

CHINA

Hong Kong Protester Shot by Police as National Day Demonstrations Descend Into Widespread Violence

A day of bitter fighting marks the worst and most widespread violent unrest to hit the city in more than half a century

By Natasha Khan and Joyu Wang

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HONG KONG—A police officer shot a young antigovernment protester in the chest during the worst day of violent unrest to hit Hong Kong in half a century, as Beijing celebrated the 70th anniversary of Communist Party rule in mainland China.

Video footage on Tuesday showed an officer firing his pistol at close range after Tsang Chi-kin, an 18-year-old high-school student, swung at him with a metal bar. Other footage showed the protester on the ground with blood spilling from his chest.

The police confirmed the shooting, saying the officer had fired at Mr. Tsang in self-defense. The teenager underwent emergency surgery and health officials said his condition was critical early Wednesday.

The incident—the first of its kind since protests erupted in the city in early June—is likely to further inflame the antigovernment movement, which was sparked by opposition to a bill allowing extradition to China. The Hong Kong government in September scrapped the proposal and has appealed for calm, but the movement has drawn momentum from what protesters allege to be police brutality and a lack of accountability.

Efforts to ease tensions and weaken protests before Tuesday's anniversary failed, with events in the city upstaging the celebrations.

The violence marked an embarrassment for Beijing, souring its National Day festivities despite President Xi Jinping's repeated demands for smooth celebrations. The ferocity and intensity of the clashes have left Mr. Xi with a dilemma as to how the uprising can be contained.

Hong Kong Erupts as Protesters Reject Communist China's Rule

Protests and violence break out across the city as China marks the 70th anniversary of Communist rule



Antigovernment protesters set cardboard boxes on fire during National Day in Hong Kong on Tuesday. Mass protests, originally triggered by a proposed law to allow extradition to mainland China, have evolved into a movement with multiple demands. LAUREL CHOR/GETTY IMAGES

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While Beijing has indicated its preference to let the city's government take the lead in resolving the crisis, mainland officials have warned that they reserve the right to step in if the situation gets out of hand. Some Chinese academics have urged Hong Kong's government to consider invoking emergency laws that would allow local police to take tougher measures to restore order, including expanded arrest powers, asserting control over transportation and censoring media.

The protests are aimed at a perceived erosion of the city's liberties by China and the tactics of the city's police, who have angered people across Hong Kong after a number of violent incidents were caught on video.

“It’s a dark turn,” Ho-Fung Hung, a political-economy professor at Johns Hopkins University, said of the shooting. “The movement and the conflict has passed the point of no return, and the use of live ammunition is adding fuel to the fire.”

Official Chinese media largely ignored the violence, sticking to stories of Hong Kong patriots celebrating China’s National Day. The state-run Xinhua news service ran a brief article saying a man was shot after threatening a police officer with a club and was in stable condition.

Besides the bill’s withdrawal, protesters have four other demands. Chief among them is the establishment of a judge-led commission to investigate violent behavior by the police. Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam has resisted appointing such a commission while another policy inquiry plays out. There are no active negotiations to resolve differences between the protesters and the government.

In response to the police shooting of Mr. Tsang, internet users on LIHKG, a Reddit-like news site popular among protesters, called for more people to support a citywide strike planned for Wednesday. “There will be a second shot after the first one was fired,” one post read.

Pro-government lawmakers urged the government to invoke sweeping emergency powers to quell the unrest, a move the government has described during the current unrest as a last resort. Such powers were previously invoked in 1967 when Hong Kong was a British colony and police shot leftist Chinese protesters who revolted while China was in the tumult of the Cultural Revolution.

Tuesday’s shooting happened as tens of thousands of demonstrators poured into the streets of Hong Kong’s main business districts and turned out in suburbs across the territory in anti-China counter-rallies to the National Day celebrations. Their tactics left police thinly stretched and outmatched in spots, leading to pitched battles.

Police said they fired live ammunition six times over the course of the day. More than 180 arrests were made, police said. Health officials said 74 people, aged from 11 to 75, were hospitalized early Wednesday, including two in critical condition.

Shortly after reports of the shooting—which occurred in the western town of Tsuen Wan—emerged, huge numbers of police swept through central districts on Hong Kong island to break up protesters that joined the day’s biggest march, which police had banned.

A woman originally from the U.K. fell to the ground after being hit by a projectile police fired outside Admiralty subway station. She said she had lived in Hong Kong for 25 years. “I just don’t want to see this,” she said. “This is my home; this is my children’s home.”

Clashes raged across more than a dozen districts across the city, many simultaneously. As protesters were alerted to the shooting on their smartphones, there was temporary quiet at some battlegrounds, though skirmishes continued into the evening.

In a rare public address, the city's police chief, Stephen Lo, blamed violent protesters for endangering officers' lives and forcing them to draw guns.

"Today is really sad for me," said Mr. Lo, referring to widespread chaos that saw subway stations attacked and storefronts—particularly businesses perceived as being pro-China—smashed. Arrests were made for rioting, unauthorized assembly, attacking officers and carrying offensive weapons, he said.

An initial assessment of the shooting in a life-threatening situation made it seem to be legal and reasonable, he said, though the force would investigate further.

"We are heartbroken and worried," Mr. Lo said of the teenager's injuries. "I believe that no one would like to see other people injured—no matter if they are officers, reporters or protesters."

The scenes in Hong Kong contrasted with colorful, jubilant anniversary celebrations in Beijing that included the country's biggest-ever military parade to showcase the nation's might.

Mrs. Lam was seen in Beijing smiling as she watched the parade, which featured a Hong Kong float carrying a golden egg, a reference to the city's science park. In Hong Kong, her deputy, Matthew Cheung, led a Chinese-flag-raising ceremony in the morning, telling guests that Hong Kong people were "shocked and saddened by the violence that has turned the city that we call home into an unfamiliar place."

Mr. Xi said during the Beijing festivities that "no force can shake the great foundation of our nation" and that it remained committed to the strategy of peaceful unification and "One Country, Two Systems," an arrangement that gives Hong Kong more autonomy than in the mainland.

Demonstrators in Hong Kong were intent on marring the big day, expressing opposition to Mr. Xi's vision of a united country. The city was in virtual lockdown for most of the day, with dozens of malls and more than half the city's subway stations shuttered by the evening.

In Sha Tin, the city's largest residential district, protesters seized overpasses and rained rocks, Molotov cocktails and full soda and beer cans down on outnumbered police. Police responded with multiple rounds of tear gas and other projectiles.

About 20 miles away in Tuen Mun, protesters armed with sticks and umbrellas charged a small contingent of police in riot gear. The police, cornered against a building, fought back with batons and pepper spray but were quickly overwhelmed and forced to retreat inside. Police said

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protesters in the neighborhood also threw corrosive fluid on officers.

Thousands more protesters filled a main road through the heavily populated district of Kowloon, across the harbor from downtown Hong Kong, where thousands more people occupied streets until being cleared as water

cannon and riot police firing tear gas advanced.

“For Hong Kong people, there’s nothing to celebrate today,” said Bonnie Leung, who was in the leadership of the Civil Human Rights Front when the group applied for police permission to stage a march on Tuesday, but was denied. “China has a habit of silencing people during ‘celebrations’ like National Day to create a cosmetic peaceful scene,” she said. “It might work in Beijing, but it would never work in Hong Kong.”

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How do you think this latest action by the Hong Kong police will alter the trajectory of the protest movement? Join the conversation below.

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