

Tiananmen Square and U.S.-China Relations, 1989-1993



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This digital collection reviews U.S.-China relations in the post-Cold War Era, and analyzes the significance of the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations, China's human rights issues, and resumption of World Bank loans to China in July 1990.

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Date Range: 1989-1993

Content: 19,137 images

Source Library: George H. W. Bush Presidential Library

Tiananmen Square has been the site of a number of political events and student protests in the Twentieth Century. These include the May Fourth Movement in 1919; the proclamation of the People's Republic of China by Mao Zedong on October 1, 1949; annual mass military displays on all subsequent National Days until October 1st, 1959; the 1984 military parade for the 35th anniversary of the People's Republic of China and the 50th anniversary in 1999; and for mass rallies during the Cultural Revolution.

The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 were a series of demonstrations in and near Tiananmen Square in Beijing beginning on April 14, 1989. Led mainly by students and intellectuals, the protests occurred in a year that saw the collapse of a number of communist governments around the world.

The protests were sparked by the death of a pro-democracy and anti-corruption official, Hu Yaobang, whom protesters wanted to mourn. Numbering more than 100,000 people, the protests lacked a unified cause or leadership; participants were generally against the government's authoritarianism and voiced calls for economic change and democratic reform within the structure of the government. Large-scale protests also occurred in cities throughout China, including Shanghai, which remained peaceful.

The protest movement, later dubbed the June 4th Movement, lasted seven weeks, from April 14th until tanks cleared Tiananmen Square on June 4th. In Beijing, the resulting Chinese government's military response to the protesters left many civilians and military personnel charged with clearing the square of the un-counted dead or severely injured.

Following the conflict, the government conducted widespread arrests of protesters and their supporters, cracked down on other protests around China, banned the foreign press from the country and strictly controlled coverage of the events in the PRC press. Members of the Party who had publicly sympathized with the protesters were purged, with several high-ranking members placed under

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house arrest, such as General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. There was widespread international condemnation of the PRC government's use of force against the protesters.

This collection contains unique primary source documents relating to the demonstrations which occurred throughout China from mid-April through June 1989, focusing particularly on Tiananmen Square. These essential primary source materials include public mail, memoranda, reports, cables, meeting notes, and news clippings. They provide a day-by-day account of events across China during this time.

Consisting of documents from White House Office of Records Management (WHORM) Subject File categories and the Staff and Office Files, they document the Bush White House's response to deteriorating U.S.-Chinese relations and worldwide support for the movement and condemnation of the Chinese government response.

Sample WHORM Subject File collections included:

- CO 034 Country File on China
- FG 0001 Presidential Office
- FO 004-02 Loans - Funds (Regarding World Bank loans to China)
- HU Human Rights
- ME 002 Presidential Messages (relating to the situation in China and American views on the pro-Democracy movement)
- PR012 Public Relations (petitions and resolutions from the public, state officials, and local government officials on U.S.-Chinese relations and support for the pro-democracy movement.)

WHORM Alphabetical Files contain letters from the general public concerning the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and the military massacre of civilians.

The Staff and Office Files contain correspondence, memoranda, and publications maintained by individual White House and Executive branch staff members and offices. The Public Mail Files document the reaction of the American people to the events in China and provides a cross section of American public opinion regarding the democracy movement in China and the eventual crackdown by Chinese authorities. Meeting notes, memoranda, and reports provide information about Administration reaction to the protests in China and eventual Chinese government actions.

Sample Staff and Office collections included:

- Chief of Staff John Sununu Files
- Council of Economic Advisers: Michael Boskin Files; John B. Taylor Files; Paul Wonnacott Files
- Legislative Affairs: Joshua Bolten Files; James Renne Files
- National Security Council: Richard Barth; Karl Jackson Files; Doug Paal; and Peter Rodman
- Policy Development Office: Stephen Farrar Files; Michael Froman Files; J. French Hill File; Warren Maruyama File; Emily Mead Files; Roger Porter File
- Public Liaison Office: James Schaefer Files
- Public Mail Files
- White House Situation Room Files

In an effort to improve U.S.-China relations, this collection contains the internal memorandum, correspondence, and talking points, concerning President Bush's decision to support resumption of World Bank loans to China in July 1990.