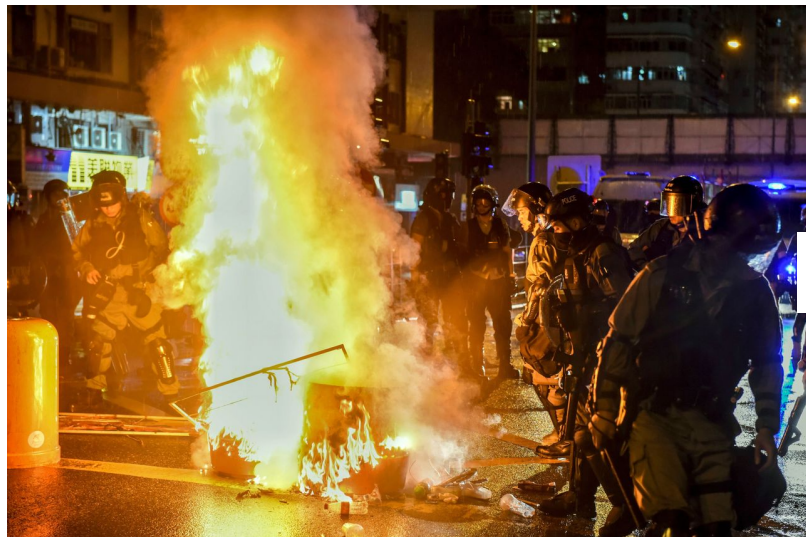


CHINA

Chinese Troops Warn Hong Kong Protesters as Emergency Law Triggers Backlash

Tens of thousands march in defiance of a ban on face masks introduced under an emergency law



Anti-riot police disperse protesters during the demonstration against a newly imposed law banning face masks in public in Hong Kong. MIGUEL CANDELA/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

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HONG KONG—The government's first use of emergency powers in half a century failed to stop violence and vandalism flaring across the city, leaving officials with the choice of introducing more extreme measures to win back the streets or risking intervention from Beijing.

For the first time during the four months of unrest, uniformed soldiers from the Hong Kong garrison of the People's Liberation Army raised a yellow warning flag at nearby protesters, saying: "You are in breach of the law. You may be prosecuted."

Masked and Anonymous: Meet Hong Kong's Army of Protesters

Photos of activists prepared to face off against tear gas and police scrutiny



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NICOLE TUNG FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Tens of thousands poured into the streets Sunday, many wearing masks in defiance of a ban on them introduced Saturday under the emergency law. There were scenes of anarchy as some protesters set fires, smashed Chinese banks and subway stations, while police, outnumbered at many locations, fired volleys of tear gas and projectiles. A taxi driver was beaten bloody by a mob in another district after he rammed into a group of protesters.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam invoked the colonial-era law Friday to ban masks at public gatherings, saying it was necessary to deter protesters who posed a serious danger to Hong Kong. The full emergency law, however, gives her government sweeping powers that include allowing authorities to impose curfews, extend

detentions, censor the internet and take control of all transport—moves her government has been reluctant to impose.

"I would expect to see such power to be invoked soon, if the masks ban does not stop the protests," Steve Tsang, director of the School of Oriental and African Studies China Institute at the University of London. "There is now a sufficiently strongly motivated group among the

HONG KONG'S MASK BAN

The measure prohibits anyone from wearing a mask at unlawful or public gatherings. Here's what that means.

- Any material—including paint—that covers a person's face is prohibited.
 - Exemptions can be granted for religious, medical and professional reasons.
 - Police are authorized to stop and search anyone wearing a mask in a public area and require the person to remove it.
 - People who wear masks at unlawful assemblies of three or more people, public gatherings of more than 50 and public marches of more than 30 face up to 12 months in jail and a fine of more than \$3,000
 - People in a public area who don't remove masks at the request of police face up to six months in jail and a fine of around \$1,300.
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protestors to fight whatever the government does to end the protests, so I see an escalation.”

If the wider application of those powers fails, Mr. Tsang said, the next step would be the deployment of China's People's Armed Police—a paramilitary force used across the mainland border for domestic security.

After the worst violence in more than 50 years erupted on Oct. 1—the 70th anniversary of the founding of Communist China—Victor Gao, an interpreter for former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, said Beijing's intervention looked increasingly likely.

“It is violence, it is rioting, it is treason,” said Mr. Gao, who is among Chinese commentators who have advocated a tougher line on Hong Kong. By law, such intervention would require a request from the Hong Kong government or a formal meeting by the central government to declare an emergency situation, Mr. Gao said.

Hong Kong's government said the ban on masks was needed to deter vandalism and other unlawful acts that pose a serious public danger. Those arrested for wearing masks at public gatherings and unlawful assemblies face as much as one year in prison.

An opinion piece posted on the website of the state-run Chinese newspaper People's Daily backed the ban, saying “violence is rampant and the rule of law is not clear” in Hong Kong.

The chief executive said Friday that even though she was using emergency laws, Hong Kong wasn't in a state of emergency. By Saturday, Mrs. Lam was condemning the “extreme behavior of the rioters” who turned out to protest the measure late that day. During the mayhem, a 14-year-

old boy was shot in the leg Friday by a police officer out of uniform who was briefly set on fire after being hit by a Molotov cocktail.

After subway stations were attacked, the operator shut down the entire system. The closure extended through Saturday, bringing Hong Kong to a near-standstill. Though the trains ran Sunday, many highly trafficked stations were closed all day, and the system closed early at 9 p.m.

Despite Mrs. Lam's plea for people to renounce violence, little changed Sunday as an 18th weekend of unrest saw mass rallies that started out peacefully, before some protesters rampaged through several districts and police filled the streets with tear gas to disperse crowds.

"I just couldn't stand with the government anymore," said Katherine Law, 28, who wore a medical mask to a demonstration on Sunday. Ms. Law said it was her first time attending an unapproved protest, with the large crowds reducing her fear of arrest for violating the mask ban.

For much of Sunday afternoon, police were overwhelmed and fired numerous rounds of tear gas seeking to disperse crowds. In the Wan Chai district, protesters smashed a Starbucks cafe and dragged chairs and tables outside to erect a road blockade. Starbucks's local franchisee, Maxim's group, is seen by protesters as an apologist for Beijing.

In one of the bloodier episodes, protesters descended upon and beat a taxi driver in Sham Shui Po, one of the city's poorest districts. A video posted online showed the man driving into a crowd of protesters before he was attacked, kicked and punched by a group of more than 20 as he lay bloodied on the ground. Elsewhere, several journalists were hit by a Molotov cocktail thrown by a protester.

Around 8 p.m., as protesters gathered near a PLA barracks located in Kowloon, several soldiers in camouflage uniforms standing atop the barracks roof raised a yellow warning flag that warned the protesters were violating the law.

Some protesters flashed green laser pointers at the soldiers in response. The garrison's actions appeared similar to that in a video of an anti-riot drill released in July, in which soldiers raised a red flag warning of the use of force.

In one video of the incident filmed from the street, a verbal warning could be heard in heavily accented Cantonese saying, "This is a restricted zone of the military. Entering is forbidden. All consequences are at your own risk."

The months of unrest in Hong Kong were sparked by an extradition bill that would have allowed suspects to be sent for trial in mainland China. Mrs. Lam said she would withdraw the bill last month, but the movement has widened to include four other demands, including an inquiry into alleged police brutality. Mrs. Lam's efforts at public dialogue have also failed to defuse tensions.

Mrs. Lam’s government has been under increased pressure to contain the turmoil, which is sending the city’s economy hurtling toward recession. On Sunday, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority released a statement rebutting what it said was a rumor that the regulator was preparing to implement a cap on cash withdrawals from banks.

Earlier Sunday, Hong Kong’s High Court rejected a bid for an injunction to block the ban on face masks. The legal action was sought by 24 pro-democracy members of the city’s legislative council. The lawmakers argued that Mrs. Lam acted unconstitutionally in bypassing the legislature to issue the ban.

A lawyer for the city said the ban was justified due to “mayhem that we have not seen since 1967.” A hearing on the application for judicial review of the emergency law was set for late October.

Out on the streets, Angela, a recent graduate who works in marketing, said the government’s decision to invoke emergency powers has strengthened the protest movement. “It’s backfired,” she said. “It’s made us more angry.”

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—*Natasha Khan in Hong Kong, Eva Dou and Lekai Liu in Beijing contributed to this article.*

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