as final negotiations with officials failed to reach a feasible settlement on June 4, 1989. Suddenly for 15 minutes at 4am, total darkness fell upon the Square all lights were turned off allowing tanks and soldiers to “invade” the protestors’ Square. Warning shots quickly turned into direct shootings with many protestors shot point blank along with being run down by tanks. In the subsequent days, attempts to oppose government forces such as the “tank-man” stance were met with harsh and forceful retaliation from the authorities whom detained many students along with protest leaders. The government was eager to change the subject of the incident describing it as a crackdown on “thugs and ruffians” with heroic soldiers cleaning up the damage.

_Cold War Significance - China’s Major Sticking Point in Global Diplomacy_

The Tiananmen Square incidents are regarded as the pinnacle of demonstrations that triggered the end of Cold War. Many Western countries echoed the American President George Bush’s condemnation of the Chinese government saying “I deeply deplore the decision to use force against peaceful demonstrators and the consequent loss of life.” The Chinese government would now face isolation, temporarily derailing the “Open Door Policy” with Deng Xiaoping’s achievements in foreign policy with the world lost. The successes of “Ping-Pong” diplomacy and ‘exchange visits’ of economic and military officials in the 1970 and early 80s were overshadowed. Embargoes including a halt on arms trade were enforced by Western nations and the international community whom suspended China from receiving assistance from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

The Chinese government suffered from a humiliating loss of “face” and raised internal tensions with increased surveillance of students and censorship of prominent voices through tightening of the media. Clashes between the activists whom had no fled abroad mainly to Western countries and the government were kept localised as an uneasy peace formed as daily life gradually returned to normal. Jiang Zemin replaced the Zhao-Ziyang and became Chinese president continuing the Deng Xiaoping’s agenda of modernisation and reform with the support of the Chinese population weakened.

The Tiananmen incident was an indication to leftist factions both in China and the USSR that “the rush to embrace the West had led to an erosion of the [Chinese] Communist values and [had] produced severe imbalances.” Communist countries across the world also gradually began to experience calls for reforms and freedoms in a domino effect inspired by the Tiananmen incident. Uprisings quickly engulfed Eastern Europe with Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania all facing anti-Communist revolutions. People power inspired by Beijing’s Tiananmen led to the Eastern Bloc crumbling with Poland leading the way in structural shift in government. Solidarity was a non-Communist trade union in Poland which incorporated nearly a

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5 Colombia University, Asia for Educators: Tiananmen Square in the Newspapers [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1950_tiananmen_newspapers.htm#article2](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1950_tiananmen_newspapers.htm#article2)
6 Barth, Kelly (2003) At Issue in History: The Tiananmen Square Massacre, Greenhaven Press p.48
7 Trueman, Chris (2000) History Learning Site: Dente [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/detente.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/detente.htm)
third of the Polish workforce. The Solidarity movement started in 1980 for worker’s rights and political freedom whilst being subjected to continuous government oppression before 1989. The Polish government entered the 1989 Polish Round Table talks in Warsaw with a willingness to negotiate supported by the Solidarity movement and opposition groups whom all agreed to peaceful transitional solution. The political success of Solidarity in the semi-elections on June 4, 1989 surpassed all expectations and cemented the anti-Communist representation in the Polish Parliament. The USSR held back its military to allow Tadeusz Mazowiecki to become the first non-communist prime minister in Eastern Europe after WW2, indicating a fading of support for Communism which would lead to the reunification of Germany and end of the Cold War.

Historical Interpretations – Tiananmen Square Incident or Massacre?

Multiple interpretations of the events on June 4 have emerged with the Tiananmen protests of 1989 labelled as the “June 4 Incident”, “Political Storm Between Spring and Summer in 1989” by the Chinese Government and “Eighty-Nine Democracy Movement”, and the “Tiananmen Square Massacre” by activists, anti-Communist groups and Western countries. The causes and total death toll is subject to fierce debate with the Chinese government claiming that around 300 armed thugs were killed when the PLA whom were “defending” Tiananmen were attacked. Many observers at that time support the American government’s perspective supporting claims that thousands were killed as a direct result of a heavy handed military crackdown on the protestors in an attempt to clear the Square. American state cables claimed that the PLA that engaged with violent clashes with demonstrators in Tiananmen and its surrounds. American embassy staff heard reports “claiming that more than 10,000 people had been killed at Tiananmen.”

However the international media’s presence in Beijing meant little as very few were present for the clearing of the square by the army. Inaccurate reporting was once put into the spotlight in 2011, with fresh claims that there were severe discrepancies delivered by foreign media at the time. Respected BBC correspondent John Simpson reiterated there was no massacre in the Square but rather that the majority of the fatalities were suffered in Beijing City streets.

The Chinese government insists that the military actions in Beijing in 1989 were part of the wider quelling of the political upheaval caused by counter-revolutionary groups receiving inspiration from Western powers. Deng Xiaoping later remarked that it had been an attempt by the “dregs of society” that had sought to topple the regime in favour of a “bourgeois republic entirely dependent on the West” but called for the Paramounts of “Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Tse-Tung thought”.

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http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS-PnxuJlj


11 Barth, Kelly (2003) At issue in History: The Tiananmen Square Massacre, Greenhaven Press p.72

12 Moore, Malcolm (2011) The Telegraph: Wikileaks: No bloodshed inside Tiananmen Square, cables claim

13 Simpson, John (2009), BBC John Simpson: Remembering Tiananmen
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8069781.stm

14 Tempest, Rone, Los Angeles Times (1997) China gets down to business
protestors shouted “stop the fascists, down with the government”\textsuperscript{15} Communist hardliners views such response to mass movements attempting to sabotage China’s own vision of “reform and openness” were necessary to halt the importation of evil influences from the West.\textsuperscript{16} From the autobiography of student leader Chai Ling, she recalls workers telling the protestors to “hold on until morning. The US government is going to intervene”.\textsuperscript{17} Later, Chai Ling and other students were given diplomatic refuge to Western countries where they received benefits such as access to university. Chai Ling later formed the “All Girls Allowed” charity in America to voice discontent with China’s One Child Policy. This has been viewed by many within the Government hierarchy as foreign attempts to destabilise China through the injection of Western ideals and freedoms.

The Tiananmen Square incident is often disguised as a peaceful student demonstration without the considering the workers’ riot in Beijing at the same time. Such simultaneous reporting has led to claims that the victims of the PLA were solely students. The initial student movement to call of greater freedoms and democracy became confused as leadership was inconsistent and subsequently divisions appeared among the ideologies of the protestors.\textsuperscript{18} On the other hand, there were a significant number of workers on strike and rioting in Beijing at the time. Martial law was imposed by Li-Peng not only to disperse the protestors in Tiananmen but also to end the acts of terror by disgruntled workers. The rioting workers had taken advantage of the peaceful student demonstrations and began inciting violence against security forces in Beijing City. These included new formed workers’ vigilante gangs calling themselves the “dare-to-die squads”\textsuperscript{19} with youths speeding around on motorcycles patrolling the city. The Laobaixing workers stood as the real threat the government instead of the student movement.

References


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\textsuperscript{17} Ling, Chai (2011) A Heart for Freedom, Tyndale Publishing p.187

\textsuperscript{18} Barth, Kelly (2003) At Issue in History: The Tiananmen Square Massacre. Greenhaven Press p.49

\textsuperscript{19} Conachy, James (1999) World Socialist Website: Ten years since the Tiananmen Square massacre \url{http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/jun1999/tian-j04.shtml}


