

## **Testimony before the U.S.-Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**

### ***Full Committee Hearing: Rule By Fear: 30 Years After Tiananmen Square***

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Honorable Chairman Risch and respectable members of the Committee,

It is a real honor to speak in front of each of you.

My name is XIAO Qiang. I am the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of China Digital Times, an independent bilingual news website about China. I am also a research scientist at the School of Information of University of California at Berkeley, and the director of Berkeley Counter-Power Lab, an interdisciplinary faculty-student research group focusing on digital rights and Internet freedom.

Thirty years ago, the world watched as millions of Chinese citizens took to the streets in Beijing and around the country, standing up for freedom. The Chinese Communist Party's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping responded by sending in infantry troops, who opened fire on peaceful protesters and drove tanks into the crowds, crushing many on Chang'an Ave (Avenue of Eternal Peace) in the nation's capital, my home city, Beijing. Hundreds, maybe thousands of Chinese citizens died in this massacre.

June 5th, this very day, exactly thirty years ago, after seeing those scenes on TV in the United States where I was studying for a Ph.D., I abandoned my astrophysics program and caught the first flight home to China. For two months, in a time of terror, I tried to find out what had happened, contacting people in hiding, dodging police, and handing over donations raised abroad to the victims and their families.

I came back from this trip with one full realization and one simple belief. I realized that the name of the People's Republic of China itself is a lie. This government has never been the "people's," nor it is a "republic." China's National People's Congress is not elected by the Chinese people, and China's People's Liberation Army opens fire on people on the streets of Lhasa, Beijing and now, in the towns and villages of Xinjiang. When challenged, this lie can only be maintained through brutal violence and the fear created through such violence.

The simple belief I gained is that the tanks and machine guns can massacre human bodies, but cannot ultimately kill Chinese people's desire for freedom.

That is why I left my science path and became a full-time human rights activist, devoting my life for the past thirty years to the campaign to establish universal human rights and democracy in China.

Mr. Chairman, respectable members of the Committee,

After 30 years, the Chinese Communist regime has not only survived but also increased its power. The choice to suppress the 1989 protests, and any hint of protest since, has allowed the CCP to so far avoid the fate of the Soviet Union. Many Western experts and politicians have been convinced that the wealth of the middle class will make China democratize. I admit, as an activist living in exile, I too, had strong hope that the rise of the internet would help to transform China from authoritarianism to a democracy. But the reality is that Chinese rulers have taken advantage of their inclusion in the globalized trading process, significantly growing its economy under the CCP controlled state capitalism, but refusing to allow any political liberalization. The Chinese government also build and maintains the world's most sophisticated internet censorship apparatus, known informally as the Great Firewall, which includes both computational algorithms and human censors tasked with monitoring, filtering and blocking any online contents considered "subversive" to the one-party dictatorship.

Since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, his government has massively increased control over the entire society, including in cyberspace. Criticism has disappeared; journalists, lawyers, bloggers, and university professors have been censored, threatened, and detained. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, who helped advise the students of 1989 and continued to fight for a free China in the years since, died in prison in 2017 after authorities failed to give him proper and timely medical treatment. Amid all this, one year ago, President Xi Jinping scrapped the presidential term limits written into the Chinese constitution and became the most powerful dictator in the world.

Mr. Chairman, respectable members of the Committee, the Tiananmen Massacre and the increasing repression since have shown us: Chinese people want, deserve and demand human rights. But their voices have never been fully heard because they have been suppressed by their government.

Tiananmen remains a taboo both in the media and in China's vast cyberspace. One example happens on Weibo, the main Chinese equivalent of Twitter. This Chinese social media platform has an estimated over 600 million users but it is heavily censored by the government. My China Digital Times team has documented over 264 Tiananmen-related search phrases blocked on Weibo since 2011. Here are only few examples:

Blocked search keywords includes "64", "89", "8x8", "square of 8" (八平方), "98" "65-1" and "May 35" (五月三十五号) which translates to June 4.

It also includes "anniversary" (周年), "pay respect" (致敬), "mourn" (悼念), "candle" (蜡烛) and "public square" (广场)".

It even includes general phrases or words when Chinese censors found out they have been used to discuss Tiananmen: "fire" (火), "move" (动), "that day" (那天), "special day" (特殊的日子), "that year" (那年) and "today" (今天) .

These are just a few examples, not an exhaustive list as my team only relies on trial-and-error and crowdsourcing to detect blocked search terms. But they show Chinese authorities' Orwellian attempt to erase Tiananmen from public discourse. For thirty years, the Chinese Communist Party has whitewashed the history of 1989 with their propaganda machine and censorship apparatus backed by violent repression. The truth about Tiananmen has been replaced with deception, indifference and cynicism, as the history of the brutality of June 4th becomes more deeply suppressed.

But over the past thirty years, Chinese people have never stopped pursuing greater freedom and a more humane, just and open society. Intellectuals, students, journalists, bloggers, factory workers, miners, petitioners, and even farmers in small villages have begun to conceive and pursue their interests as "rights." Despite all the government's efforts to repress these voices, the trend has grown beyond anything China's rulers can reverse.

However, the world has also recently witnessed, another trend threatens the hope of freedom in China: the digitalization of Chinese society is amplifying the state's capacity to monitor and control the country's 1.4 billion people. The new arsenal of the Chinese surveillance state includes mass video-surveillance projects incorporating facial-recognition technology; voice-recognition software that can identify speakers on phone calls; and a sweeping and intrusive program of DNA collection. There are more than 200 million surveillance cameras peppered around entire country, recording what's going on. Chinese government's facial recognition database includes almost every one of its 1.4 billion people. In addition, officials are at work on a nationwide Social Credit System (SCS) intended to assess the conduct of every Chinese. A new generation of digital technology, including AI and Big Data Analysis, will empower the state to monitor, control and manipulate China's vast population in scalable fashion, at ease and with the capacity to micro-target individuals. It can also help the state to identify and quash opposition in advance. China is now on its way to building the world's first "digital totalitarian state." It is also exporting these surveillance and control technologies to autocratic regimes around the world, normalizing and

enabling a global authoritarianism. This is why the U.S. must widen its focus to the entire Chinese surveillance tech industry, disrupting its supply chains, and through working with allies, prevent China from using its government-controlled companies to advance its digital totalitarian interests in other parts of the world.

For the Tiananmen Massacre, U.S must continue to call for a full public accounting for those killed, detained and missing thirty years ago, including the identity and whereabouts of Tank Man - the brave young man who stood in front of a column of tanks on Chang'an Ave on June 5, 1989 in an image recognized around the world--though often not in China, where there has been a complete blackout of its display for the past 30 years. The Chinese government must acknowledge the demands of the Tiananmen Mothers, an informal group of parents whose children were killed by tanks and guns in 1989, but who have been repeatedly silenced in their efforts to call for accountability and a full accounting for the deaths. They are not allowed to publicly mourn their children. Without a basic grounding in the truth about Tiananmen, if a government cannot come to terms with its own history and make peace with its own people, how can the world trust the myth of its “peaceful rise”?

Mr. Chairman, respectable members of the Committee,

The rise of China under a one-party dictatorship threatens not just American interests but also the rules-based international order. US-China relations are not, and should not, just be about economic competition, or even global power rivalry. It should also be firmly rooted in the universal value of human rights. The United States of America must continue to uphold this liberal framework.

We must have no illusions: it is the existence of the Chinese Communist Party dictatorship that abuses and threatens the liberty and dignity of Chinese people, and people's lives anywhere in this increasingly interconnected globe. But this is not a “clash of civilizations.” It is a “clash” between two different political systems, between democracy and a one-party dictatorship. We just need to look to Taiwan, where “Chinese civilization” works well with democratic governance. We

can also look to Japan, South Korea, and India. The "clash of civilizations" frame does not single out China among friends and allies of the United States, but it can isolate the United States from the rest of the world, and at the very worst, it can become a dangerous, self-fulfilling prophecy. As a son of China, and a proud citizen of the United States of America, I am asking each of you: when making the best possible China policy that defends the value and interests of American people, please also make it align with, and support, Chinese people's struggle for universal human rights and freedom.

Thirty years after Tiananmen, the CCP continues to rule Chinese people through fear. But those who rule by fear also live in fear. As a great Chinese human rights campaigner, astrophysicist Fang Lizhi once said 30 years ago: "We (Chinese people) may only fear today, but we absolutely do not fear tomorrow. In contrast, those murderers not only fear today, they fear tomorrow even more."

Last week I was visiting Berlin and had some time to take a walk in the streets of the once divided city. Where the Berlin Wall once stood now there is only a dark red line through the city; some parts are even now a hiking trail. But I also saw something else - names of victims of the Nazis engraved in shining brass plaques, 70,000 of them spread throughout Berlin. I started to envision that one day in Beijing, the names of those who died during the Tiananmen Massacre will be engraved into the city's roads, building walls and parks, and on Tiananmen Square - The Gate of Eternal Peace. I asked myself: Where is Hitler's Nazi Germany now? Where is the former Soviet Union? Where is Suharto's Indonesia or Pinochet's Chile? They're all gone! Because the ultimate spirit of human dignity is more enduring than tanks and machine guns, even when those weapons are aided by big data analysis, artificial intelligence or missiles, satellites and spaceships. Freedom will prevail, in West or East. In Berlin, or in Beijing.

I would like to end my testimony with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, a great man from another great civilization:

“When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it--always.”

Thank you Mr. Chairman.