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Tiananmen Square: 24 Years Later

**President Obama: Seriously Push Human Rights on
Friday with Xi Jinping**

*Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and Int'l Orgs.
2172 Rayburn HOB
June 3, 2013*

Today—and this week—the world remembers the dream that was and is the “Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989” and deeply honors the sacrifice endured by an extraordinarily brave group of pro-democracy Chinese women and men who dared to demand fundamental human rights for all Chinese.

Twenty four years ago today, the world watched in awe and wonder as it had since mid-April of '89 as hundreds of thousands of mostly young people peacefully petitioned the Chinese government to reform and democratize. China seemed to be the next impending triumph for freedom and democracy especially after the collapse of the dictatorships in the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. But when the Peoples Liberation Army poured into and around the Square on June 3rd, the wonder of Tiananmen turned to shock, tears, fear and helplessness.

On June 3rd and 4th and for days, weeks and years after right up until today, the Chinese dictatorship delivered a barbaric response—mass murder, torture, incarceration, cover-up and the systematic suppression of fundamental human rights.

The Chinese government not only continues to inflict unspeakable pain and suffering on its own people, but the cover-up of the Tiananmen massacre is without precedent in modern history. Even though journalists and live television and radio documented the massacre, the Chinese Communist Party line continues to deny, obfuscate and threaten.

In December of 1996 General Chi Haotian, the operational commander who ordered the murder of the Tiananmen protestors visited Washington DC as the Chinese Defense Minister.

Minister Chi was welcomed by President Clinton at the White House with full honors including a 19 gun salute—a bizarre spectacle I and others strongly protested. Why do I bring this up? Minister Chi addressed the Army War College on that trip and in answer to a question said “not a single person lost his life in Tiananmen Square” and claimed that the People’s Liberation Army did nothing more violent than, the “pushing of people” during 1989 protests. Not a single person lost his life? Are you kidding? That big lie and countless others like it was—and is—the Chinese Communist Party’s line.

As chair of Foreign Affairs’ human rights subcommittee, I put together a congressional hearing within a couple of days—December 18th, 1996—with witnesses who were there on the Square in 1989 including Yang Jianli—a leader and survivor of the massacre—and Time magazine bureau chief David Aikman, two of today’s witnesses. I also invited Minister Chi or anyone the Chinese Embassy might want to send to the hearing. He—they—refused.

I guess Minister Chi thought he was back in Beijing where the big lie is king and no one ever dares to do a fact check.

A few days ago, the US State Department asked the Chinese government to “end harassment of those who participated in the protests and fully account for those killed, detained or missing”. The response? The Chinese Foreign Ministry acrimoniously said that the U.S. should “stop interfering in China’s internal affairs so as not to sabotage China-U.S. relations.”

“Sabotage” Sino-American relations because our side requests an end to harassment and an accounting? Sounds like they have much to hide.

President Obama is scheduled to meet with China’s President Xi Jinping on Friday to discuss security and economic issues. A robust discussion of human rights abuses in China must be on the agenda and not in a superfluous or superficial way. It’s time to get serious about China’s flagrant abuse.

Can a government that crushes the rights and freedoms of its own people be trusted on trade and security?

China today is the torture capital of the world and victims include religious believers, ethnic minorities, human rights defenders like Chen Guangchen and Gao Zhisheng and political dissidents.

Hundreds of millions of women have been forced to abort their precious babies pursuant to the draconian one child policy which has led to gendercide, the violent extermination of unborn baby girls simply because they are girls. The slaughter of the girl-child in China is not only a massive gender crime but a “security” issue as well. A witness at one of my earlier hearings, Valerie Hudson, author of *Bare Branches*, testified that the gender imbalance will lead to instability and chaos—even war, “that the One-Child policy has not enhanced China’s

security, but demonstrably weakened it. As Nick Eberstadt famously phrased it, what are the consequences for a society that has chosen to become, simultaneously, both more gray and more male...The other face of the coin from the missing daughters of China, are the excess sons of China... the abnormal sex ratios of China do not bode well for its future.”

I hope policymakers pay close attention to our witnesses because Tiananmen was a tipping point and the lessons learned and employed ever since by the Chinese government required much better understanding and due diligence and a more effective response from us.

One of our witnesses, Dr. Yang Jianli will testify that soon after Tiananmen the Communist Party embraced an ubiquitous code of corruption to enrich the elite at the expense of the general public believing that “economic growth means everything” to the survival and sustainability of the dictatorship. “All this was made possible thanks to the Tiananmen massacre and the political terror that was imposed on the entire country in the years following...”

Today we will hear from activists who were in Beijing in June of 1989, another democracy advocate who was serving an 18 year sentence in prison at that time and a former Time Magazine Beijing reporter who was an eye witness to these events.

Dr. Yang Jianli, is a former political prisoner and survivor of the massacre. His insights into the repercussions on China from Tiananmen, the ongoing corruption and the unfinished business are elucidating.

Chai Ling, was one of the most effective—and most wanted—leaders of the protest movement in Tiananmen Square. Her courage and fight for democracy and remarkable escape is the stuff of legends. Today, as a strong woman of faith, her testimony is a message of remembering the lessons of the past but also giving hope for the future.

Wei Jingsheng has been advocating for democracy in China for decades and has paid a heavy price in serving over 18 years in prison for his activities in fighting for freedom of the Chinese people. His perceptive and frequent analyses of the Chinese Communist system and the changing views of the population offer a profound view today of the events surrounding Tiananmen.

And we are also grateful to have with us Dr. Sophie Richardson of Human Rights Watch who for many years has been an expert and advocate of political reform, democratization and Human Rights in China.

Dr. David Aikman, former Beijing Bureau Chief for Time Magazine, was also present during the Tiananmen massacre and covered the student protests prior to the conflict. He has also has studied extensively on the status of religious freedom in China and the situation of Christianity in China today and the historical influences on its development. And we also greatly look forward to his insights and testimony.

We will not forget what took place in Tiananmen Square 24 years ago today. The struggle for freedom in China continues. Someday the people of China will enjoy all of their God-given rights. And a nation of free Chinese women and men will someday honor the heroes of Tiananmen and all those who sacrificed for freedom.