

China calls for Hong Kong to swiftly punish 'radical' protesters

Monday 29 July 2019, by [CHOR Laurel](#), [KUO Lily](#) (Date first published: 29 July 2019).

Beijing offers full support to region's leader in rare remarks from government office
China has offered its full support to Hong Kong's embattled leader and its police force, and said violent protesters must be swiftly punished, in rare remarks by the government office that oversees policy towards the territory.

Hong Kong has been rocked by two months of escalating pro-democracy protests that have posed the most significant challenge to Beijing's authority since the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

In its first press conference since 1997, the state council's Hong Kong and Macau affairs office said the protests were "horrendous incidents" that have caused serious damage to the rule of law.

"No society or rule of law society will tolerate rampant violence," said **Yang Guang, a spokesman for the office**. Yang said the violence, which he blamed on a "few radicals", had seriously undermined Hong Kong's prosperity and stability.

"In our view, the most dangerous situation in Hong Kong is that violent crimes have not been effectively stopped," he added. *"The most important task of Hong Kong at present is to resolutely punish violent crimes according to law, restore social stability as soon as possible, and safeguard Hong Kong's good legal system."*

The last eight weeks of protests were sparked by a now delayed bill that would allow suspects to be extradited to mainland China, but most recently the anger has pivoted towards the police, who have been accused of using excessive force.

Protesters have also focused their ire on what many believe to be collusion between the authorities and triads, Hong Kong's organised crime groups, after masked and armed thugs conducted vicious attacks on metro commuters, protesters and journalists on 21 July.

At the press conference on Monday the **Hong Kong office** said "rumours" of police or Chinese involvement in the attacks were *"unfounded and insulting"*.

Echoing statements previously made by state-owned media and other Beijing officials, the spokesman also sharply criticised **foreign "interference", blaming western politicians for trying to cause trouble in the country.**

Hours before the briefing on Monday, **the People's Daily, the official mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist party**, called on the Hong Kong government and police to *"not hesitate"* and *"do what needs to be done"* to end the weeks of protest.

"For some time, the power of the Hong Kong police has been severely limited by politics, public opinion, and even the judicial environment," said one editorial, describing protesters as *"thugs"* and *"militants"* who have undermined stability in Hong Kong.

"Facing these circumstances the Hong Kong government and police should not have any hesitation or any 'psychological burden' - do what needs to be done."

The article called on the police to **"punish lawbreakers regardless of whether they hold up the**

banner of 'freedom and democracy' or wear the cap of 'civil disobedience'".

Monday's remarks by government officials and the party paper are **the strongest statements Beijing has made since the mass protests began in June**. Observers have been looking for clues as to how Beijing would respond and the possibility of escalation, including deploying the People's Liberation Army, which has a garrison in Hong Kong.

At the briefing, **the spokesperson sidestepped a question on potential intervention**, saying he had nothing to add to what was already stated in the Basic Law, the city's constitution. Last week, an official from the Chinese defence ministry said Beijing could legally intervene should the Hong Kong government ask for help *"in maintaining social order"*.

In a front-page article in the **overseas edition of the People's Daily** on Monday 29, the paper also **criticised the Civil Human Rights Front**, a group in Hong Kong that has organised mass marches against the extradition bill. The paper accused the group of collaborating with *"western forces"* and warned citizens to keep their eyes open to such groups who *"lead the wolves into your home and hurt the country"*.

"[China] will never allow any foreign forces to collaborate with the internal forces, endanger Hong Kong's development, and trample on 'one country, two systems'," the article said.

With anger mounting over police violence, including the use of teargas in residential areas over the weekend, there is no end in sight to the mass demonstrations.

Protests are scheduled for the next three weeks all over the territory, including a mass transit strike, a rally by civil servants and a city-wide strike.

"For the Chinese Communist party, the continuing crisis in Hong Kong is not only a direct challenge to its authority but also damaging to its domestic prestige and international reputation," said Adam Ni, a China researcher at Macquarie University in Australia.

"Essentially, Beijing just doesn't have any simple short-term answers to the current impasse," he said. *"Beijing's Hong Kong problem is here to stay."*

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