

## *Losing Its Grip*

“Cracks in the Wall: China’s Eroding Coercive State” by Murray Scot Tanner, in *Current History* (Sept. 2001), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

Ever since the 1989 protests in Tiananmen Square, China’s rulers have worked hard to suppress dissent, and with the possible exception of the Falun Gong, these efforts have largely succeeded. But Tanner, a professor of Chinese and East Asian politics at Western Michigan University, sees “signs of erosion” in China’s internal security strategy. Beijing’s control over Chinese society is slipping, “perhaps irreversibly.”

“In contrast to the widespread Western image of a highly centralized KGB-style ‘police state,’” Tanner says, China’s security system “is far more decentralized and dependent on active social support than most Westerners suppose.” Decentralization leaves the system open to trouble: Security officers are “overwhelmingly recruited locally and have strong social and economic links to their local societies.” They are often torn between allegiances to family and friends on the one hand, and loyalty to the state on the other.

The security system, Tanner argues, also suffers from an overreliance on the volunteer work of nonprofessional citizen security activists. China’s surprisingly low ratio of professional police to citizens (1.4 million public security officers police 1.3 billion citizens) and the enormous size of the country make the involvement of neighborhood, village, and workplace citizen security committees “absolutely indispensable.” But the dedication of these volunteer security activists is likely to be undermined by the massive social and economic changes China is undergoing. Newfound social mobility, massive layoffs, a rise in social inequality, heavy tax burdens, and rising crime rates all

make it more difficult to secure the loyalty of volunteer activists.

These same forces are also causing a “dramatic increase in unrest.” One analyst counted 100,000 “large-scale protests involving hundreds of people” between 1997 and 2000. Even the Communist Party has admitted that protests are growing in number, size, and effectiveness. Protesters are also resorting to more violent methods: Attacks on party and government buildings and kidnappings of law enforcement officials and citizen security activists are on the rise.

The response by China’s security forces has been “inept,” says Tanner. The police and army “have not received sufficient training or equipment to contain crowds with minimal violence,” and have been known to fire on unarmed crowds. Their blunders have reportedly turned peaceful demonstrations into riots and often have “heightened, rather than defused, social tensions.” The system, moreover, is corrupt: Decentralization has encouraged local officials “to treat police as their private enforcement brigades.”

Key aspects of the nation’s security system have been effective, however: “Twelve years after Tiananmen, China still has no nationwide or even regional independent political parties, labor unions, or intellectual, student, or peasant organizations that could train and raise a credible non-party ‘counterelite.’” Yet as the system that holds these democratic forces in check crumbles, Tanner notes, China’s critics must beware: Without some kind of effective law enforcement, the prospects for a transition to a stable democratic government are dimmed.

## *Genocide in the Outback?*

“The Fabrication of Aboriginal History” by Keith Windschuttle, in *The New Criterion* (Sept. 2001), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

When Kathy Freeman, an Australian Aboriginal sprinter, was chosen to carry the Olympic torch during the opening cere-

monies of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, it was widely viewed as a sign that Australians were finally coming to terms with a sordid