

Tiananmen truly a massacre

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Today marks the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, when on June 3 and 4, 1989, the Chinese People's Liberation Army brutally suppressed pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing and surrounding areas.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) normally maintains a stony silence over the events that occurred on those two blood-soaked nights, and through a combination of aggressive censorship and harassment of victims' families has effectively airbrushed the event from the collective consciousness of the Chinese public.

An exception occurred on Sunday, when Chinese Minister of National Defense General Wei Fenghe (魏凤和), after delivering a saber-rattling speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, took a question from an audience member about the massacre.

Wei said that measures taken by the government to quell the "turbulence" were the "correct policy."

"The 30 years have proved that China has undergone major changes," he said, adding that because of the government's actions at that time, "China has enjoyed stability and development."

Wei's historical revisionism is concerning. It indicates that the party feels fully exonerated by China's meteoric economic rise.

In a macabre illustration of Orwellian doublethink, the party appears to believe that the bloody crackdown, far from being a catastrophic misjudgement, was in fact beneficial to the country's development.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Recently uncovered information shows that the massacre was callous, indiscriminate killing for which there can be no justification in a civilized society.

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A declassified diplomatic cable from then-British ambassador to China Alan Donald was published by Hong Kong news Web site HK01 in 2017. In the cable, Donald provided information passed on to him by a “reliable” source, who he attributed as a “close friend” of a member of the Chinese State Council — the country’s highest administrative authority.

The source said that the killings were carried out by the 27th Group Army, made up of troops from Shanxi Province, who were “60 percent illiterate and are called primitives.” They were kept without news for 10 days and were told they were taking part in an exercise.

In the first waves of attacks in areas away from Tiananmen Square, unarmed and lightly armed soldiers from other units tried, unsuccessfully, to clear the crowds. The 27th’s armored personnel carriers (APCs) then attacked, opening fire on the crowd — both civilians and soldiers — before running them over. The 27th was ordered to spare no one; even wounded soldiers were shot.

Donald said: “On arrival at Tiananmen ... students understood they were given one hour to leave the square, but after five minutes APCs attacked. Students linked arms, but [were] mown down by soldiers. APCs then ran over bodies time and time again to make ‘pie’ [and the] remains were collected by bulldozer. Remains were incarcerated and then hosed down drains.”

He relayed barbaric scenes: Four wounded female students begged for their lives, but were ruthlessly bayoneted; a mother was shot as she attempted to rescue her injured three-year-old daughter — six others tried to help, but were also shot; army snipers “shot many civilians on balconies, street sweepers, etc, for target practice.”

He ended the cable: “Minimum estimate of civilian dead 10,000.”

Previous estimates ranged from several hundred to more than 1,000.

In today’s uncertain world, it has never been more important that the victims of the Tiananmen

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Square Massacre be remembered. The CCP was then, and still is today, a brutal dictatorship with not one iota of respect for human life.

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