

Wikileaks: no bloodshed inside Tiananmen Square, cables claim

Secret cables from the United States embassy in Beijing have shown there was no bloodshed inside Tiananmen Square when China put down student pro-democracy demonstrations 22 years ago.

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Source: [The Telegraph](#)

The cables, obtained by WikiLeaks and released exclusively by The Daily Telegraph, partly confirm the Chinese government's account of the early hours of June 4, 1989, which has always insisted that soldiers did not massacre demonstrators inside Tiananmen Square.

Instead, the cables show that Chinese soldiers opened fire on protesters outside the centre of Beijing, as they fought their way towards the square from the west of the city.

Three cables were sent from the US embassy on June 3, in the hours leading up to the suppression, as diplomats realised that the final showdown between the protesters and soldiers was looming.

The cables described the "10,000 to 15,000 helmeted armed troops" moving into the city, some of whom were "carrying automatic weapons".

Meanwhile, "elite airborne troops" and "tank units" were said to be moving up from the south.

The army came up against "an elaborate system of blockades", described in a cable from May 21, 1989, which allowed students to "control much of central Beijing".

Diplomats observed that "there were buses turned sideways to form roadblocks" and students had vowed the army would not be able to cross. "But we doubt it", one cable added. Students also used teams of motorcycle couriers to communicate with the roadblocks, sending reinforcements where needed.

As the troops moved in, the cables stated that diplomatic staff were repeatedly warned to "stay at home" unless involved in front-line reporting. "The situation in the centre of the city is very confused," said a cable from June 3. "Political officers at the Beijing Hotel reported that troops are pushing a large crowd east on Chang'an avenue. Although these troops appear not to be firing on the crowd, they report firing behind the troops coming from the square".

Inside the square itself, a Chilean diplomat was on hand to give his US counterparts an eyewitness account of the final hours of the pro-democracy movement.

"He watched the military enter the square and did not observe any mass firing of weapons into the crowds, although sporadic gunfire was heard. He said that most of the troops which entered the square were actually armed only with anti-riot gear – truncheons and wooden clubs; they were backed up by armed soldiers," a cable from July 1989 said.

The diplomat, who was positioned next to a Red Cross station inside Tiananmen Square, said a line of troops surrounded him and "panicked" medical staff into fleeing. However, he said that there was "no mass firing into the crowd of students at the monument".

According to internal Communist party files, released in 2001, 2,000 soldiers from the 38th army, together with 42 armoured vehicles, began slowly sweeping across the square from north to south at 4.30am on June 4. At the time, around 3,000 students were sitting around the Monument to the People's Heroes on the southern edge of the giant square, near Chairman Mao's mausoleum.

Leaders of the protest, including Liu Xiaobo, the winner of last year's Nobel Peace prize, urged the students to depart the square, and the Chilean diplomat relayed that "once agreement was reached for the students to withdraw, linking hands to form a column, the students left the square through the south east corner." The testimony contradicts the reports of several journalists who were in Beijing at the time, who described soldiers "charging" into unarmed civilians and suggests the death toll on the night may be far lower than the thousands previously thought.

In 2009, James Miles, who was the BBC correspondent in Beijing at the time, admitted that he had "conveyed the wrong impression" and that "there was no massacre on Tiananmen Square. Protesters who were still in the square when the army reached it were allowed to leave after negotiations with martial law troops [ ...] There was no Tiananmen Square massacre, but there was a Beijing massacre".

Instead, the fiercest fighting took place at Muxidi, around three miles west of the square, where thousands of people had gathered spontaneously on the night of June 3 to halt the advance of the army.

According to the Tiananmen Papers, a collection of internal Communist party files, soldiers started using live ammunition at around 10.30pm, after trying and failing to disperse the crowd with tear gas and rubber bullets. Incredulous, the crowd tried to escape but were hampered by its own roadblocks.

The cables also reveal the extent to which the student democracy protests had won popular support, and how for several weeks the protesters effectively occupied the whole of central Beijing, posing an existential challenge to the Communist party.

One cable, from May 21, 1989, reports that an anonymous caller had told the US consulate in Shenyang that Ni Zhifu, the chairman of China's labour unions, had condemned martial law in the capital and warned that unless the students were treated with more respect he would lead a general workers' strike that would cripple China.