

# Massacre At Tiananmen Square

It has been 25 years since the infamous massacre at Tiananmen Square. In Western strongholds, especially Hong Kong, throngs of people came together to mark the date. The only place where no mention of it was made was China—where the atrocity occurred!

What happened there in the spring of 1989? How did a small student protest turn into a national crisis and almost bring down an empire? Read the blow-by-blow account that China fears more than anything else.

This past June 4 the world solemnly marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, when the Chinese government deployed 200,000 troops armed with assault rifles and tanks against unarmed civilians to a break up a seven-week long pro-democracy demonstration in Tiananmen Square, situated in the heart of China's capital, Beijing.



25 years later: The ruling party prohibits public discussion and the event is banned from textbooks and Chinese websites. In Tiananmen Square it's a very routine day.

Even today, the exact death toll from the crackdown against the protestors remains unknown. According to *Tiananmen Square, 1989: The Declassified History*, published by George Washington University's National Security Archive, about 500 to 2,600 people were left dead. China's official death toll is 246.

Memorial events were held the world over. Yet at the site of the killings there was no trace of remembrance. The Chinese government has imposed a collective amnesia on its citizens, who are still not allowed to debate or even publicly discuss what happened on June 4, 1989. Chinese schools and media make no mention of the deadly crackdown, even as the foreign news media give it global attention. Images and information about the event that get posted to the internet are quickly scrubbed.

Chinese citizens who dare commemorate "6/4" (as it is sometimes referred to, since it took place on June 4) are silenced with ruthless efficiency. In advance of the anniversary, authorities typically detain dozens of activists. Some are held in places unknown. Foreign journalists are called in and warned. Officials mobilize tens of thousands of informants to look for suspicious activity.

Some relatives of the victims are allowed to pay their respects at cemeteries—but only with police escorts. Others do so at home under surveillance, expressing frustration at the restrictions placed on their remembrances.

This year, the repressive tactics ahead of the Tiananmen anniversary began earlier



Left: A June 10, 1989 file photo shows People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops standing guard with tanks in front of Tiananmen Gate in Beijing. Right: 25 years later, Chinese paramilitary policemen marching through the same area to clear tourists for a flag-lowering ceremony.



People hold candles to commemorate the events of 1989 in China's Tiananmen Square during a candlelight vigil in Hong Kong on June 4, 2014.

and were more extensive than in recent memory, a sign that the Communist Party views the historical event as an ongoing threat.

In Washington, the White House said in a statement, "Twenty-five years later, the United States continues to honor the memories of those who gave their lives in and around Tiananmen Square and throughout China, and we call on Chinese authorities to account for those killed, detained or missing in connection with the events surrounding June 4, 1989."

Interestingly enough, there was one city on Chinese soil where the massacre was remembered: semi-autonomous Hong Kong, where tens of thousands gathered at a central park. The organizers of the vigil in Hong Kong said the crowd numbered over 180,000, while the police estimated about half that. The turnout was the largest since 1989, according to the organizers.

### The Tank Man

A wiry, slope-shouldered young man in a white shirt and black pants holds two plastic grocery bags. Bearing down on him in the middle of a wide avenue adjacent to Beijing's Tiananmen Square is a column of tanks. They appear to be an unstoppable force bent on running him over.

Yet, he holds his ground and refuses to move.

Remarkably, the lead tank stops only inches from him. Looking tiny next to the hulking tanks, the man swings one of his shopping bags up and over in a "shoo" gesture.

After a brief delay, the lead tank lumbers to the right, intending to go around him. Incredibly, the man darts to the right, cutting it off. The tank stops, as if taking a moment to think. Then the metal behemoth turns in