



Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC)

“Tiananmen at 30: Examining the Evolution of Repression in China”

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As Prepared for Delivery

I want to thank Chairman McGovern for convening this important Congressional-Executive Commission on China hearing on the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

I welcome our witnesses here today and look forward to your testimony, your first-hand recollections about the watershed events of 1989, and your policy recommendations for Congress as we consider U.S. relations with China.

Today’s anniversary reminds us that the fundamental human yearning for dignity and basic rights is not limited to any one region or country. These aspirations transcend geography and culture.

We must remember Tiananmen—not simply as an historical event but as a present and poignant reminder that when the Chinese people are free to assemble, to act, and to speak, they demand freedom, democracy, and political reforms.

Today we honor those whose lives were irrevocably altered by the events of that day. Those who perished, those who were imprisoned and tortured, those who lost mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, and those whose loved ones remain missing and unaccounted for. We remember the noble aspirations of the “Tiananmen generation” and we recommit ourselves to the struggle for freedom and human rights in China.

For Tiananmen must not be viewed exclusively through the lens of history. Rather, today we must also reckon with the ongoing systematic human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government and Communist Party against its own people.

I know this has been covered, but I also want to take a brief moment to reflect on the events that led up to that fateful day on June 4, 1989.

In spring 1989, thousands of students gathered in the center of Beijing to mourn the death of Communist Party leader Hu Yaobang—a prominent reformer who sought to move China towards a more open and democratic political system.

In the days to follow, thousands would gather in Tiananmen Square to call for greater freedoms and political reforms and protest the repressive policies of China's Communist leaders.

Their numbers grew as the days passed, not only in Beijing but also in 400 cities and universities across the nation until more than a million people—including journalists, workers, government employees and police—joined the Tiananmen students and echoed their demands.

Late in the evening of June 3rd and into June 4th, 1989, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), acting on orders from Chinese Communist Party leadership, responded with brute force and lethal violence, opening fire on peaceful demonstrators—including innocent civilians and students.

To this day, the precise number of resulting casualties is unknown. There has been no public accounting of the events of that week and no justice for the victims. Rather, those seeking to commemorate the event or seek information about those killed, like the Tiananmen Mothers, are harassed, detained, and arrested.

Perhaps the most iconic image associated with the Tiananmen Massacre, is the so-called “tank man”—the small, solitary figure, with shopping bags in hand, who stood in the path of an advancing line of tanks.

The “tank man” remains an enigma—his fate remains unknown. While some speculate that he was imprisoned, others believe he was executed.

There are some who venture that he is alive today and unaware of his fame because of the Orwellian lengths that the Chinese Communist government goes to censor the Internet and block all discussion of the events surrounding June 4, 1989.

While the names of many of the Tiananmen protesters are now lost to history and to the Chinese Government's Orwellian “memory hole,” the bravery of protesters in the face of certain danger leaves us in awe, and reminds us that the principles of freedom, democracy and self-rule are not only American principles.

Rather, they are universal principles that neither tank treads, nor torture, nor terror can ever erase from the face of the Earth.

Indeed, the realization someday of these universal principles in China, I believe, still remains the quiet hope and aspiration of many people in that ancient and noble nation.

The United States—and the nations of the free world—should demand that the Chinese government:

- allow open discussion of the events of 1989;
- end the enforced amnesia about the Tiananmen Square massacre—in China, online, and at Confucius Institutes that operate on college campuses globally, including the U.S.;
- unconditionally release those detained or imprisoned for attempting to commemorate the Tiananmen anniversary; and
- reckon publicly with the horrific violence experienced by the Chinese people at the hands of the Party and the military

We must educate younger Americans about the true story of the Tiananmen Square Massacre and the brave Chinese citizens who sacrificed their lives and futures in the hopes of seeing a freer and democratic China.

This last point is important because today, because Tiananmen revealed to the world the true nature of the Chinese Communist Party. And yet for decades successive U.S. administrations have tried to pursue “constructive engagement” with China.

U.S. Presidents and policy-makers wrongly assumed that trade, investment, and other engagement would eventually persuade Beijing to accept and embrace the international order, including respect for basic human rights.

This optimism was misplaced.

And now, under Xi Jinping, we see an increasingly aggressive Chinese Communist government that is more repressive in domestic politics, more mercantilist in trade and economic policy, increasingly dismissive of international norms, and more assertive in exporting their authoritarian model globally.

While Chinese government-sponsored repression looks much different today than it did 30 years ago, the goal remains the same: to preserve the Communist Party’s monopoly on domestic political power through state-sponsored indoctrination, mass surveillance, arbitrary detention, torture, and violence.

The Communist Party is using technology to stay in power—whether in the emerging social credit systems or the vast digital surveillance state, and accompanying internment camps, to transform the religious and ethnic identities of millions of Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

Data-driven surveillance is facilitated by iris and body scanners, voice-pattern analyzers, DNA sequencers and facial-recognition cameras in neighborhoods, on roads and in train stations.

This sounds like the stuff of a science fiction movie, but it is real and is happening in China today.

In the era of high-tech social control, there is a direct line of repression linking the “tank man” and the internment of over one million Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities in “political re-education” camps.

And just over the weekend, Twitter—a global tech company that isn’t even allowed to operate in China—suspended the accounts of reportedly more than 100 Chinese language users critical of the government just ahead of the Tiananmen anniversary.

We must keep American companies accountable for their potential complicity in Chinese-government censorship and other abuses.

Conclusion

It is time that the United States lead the free world’s democracies in holding the Chinese government accountable for its ongoing blatant repression of the Chinese people.

We must take all steps to stop the Communist Chinese government’s efforts to export their authoritarian model around the world.

We must stand with the oppressed Tibetan Buddhist monk, the silenced human rights lawyer, the imprisoned Christian pastor, the disappeared Uyghur Muslim, the disillusioned Hong Kong democracy activist, and countless others living under the repressive policies of the Chinese government.

To do anything less dishonors the spirit of Tiananmen. It tarnishes the memory of those lost and places us on the wrong side of history.

With that, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today, specifically about how the U.S. can support the people of China.