



One year after the massacre at Tiananmen Square, China's leaders are weaker than ever before.

China's old and dirty hands

By Marie Gottschalk

ONE year ago, Chinese troops cut a bloody swath through Beijing as they recaptured Tiananmen, the heart of the capital and the country. Although they succeeded in clearing the square and terrorizing the state, China's current leaders remain under siege, weaker today than at any other time in the Communist government's 41-year old history.

Party chief Jiang Zemin attempted to dismiss the outrage over the killings at Tiananmen as "much ado about nothing" during an interview in early May with ABC's Barbara Walters. Yet in the year since the assault, he and China's other top leaders have been behaving as if they were adrift in a sea of gasoline, fearful that the smallest spark might engulf them in flames.

Immediately after the attack last June 3-4, police and soldiers began rounding up thousands of students, intellectuals and workers. Days later, several workers were publicly tried and executed. A veil of repression quickly descended over urban China as many Chinese severed their contacts with foreigners for fear of government reprisals and spent much of their time attending political study sessions and writing and rewriting self-criticism.

The ever-so-slight chance that the leadership would soften its hard-line stance evaporated in late December with the overthrow and execution of Nicolae Ceausescu. The Romanian leader had been a longtime friend of China, and his rapid and bloody demise stunned China's geron-

ocrats. The government responded by putting its security forces on alert and refusing to make any real concessions on human-rights concerns in the aftermath of the visit by U.S. National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger earlier that month. President George Bush provoked a storm of controversy by sending the two aides to China even though there had been no let up in the repression and despite an earlier promise to suspend high-level contacts.

"Let's face it," said a senior U.S. State Department official recently in discussing

Isolated abroad, despised at home, uncertain of the army's reliability and unable to turn the economy around, the current leadership has no greater plan beyond "moving from stone to stone across the river."

why the trip had yielded so little, "this is obviously a leadership obsessed by internal stability."

Nothing to my name: Although martial law was lifted in January, the number of troops visible on Beijing streets this spring rivaled that during the height of military rule. During Qing Ming, the Chinese festival held each April to honor the dead, thousands of police encircled Beijing's cemeteries to guard against any displays of support for the hundreds—perhaps thousands—who were killed last year. The Chinese authorities reportedly even directed florists to remove white carnations, a traditional flower of mourning, from their shelves.

More recently, Chinese officials put a stop to the 10-city national concert tour of Cui Jian, China's best known rock'n'roll star. Cui was originally permitted to go on tour largely because the cash-starved government needs money for the Asian Games, which China will host in September.

The authorities have attached great importance to the games, seeing this "mini-Olympics" as a way to win back some international respectability. Chinese officials were shocked, however, by the sight of thousands of young people raising their fists, flashing the V-for-victory sign and cheering during the first leg of the tour as Cui sang, "I'd give you my dreams as well as my freedom, but you always laugh at me—nothing to my name," the lyrics to one of the unofficial anthems of the democracy movement.

But the Chinese leadership has had a lot more to contend with than seething youth, intellectuals and urban residents. The army remains unreliable, the economy is unraveling and soldiers have been used not only to police the capital but also to enforce

martial law in Tibet and to quell a Moslem uprising in Kashgar, China's westernmost city, in which several dozen people were reportedly killed in April.

Beijing has attempted to buy off the People's Liberation Army (PLA), rewarding it with a 15-percent budget increase, its first real hike in years. Nonetheless, the army remains discontented and sharply divided. Thousands of officers have been under investigation for suspected involvement in the democracy movement, and many of them are believed to be serving in units in and around Beijing. Many of the younger soldiers are disgruntled because of rampant nepotism, and officers are upset because the PLA's primary task has shifted from protecting China against external threats such as the Soviet Union to maintaining internal security.

China is experiencing economic paralysis as well. An economic austerity program initiated in 1988 has brought down the double-digit inflation rate, but at an enormous cost. The People's Republic has had two quarters of no or negative growth—its bond rating has slipped and it has a \$40 billion external debt. Hundreds of thousands of private and collective enterprises in the countryside have been shut down because of a credit squeeze that has left major urban construction projects on hold and tens of millions unemployed.

In a March speech to the National People's Congress, China's nominal legislature, Premier Li Peng stressed the need to tightly centralize the society's economy and political system. But provincial leaders are balking at the austerity program and are openly defying Beijing's attempts to further centralize economic control.

At the margins: The current leadership is enfeebled both at home and abroad. The biggest blow to its efforts to project an image of stability overseas has been struck by Xu Jiatao, who until early this year was Beijing's most senior representative in Hong Kong. In May, Xu went on an unauthorized "vacation" to the U.S., fueling speculation that he has defected. If so, he would be the most senior Chinese official ever to defect to the West.

Determined to swim against the democratic tide that swept the world last year and paralyzed by domestic political and economic troubles, China has been marginalized internationally. Its relationship with the U.S. is in tatters, and one State Department official recently predicted that Sino-U.S. relations "are more likely to go downward than upward" in the near future.

The Sino-Soviet summit held in the Soviet Union in April raised barely an eyebrow, and Premier Li Peng and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov were so far apart on political, economic and security issues that the two countries ended up issuing separate statements rather than a joint communiqué. In February, Chinese officials privately blamed Gorbachov for the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and expressed confidence that he would be replaced when the Soviet leadership met later that month.

Shunned by many Western countries and downright hostile to the recent changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, China has had to turn, as it did in the '60s, to Third World nations to improve its international stature.

While such exchanges are good for China's international ego, they are no substitute for the capital, high technology and

wealthy markets that only the West can provide. And China now stands the risk of losing the two fattest markets it has long counted on inheriting—Hong Kong and Taiwan (see accompanying story).

Hong Kong, the financial center of Southeast Asia, has been hemorrhaging people and money and may be an empty shell by the time Beijing officially takes it over in 1997. According to one poll, one-third of the country's 1.55 million households plan to emigrate by then, and two-thirds of its executives, professionals and entrepreneurs are currently looking for a way out.

Some argue that Taiwan is pursuing a two-track strategy aimed at winning international support for de facto independence without rupturing its burgeoning ties with Beijing. Since China remains politically and economically isolated, as well as desperate for Taiwanese capital, it is not in a strong position to block Taipei's new drive for international respectability and legitimacy.

Not Eastern Europe: Isolated abroad, despised at home, uncertain of the army's reliability and unable to turn the economy

around, the current leadership has no greater plan beyond "moving from stone to stone across the river," a popular Chinese expression. That said, no one should assume that China's old men will fall as fast as the Berlin Wall or as hard as Romania's Ceausescu.

China differs from Eastern Europe in a number of significant ways. China's communism was homegrown, not imposed from the outside. Thus, while the roots of communism may no longer run deep in China, the Chinese Communist Party—a Leninist organization—may have a good deal of life left in it because it was created internally, as a result of societal conditions.

Unlike Czechoslovakia, China did not have a viable, Western-oriented democratic tradition prior to taking the communist route. And unlike Poland, where a strong Catholic Church had existed side by side with the Communist Party, there have never been any strong bases of power within China independent of the Communist Party.

China remains a primarily agrarian nation. While the countryside has been restive the last few years over taxes, unemployment,

inflation, corruption and widening income disparities, rural unrest and urban dissent have thus far remained separate phenomena, and peasants have been relatively untouched by last year's disturbances and crackdowns.

While the intensity of last spring's opposition movement was unprecedented—way beyond what the students or leadership had expected—no longstanding experienced organizations existed through which to channel and direct the collective wrath.

China's students were just beginning to organize themselves into a national group and the country's workers were in the midst of forming the nation's first independent trade unions when the crackdown took place. In addition, relations between the students and the workers were quite tenuous. Thus today China has no coherent, organized national resistance movement, and, given the degree of general repression now in existence, one is not likely to emerge soon. "It's as dangerous for a person to stick his head out now as it is for a pig to get fat," one Chinese told a Western journalist.

The overseas democracy movement is unlikely to play a decisive role in China's political future, for it is embryonic and splintered by personal and ideological differences. Moreover, Beijing has been working to intimidate and silence Chinese students abroad by revoking passports, terminating government stipends, restricting contacts with relatives back home and recruiting informants.

The political maneuvering going on today within the highest reaches of the Chinese government is undoubtedly as intense as that during the mid-'70s when Mao was ailing. And, once again, much of the jockeying is taking place behind closed doors. Many in the West and in China expect that significant change will come only when the old men—in particular Deng Xiaoping—begin to die off.

Lowell Dittmer, a political science professor at the University of California at Berkeley, notes that, although the older generation tends to be more orthodox and less reformist, the political cleavages cut across generations—in part because many senior offi-

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A faltering democracy movement of Hong Kong's own

BETWEEN 100,000 and 250,000 people packed Hong Kong's Central District on June 3 to mourn last year's massacre in Beijing. While even organizers expected no more than 30,000 people to show up, political leaders now hope that the massive demonstration will jump-start Hong Kong's faltering democracy movement.

With China due to take over Hong Kong in 1997, the press has recently focused its attention on the territory's desperate search for emigration sites. But for the vast majority in Hong Kong, emigration will not be possible.

Local organizers have long been lobbying for democratic reform in both China and Hong Kong in order to protect the future of those left behind following the imminent exodus. But they have received little support from Britain, their current landlord, and even less from China, whose leaders have called Hong Kong's democracy movement "subversive."

At least since the First Opium War of 1842, when the British took control of Hong Kong as a drug-trading base, profit—not politics—has been the territory's local obsession.

Last spring's student uprising in Beijing brought Hong Kong out of its political slumber, temporarily. When hopes for democracy in China ended in bloodshed, nearly a million people took to the streets of central Hong Kong to protest the movement's violent conclusion.

"No matter what happens in China now, politics has changed in Hong Kong,"

T.L. Tsim, a political analyst at Hong Kong's Chinese University, told the *New York Times* just before the massacre. "People have come alive." But in the year since, Hong Kong's political movement has collapsed. The mass demonstrations of last spring were replaced by apathy and resignation, and Tsim worried that many activists would leave the country out of frustration.

Now, however, after the mournful demonstration, Tsim is hopeful again. "There is a great deal of resilience in the Hong Kong democracy movement," Tsim told *In These Times*. "Having witnessed the mass rally firsthand, I believe the people of Hong Kong will not give up their fight. They will not be cowed."

A piece of the pie: Democracy in China remains an important concern for Hong Kong. "We are Chinese," says Lee Wing-tat, a founding member of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China, an organization China has threatened to ban after 1997.

As a local politician, Wing-tat also understands that Hong Kong's support of the Chinese democracy movement involves more than simple altruism. "It has become more and more certain that without Chinese democracy, Hong Kong democracy is not sound," he says.

Many in Hong Kong believe that their only hope for democracy lies in a more progressive government replacing the aging hard-liners in Beijing. But political organizers such as outspoken legislator Martin Lee, who led this year's June 3 rally, have refused to take a wait-and-see approach. "When that time will be is anyone's guess," says Lee. "It could be four months. It could be four years. It could be 40 years. We are hoping for the best but working on the assumption that there will be no change."

What remains to be seen, adds Tsim, is whether Lee and his political colleagues can muster the same support for Hong Kong's own democracy movement. When Britain announced in 1984 that it would hand Hong Kong over to China in 1997, it promised democracy for the territory. But on April 4 of this

year, China ratified its Basic Law—the mini-constitution that will govern Hong Kong after 1997. In the name of "convergence"—a smooth governmental transition—Britain conceded nearly every point to the Chinese, giving its blessing to laws that place strict limitations on Hong Kong's democratic power.

Now the people of Hong Kong must decide whether to accept the fate handed to them by the Beijing-appointed, primarily Chinese, Basic Law Drafting Committee, or to fight for reforms that will complicate the changing of the guard later this decade.

The Basic Law provides for the direct election of only one-third of the members of the Legislative Council, Hong Kong's law-making body, in 1997. (Under British rule, Hong Kong has never directly elected a single Legislative Council member.) Furthermore, the legislature will be controlled by a Beijing-appointed chief executive who will have the power to veto any laws proposed by the legislature. Amendments to the Basic Law can be made only with the approval of China's National People's Congress, which has insisted that no changes will be made before 1997.

While public opinion polls show that the people of Hong Kong do want a more democratic government, the general public has been unwilling to openly join the fight. Many are worried by claims that China is keeping records of who participates in the pro-democracy movement, and that those who do will be punished after China takes over.

Many in Hong Kong who recently fled from China feel there is nothing they can do in the face of the Chinese government except to earn as much money as possible in the next few years, says Nelson Chow, a professor at the University of Hong Kong's School of Social Work.

Hong Kong's powerful business community also has been hesitant to demand reform. "We don't want to rock the boat," says a spokesman for the conservative, business-oriented New Hong Kong Alliance. Much of the business sector is convinced that China will give Hong Kong economic autonomy as long

as it shows the mainland proper respect. "China is like a great bear," says one Hong Kong businessman, "and Hong Kong is just a little bee. As long as the bee brings the bear honey, they get along fine. But if the bee tries to sting the bear, he will be eaten in one bite."

Taking flight: Since the crackdown in Beijing, Hong Kong's best and brightest have been leaving at a rate of 1,000 a week. But for up to 90 percent of Hong Kong's population, emigration is not an option.

Britain, the last hope for a large-scale abode plan, has made a proposal to grant passports to 50,000 Hong Kong households—about 225,000 people total—as a safety net to keep "important" families from leaving the territory. Even this limited quota has faced fierce opposition in Britain's Parliament, where nationalists are concerned the plan would result in an unwelcome wave of immigration.

For its part, China has announced it will not recognize the British passports and that any applications for foreign citizenship would have to be approved first by Beijing. But even if Britain passes the passport plan with China's approval and immigration continues at its present level, 5 million out of Hong Kong's 5.7 million citizens will still have no place to go.

There has been very little mention of members of "unimportant" families, who work in the watch and garment factories, the banks, ports, stores and hotels which have fueled Hong Kong's economic boom.

While the world celebrates the birth of its new democracies, Hong Kong, a country the size of Nicaragua and Panama combined, is being virtually ignored. Martin Lee and many others blame the lack of stability in Hong Kong on the absence of democratic safeguards. "We must have a democratic government in place before 1997," says Lee. "Britain's approach of kowtowing to China has insured that there will not be one."

—Jeremy Mindich

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