

# Hong Kong protests: brutal undercover police tactics spark outcry

Tuesday 13 August 2019, by [HALE Erin](#) (Date first published: 12 August 2019).

## Footage of helmeted protesters suddenly making arrests causes concern after weekend of intense clashes

Rights groups and democracy activists have accused police in [Hong Kong](#) of using excessive force after teargas was fired into an enclosed subway station and officers posed as protesters before making arrests during an intense weekend of clashes.

“Clashes between protesters and police over the weekend escalated to another level especially on the police side,” said Man-Kei Tam, director of Amnesty International Hong Kong.

Tam cited video footage of [police firing teargas into a subway station](#) on Sunday night in Kwai Fong. It was not clear how many protesters were inside the station at the time, but it has been rare for officers to fire tear gas indoors. He also shared footage of police firing non-lethal projectiles at close range as protesters attempted to flee down a separate subway station escalator.

Tam questioned the need for such force in both cases as protesters appeared to be showing “no aggression” towards officers. “These are all very ugly things,” he said.

Pro-democracy street protests in Hong Kong stretched into their 10<sup>th</sup> week on Monday with no sign of either side backing down. The police have also reported injuries among their ranks, including eye irritation from laser pointers and burns from a petrol bomb.

Civil Rights Observer, a local rights group that sends observers to protests, said it had “very serious concerns” about police violence and had seen “very clear evidence to show the police are violating their guidelines”, according to its spokesman Icarus Wong.

He said the group was particularly concerned by the use of undercover officers for the first time, who later turned on protesters on Sunday night. He said it was unclear if they may have acted as agitators before making mass arrests.

During the weekend protests, the website Hong Kong Free Press showed footage of one arrest that appeared to include officers dressing as protesters who injured a demonstrator pressed to the ground. The young man, who said his name was Chow Ka-lok and asked for a lawyer, was left with bleeding head wounds and a broken tooth.

Outrage against police violence quickly spread online, where a sit-in at Hong Kong International airport was quickly organised over social media for Monday afternoon.

Many residents also shared videos and photos of police violence on Twitter, in some cases under hashtags such as [#AbolishHKPF](#) and [#HKPoliceState](#), as well as in Telegram protest groups. One commonly shared photo included an image of a female protester hit by a police projectile and

bleeding profusely from her eye.

“Let us [admit] HK is a police state. Riot police push down peaceful protestor on the escalator of railway station,” the democracy activist [Joshua Wong tweeted](#).

“Hong Kong police repeatedly shooting rubber bullets from 1m distance at protesters who are leaving and entering Taikoo MTR station. How is this acceptable behavior?????” [Denise Ho](#), a cantonese pop star turned activist tweeted.

Over the weekend journalists were also attacked by mobs of residents believed to be pro-China supporters in one district on Hong Kong island.

“Violence against journalists, whether it comes from the police or pro-Beijing mobs, has become systematic and clearly aims to discourage the media from covering the protests in Hong Kong,” said Cédric Alviani, the head of the Reporters Without Borders East Asia bureau, who called for an independent investigation into protest brutality.

On Monday legislators and journalists were also invited to witness a display of police water cannons, which Amnesty warned last week could lead to serious injuries if misused within Hong Kong’s confined spaces.

Protests in Hong Kong began in early June against a legislative bill that would have allowed for residents to stand trial in mainland China on criminal charges.

While Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule in 1997, it was promised semi-autonomy for 50 years including a separate legal system. Many protesters feared the bill, now suspended, would have led to the decline of civil and political rights in the Asian financial hub.

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## **Erin Hale**

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