

## TIBETAN REVIEW SEPTEMBER 1990

### *450 Tibetans murdered in Lhasa riot of March ' 89 - Chinese journalist presents documentary evidence*

On 5 March Last year, three months before Tiananmen square, the People's Armed Police knew it had been given the right to kill. China's paramilitary force was marching into the centre of Tibet's capital, Lhasa, to begin a massacre that continued for days, leaving more than 450 monks, nuns and civilians dead. Thousands more were arrested and many tortured.

"They knew the Tibetans were not armed as they were, and they knew they were free to kill them," said Tang Daxian, an official reporter for some of China's highest organisations.

On the basis of secret official reports made available last week to The Observer by Tang, it now appears that the massacre in Tibet was provoked by members of the armed police dressed as Tibetans. The disguised police-whose purpose is to crush civil disorder-attacked and burned shops, offices, and stores, providing the authorities with the excuse that they were dealing with hooligans who threatened civil order.

Martial law was declared in Lhasa on 8 March. On 2 May it was imposed in Peking, the first move before the killings of 3-4 June which smashed the Tiananmen demonstrations. For years, Chinese who complained of government oppression had approved of it in Tibet on the grounds that Tibetans were unruly and ungrateful. After Tiananmen, they realised that for years Tiananmen had been prefigured in the streets of Lhasa. But the extent of the killing was not known.

It was 387 days until martial law in Lhasa was lifted, and little news seeped from the region. On 30 April this year, Tibet's Communist Party Secretary, Hu Jintao, who has since been removed, reportedly for not being tough enough praised the martial law troops for their 'immortal deeds' in maintaining order in China's largest minority area.

Tibetans have resisted the Chinese since their invasion of the country began in late 1949; the occupiers insisted then, as now, that Tibet has belonged to China for centuries. The recent spate of uprisings began in late 1987, when police shot dead at least eight demonstrators in the Barkhor, Lhasa's central market, which surrounds the country's holiest shrine.

The demonstrations have become larger and more tumultuous and the repression more violent But Western experts on current affairs in Tibet, such as Robbie

Barnett of the London based Tibet Information Network, admit that they discounted as exaggerated Tibetan reports of great killing, especially on 6 March last year, or the account of piles of bodies by a Western businessman, one of the last foreign witnesses in Lhasa. Such accounts now appear to have been accurate.

What has also been unknown until now was that the Armed Police themselves, by impersonating Tibetan hooligans, had provoked the massacre. Equally new are Tang's revelation of the criticisms-even within the Chinese controlled Tibetan bureaucracy, long before the March killings-of the behaviour of the Armed Police and of their violence and corruption.

This was an embarrassment for China at the highest level; the Armed Police are the instrument of Qiao Shi, China's security supremo and one of the five men who rule from the standing committee of the Politburo, who in 1988 had warned Tibetan dissidents of a policy based on 'merciless repression.'

For Tang Daxian, events leading up to the March massacre began early on the morning of 7 February, when 'the people of Lhasa woke up to see fluttering above the Jokhang the flag of the snow lions and the snow mountains, the forbidden symbol of Tibetan nationalism.

According to Tang, this act of nationalist defiance alarm Tibet's regional leaders and, more significantly, Peking, where it was brought to the attention of supreme leader Deng Xiaoping, communist party boss Zhao Ziyang, President Yang Shangkun, and Prime Minister Li Peng, the four men who would play the decisive roles in the Tiananmen massacre in early June.

Zhao was sacked for alleged complicity in the Tiananmen uprising, but in February he did not hesitate. He signed a cable to Lhasa, on behalf of Central Committee, ordering 'severe preventive measures'. To underline the importance of this instruction, Zhao's fellow Standing Committee member, Qiao Shi, dispatched a seven man 'work team' to Lhasa, with instruction to take command of the People's Armed Police, who within a month would be slaughtering Tibetans.

Tang saw the cable and the accompanying analysis of the situation from the State Security Bureau and the United Front Department, in which his father has once been a key figure. He heard that Qiao had made at least three urgent telephone calls to Lhasa.

During the next two days the Armed Police occupied the Jokhang temple, where the flag had already disappeared, and arrested 20 of the monks. This fined the beliefs of the hard-line faction in the Lhasa bureaucracy which, Tang says, believed that the religious elements were stirring up anti-government feelings spurred on by the exiled Dalai Lama. This faction, Tang suggests, was opposed by a second group that counselled less emphasis on religious matters, a more positive approach to the Dalai

Lama, and above all expressed "concern about the lack of discipline within the Armed Police."

This group's main ally had been the Panchen Lama, Tibet's second highest religious figure. Although under Chinese control for decades, he had exercised a moderating influence on discipline since 1980. But the Panchen had died in late January, the crackdown increased, and by mid-February "the atmosphere in Tibet had become extremely tense; with disturbance throughout the region. "Amid the curses and complaints," Tang says, "the rule of the Chinese Communists had led to a powerful resistance. It was this that led, on 2 March 1989, to the curtain rising on tragedy." Until now, Western observers had thought the massacre was triggered off on the morning of 5 March, when police shot two Tibetans in front of the Bakhor, after an exchange of bottles and stones between police and demonstrators. But Tang's narrative says that on 2 March, a crowd waiting in front of the Jokhang was joined by 38 monks and nuns, who began to walk round the temple. An onlooker loudly demanded the death of the

Armed Policemen who on other occasions had killed Tibetans.

A scuffle broke out between the crowd and 200 plainclothes police, whose headquarters faces the Jokhang. Before long monks were shouting "Dalai Lama back to Tibet" and "Power back to the Tibetans", while members of the rapidly increasing crowd cried "Down with the corrupt Chinese government." But the confrontation ended without violence.

From dawn on 3 March to midnight the next day, Tang reports, party and military leaders discussed the deepening tension. According to the notes of the meeting and its taped discussions, he says, the army attacked the Armed Police for their "lack of discipline" which was held by the soldiers to be "a significant cause" of the disturbances in Lhasa.

This analysis was followed by recommendations from the central government: the Public Security Bureau should find a way out of the crisis, "avoiding large-scale bloodshed," and the army should maintain security in Lhasa. No recommendations mentioned the Armed Police.

This local government analysis was bolstered by "a detailed and highly critical report." This said that no officials "had heeded to the complaints of the people" that investment in education and religion had been forced and the Chinese entrepreneurs were threatening the Tibetan economy. It said that discipline within the Armed Police "had led to serious dissatisfaction among the majority of the people." It also specifically accused the Armed Police of corruption.

Although, Tang says, the Armed Police had now been identified as the focus of Tibetan unrest, They "sat quietly throughout the meeting." But this was not shame, Tang adds. A police source told him that the force had received instructions from Qiao Shi to "avoid discussions and debate over details...your function in Tibet cannot be performed by others "

By the morning of 5 March the Armed Police had received orders entitled 'Fighting Mobilisation Instructions' from their commander in Peking, General Li Lianxiu. In addition to specifying how the police should deploy, he gave the order which created the excuse for the massacre: "The Special Task force should immediately produce 300 people dressed as ordinary citizens and monks. They are to co-operate with the plainclothes police to complete the task of creating a provocative atmosphere along the Barkhor on the morning of 5 March. Their task was to bum down the Darshing prayer pole on the north-east of the Jokhang temple; to destroy and ransack the granary in Chenguan district, provoking citizens to steal the grain, and provoking people to rob the Tibet-Gansu Commerce Corporation of its goods; not to create disturbance in other areas and locations part from these specified."

These orders, it was made clear, "must be kept secret from other co-operating units involved. Anyone violating these orders is to be severely punished." Despite the secrecy, on the same morning a cable was sent from regional officials to Peking begging the army to take over and prevent the police from making matters worse. But although the 52nd regiment was only 187 miles away, it was too late. Ten thousand police were ready for action and, in Tang's view, "they had been given the right to kill."

By 12.15 pm, police had thrown bottles from rooftops, a Tibetan threw a stone, and the police had shot two people. Thousands of Tibetans, shaking their fists, marched behind their illegal flag. By 1 40 pm, Tang says, the Darshing prayer pole had been set alight by armed police dressed as hooligans, and when an outraged crowd gathered, weeping at the sight, police fired, killing eight. Other armed police entered the Barkhor firing tear gas, but were forced to withdraw by the crowd. At 3.10 pm an order was issued delaying further operations because of foreign witnesses.

The disguised police set Chinese premises on fire. He took photographs of a policeman he knew, dressed as a monk, burning an overturned car.

By daybreak on 6 March almost all foreigners had been isolated in the Holiday Inn and the police were ready to attack the centre of Lhasa. Their orders included: all units to stand by for the attack on the Barkhor area at round 10 am; the Armed Police were to be ready for action and to arrest hooligans. If they resist, they should be killed.

At 10 am, Tibetans crouching behind barricades saw Armed Police advancing towards them over the roofs of the alleys near the Jokhang. Under a barrage of stones the police retreated. Misreading this as weakness, the Tibetans charged after them brandishing sticks and bricks. The trap was sprung. Police appeared on the roofs overlooking the narrow Xuanjing alley with automatic weapons and blazed away. Within 10 minutes, 300 people had been shot "the massacre," says Tang, "had begun." Everywhere the police were shooting Tibetans, some in the streets, others in the houses into which they fled where they were hunted down and shot. According to Tang more than 450 people were killed within a brief period and more than 3,000 arrested. Although he saw much of the action, the number, he emphasises, come from the police themselves, although they were never made public. Most of the bureaucracy was shocked by the police violence which was held to have "planted a time bomb." By the evening of 6 March, the public security bureau withdrew 3,000 men. At noon the next day they warned the Armed Police that the killing must stop.

On the afternoon of 7 March, during an attempt to arrest two Tibetans, in which one was killed, a policeman accidentally shot dead a colleague. Their officer instantly killed the remaining Tibetan and ordered his men to say that the dead man had shot their comrade. As Tang was to learn from his contacts within the police this allowed them to publish a picture of a dead Tibetan 'murderer' together with pictures of ancient Tibetan rifles next to bullets which plainly did not match.

Even Qiao Shi "lost his nerve and denounced the Armed Police for their stupidity... he) ordered that reports based on fabricated evidence be withdrawn from publications as soon as possible." Tang was present at the Lhasa television station when the police arrived to retrieve the pictures.

But although 'the joke' had by now spread through Lhasa, on the evening of 7 March local party boss Hu Jintao proclaimed that "the Armed Police, following the instructions of the Central Committee (which was true), had maintained the unity of the motherland," and warned too that the majority of Tibetans who had joined the disturbance...must be made to feel guilt and promise they would never do so again. The killing had been extensive. On 11 March, the Public Security Bureau and the Tibet Ministry District Command reported the numbers to the Tibet Party Committee: "Prior to 10 March, 387 Lhasa citizens have been killed the majority by bullets, 721 were injured, 2100 have been arrested or detained...354 have disappeared... 82 religious people have been killed, 37 injured, 650 arrested or detained."

From the evening of 7 March, Tang remembers, "cries were heard all over Lhasa" and many Tibetans working in Lhasa's party and government offices, whose relatives had been killed, wounded, or arrested, attempted to get permission to resign.

The next day, 8 March, martial law was declared, and would last 367 days; Tang soon flew back to Peking. In April he received a letter-seen. by The Observer-from an official in Lhasa suggesting that he return to inspect the large numbers of bodies which had not yet been removed. But the Tiananmen demonstrations had begun and Tang did not return. (Additional material provided by Robbie Barnett.)

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### *TIBETAN REVIEW SEPTEMBER 1990*

#### *Why I Had to Tell the World*

*At the Paris headquarters of the Chinese Democratic Front, formed by political refugees after Tiananmen, dissident leaders such as Wuer Kaixi and Wan Runnan are ever on the alert for informers and spies. Their confidence in Tang Daxian's background and Tibetan experience is echoed by University of Paris specialists and experts from human rights organizations. They also cannot risk their reputations by falling for bogus information.*

*Tang is well connected in Peking, a member of what he describes as a family of "high cadres." In the Fifties, his father, Tang Hai, who is remembered by Tibetans close to the Dalai Lama, was the head of the Tibetan section in the United Front Department, which oversees non-Communist Party organizations. Tang spent three years in prison, beginning in 1975, for writing and distributing anti-Mao leaflets. He was eventually declared innocent. After training as a journalist he began to visit Tibet in 1983, sometimes as many as three times a year. He rented a flat in Lhasa.*

*Tang, 36, who has been living in Paris since mid-May last year, is writing a doctoral dissertation on Chinese ethnic minorities. Although he had been planning to study in France, his trip was accelerated by police advice that he might be arrested for his role in the Tiananmen demonstrations. Tang had furnished high-level information to protesters about debates within the supreme leadership on how to handle the uprising.*

*A gaunt, deep voiced man, with short hair and an unusually unshaven face for a Chinese, Tang was last in Tibet in early 1989, representing the Chinese journalists' Association, and writing reports for the religious affairs department of the State Council, the United Front department and the Office of National Minority Affairs, plus internal reports for his own association.*

*Because of his official duties and family connections, Tang had access to official documents and letters (some seen by The Observer) and notes of key meetings,*

*interviewed officials and saw copies of top-level cables from Peking. He witnessed the demonstrations and the killings and took both still and video pictures.*

*Why has he destroyed any chance of returning to China during the present or similar successor regime by making public what he has known and under his name?*

*"I know that many party leaders dislike the violent and exploitative policy in Tibet," Tang says. "I hope that information like this - which shows how we behave makes Tibetans hate us - will help them to change the policy. Because all those who died and were wounded were Tibetans, the Chinese authorities stopped news from getting out of Lhasa. This means Chinese in the mainland and people in the outside world have an incomplete picture...of what really happened in Tibet. I want to make public the facts about the massacre so that those concerned with human rights in Tibet can know what happened.":*

*Tang has already done the politically unforgivable, in the eyes of Deng and his colleagues, by briefing the Dalai Lama, but his views on the ultimate independence of Tibet remains uncertain, although he is convinced that almost all Chinese should leave the region.*