

'Gang of Ancients' desperate to keep grip on China

by Mary McCourt Burdman

The tanks are rolling in the streets of Beijing again, this time in anticipation of some or any demonstrations or disturbances during the September Asian Games. Reports are circulating that the underground resistance to the Communist Party regime in China will use the presence of international diplomatic and press visitors to Beijing for the Games, which begin Sept. 15, as an opportunity to stage protests, as they did during the visit of Mikhail Gorbachov in May 1989.

Some Chinese students have threatened to set themselves on fire to protest the repression, and the Chinese National Security Department has reportedly issued a circular, warning of disturbances from the underground pro-democracy movement. Leaflets have appeared in China demanding sanctions against the Games and calling for democracy and freedom.

But the democracy movement is not the greatest threat to the Beijing government's grip on the country. The breakdown of China's economy, which has generated a 100-million strong "floating population," has created total disorder. The police and security forces rant continually about "armed gangs" and other criminals threatening public security through robbery, explosions, sabotage, and murder.

The authorities are certainly nervous. Tanks and armored personnel carriers, which had not been seen for some time, have reappeared in the streets of Beijing in the past 10 days, Western correspondents reported from there July 31. One Chinese resident reported a tank in the university district, carrying soldiers wearing combat helmets. There have also been large-scale troop movements in the city: Convoys of up to 300 soldiers have been seen along Beijing's main avenue during the day, and helicopters have repeatedly flown over the city. There is also a substantial increase in the numbers of People's Armed Police in the streets.

Bogus liberalization

So much for the steps China has taken to "liberalize." Those steps, the nominal release of a few hundred dissidents from prison and of astrophysicist Fang Lizhi from the U.S. Embassy June 24, were only done for consumption in the United States, Britain, and Japan to help those governments promote their pro-Chinese policies at home.

The great problem is, that with the "Gang of Ancients,"

the octogenarians now leading China, the country has no chance. This group will gather in their wheelchairs at the seaside resort of Beidaihe in August to conspire with and against each other, before the fall CP plenum, veteran China correspondent Simon Long wrote in *The Guardian* July 31. Deng Xiaoping, 86, is still on top, as far as can be determined, but the battles among rivals are not their primary concern. Holding on to power they have held for 60 years is. Vice President Wang Zhen still asserts the continued importance of "Mao Zedong's comrades in arms" and the Communists' World War II "Yenan spirit."

Wang was reportedly in a helicopter watching the June 4 massacre operations. Another, Peng Zhen, 87, has influence in the legal and security networks now run by Qiao Shi. At this point, all the mechanical statements about "Party unity" only assert that the Party leadership is unified in "basic principles"—retaining power. Peng Zhen expressed the Party leadership view best, in statements attributed to him when he heard about the Beijing massacre: "Now the ship is sinking. The pressing task for the moment is to get across the river in this ship before it sinks, rather than disclose which direction it will take."

Martial law was never lifted in Beijing: The People's Armed Police, who are armed with AK47s, are under the command of the Peoples Liberation Army. And the dissidents were never "released." None have been exonerated, charges still stand against them, and all are being watched and could be arrested again at any time.

Beijing's mayor, Chen Xitong, noted for his support for the Tiananmen Square massacre, asserted June 21 that the Asian Games "would be free from terrorism." He told Kyoto press of Japan that Chinese security would be on alert. He said that China has "increased production of such 'mild' weapons as tear gas since the Tiananmen Square incident last year, while beefing up its riot squads." Some 500,000 "citizens" and 100,000 students would be mobilized to "help assist the squads during the Games."

There are consistent reports of underground resistance groups in mainland China. Early in July, the Chinese-language *World Journal* reported that representatives of the "China Communist Revolutionary Committee," which has been active on the mainland since the end of the Cultural

Revolution, met with leaders of the Paris-based exiles' organization, the Federation for a Democratic China, in Tokyo in March. The Revolutionary Committee asked the FDC to announce that the meeting had taken place, and that Committee members include high-level Communist Party members.

Mass rallies for death

The week of July 16, Qiao Shi led a national meeting of public security directors in Beijing. Although he claimed the "decisive victory" over the "counter-revolutionary rebellion" last year, has "shown the world that the political situation in China is stable and the communist leadership and socialist system enjoy profound support among the masses," Deputy Minister of Public Security Gu Lingfang was not so sanguine. He told the meeting that "the situation as far as China's public security is concerned is basically stable, but challenging."

A month earlier, Gu had told the National People's Congress standing committee that "hostile forces and hostile elements at home and abroad have intensified acts of sabotage [and] stepped up their counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement." Gu focused on the tremendous rise in "criminality" during 1990: One million criminal cases were filed this year already, he said, an increase of 260,000 over last year, and a rise of 25% in major crimes since last year. Gu said public security departments should adopt "all necessary measures in accordance with the law" to crack down on crime.

These measures include the hideous "public rallies" in which tens of people are tried at once. Death sentences are rampant, and anyone sentenced to death is immediately led away from the rally and executed. In Fujian province July 23, two men were executed after a mass trial of 186 people. Two more were executed in Liaoning for dismantling and selling 30 agricultural power transformers. Pornography now carries the death sentence, and in Shenzhen, a 26-year-old official was executed for "taking bribes" July 16. Hebei province increased death sentences 25% from last year. In Dalian, after such a mass trial, 10 people were executed for "bribery and corruption" June 27.

Unrest on all the borders

Serious unrest continues in Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang province in China's western interior. On July 1, Hong Kong's *Cheng Ming* reported that there were some 20 rallies and demonstrations for independence in Inner Mongolia between December 1989 and April 1990. One huge demonstration of 80,000 people, herdsmen, workers, and students, was followed by another of 40,000 in the capital city of Hohhot May 26-28. Seven people were killed and over 200 injured by the Chinese authorities. The border was sealed, and Beijing reportedly sent representatives to Ulan Bator, the capital of the Soviet-dominated country of Mongolia.

The reports are to some degree confirmed by the fact that the official Chinese media reported that Politburo Standing

Committee member Qiao Shi, the head of internal Party security, toured Inner Mongolia for *nine days* during an unspecified period in late May. Qiao called the situation "comparatively stable," a more serious evaluation than the usual "stable," and emphasized the need to develop the economy for "good social order."

The first week in August, Qiao Shi was in Xinjiang province, which was rocked by an uprising by a group of the Turkic-speaking Muslim population April 5-6, in which hundreds may have been killed. The Army has been trying rapidly to upgrade its skills in "riot and disturbance quelling" in Xinjiang. Qiao Shi called for "no relaxation in the fight against separatism."

Cracking the whip on Tibet

Communist Party head Jiang Zemin went to Tibet the last week of July—the highest-level CP official to visit there in 10 years. He announced in Lhasa that "stabilizing the situation" should be the top priority for Tibet, and fulminated against the Tibetan separatists "at home and abroad creating disturbances and violating social order."

He called for special attention to education, "to enable students to know from childhood that Tibet is a sacred and inseparable part of the motherland and that without the Communist Party of China, there will be no socialist new Tibet." Jiang's visit was preceded by a delegation from the State Council, and the Tibet Communist Party held a congress the week of July 16, where emphasis was placed on developing the economy to promote stability.

Soviet leaders apparently have few illusions about the situation in China. After interviewing a group of top Soviet Asian experts in Moscow, *Hindustan Times* correspondent Bhabani Sen Gupta wrote July 23 that there are serious problems, despite the growing "warmth" of Sino-Soviet relations. "We will be cautious about China," Dr. Georgi Arbatov of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute told Gupta, who also interviewed Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachov, Institute of Oriental Studies head Dr. Mikhail Kapitsa, and Institute of Far Eastern Affairs head Academician Mikhail Titarenko. Titarenko told Gupta, "We will not forget what we have learnt from experience" with China.

On China's internal situation, these Soviet specialists had three perceptions, Gupta wrote: the first, that the cleavage between the leadership and population, especially the urban population, is far from resolved, and may burst out again in the near future. One expert stated that the Chinese made a great mistake by centering several universities in Beijing, while in the U.S.S.R., they are widely dispersed, with only one in Moscow.

The second view is that the Chinese leaders may be able to bring about the minimal necessary political changes in the next few years to avoid another explosion, but the third view was that China's economic realities are getting grimmer and grimmer, making outbursts of social discontent quite possible.