

Hong Kong police lay siege to university occupied by demonstrators

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The police siege of Hong Kong's Polytechnic University (PolyU) continued into Tuesday after the authorities' sharp escalation of violence on Monday, which included an attempt to storm the campus and the threat to use live ammunition. It is a clear warning that the police are preparing for a violent suppression of the nearly six-month long protest movement for basic democratic rights.

Demonstrators comprised largely of students and youth occupied PolyU last week, along with a number of other campuses around the city, including the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and attempted to block roads and highways as part of a student-led call for a city-wide general strike. PolyU is located in Hung Hom, Kowloon near a number of major roads and a cross harbor tunnel.

Police have turned campuses like PolyU into battlefields, with the use of rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons. Protesters had responded with petrol bombs and other makeshift weapons as they tried to defend themselves from the onslaught. The police dramatically ramped up their assault on PolyU on Sunday before the following day's attempt to storm the campus.

Later Monday, the university president Teng Jinguang claimed to have negotiated a truce, stating the police would not attack protesters if they left and did not clash with the police. However, as of Tuesday morning, approximately 500 people remained trapped on campus.

A 23-year-old youth at the university, named Han, told Vox via a social media app, "Students [don't] want to fight these battles, they just want the government to listen to their demands." She stated that protesters were hiding in class rooms while looking for ways to leave the university. Others have reported that

the youth are too afraid to attempt to leave the campus. A few dozen have managed to escape the siege by climbing down to a roadway from a university footpath before being picked up by waiting vehicles.

Deutsche Welle reported from outside PolyU: "Protesters have been told to leave the campus area. As they attempted to run past police, they were met by tear gas and arrest. We're seeing images of protesters being tackled to the ground, some of them dragged across the floor during that arrest."

In an ominous sign, police have also been seen carrying assault rifles. Police spokesman Louis Lau stated, "If [the protesters] continue such dangerous actions, we would have no choice but to use the minimum force necessary, including live rounds, to fire back." The editor-in-chief of China's *Global Times* Hu Xijin wrote on social media that police should kill protesters including by using snipers. "If the rioters are killed, the police should not have to bear legal responsibility," he said.

While Hong Kong authorities have claimed that the Red Cross has been allowed into PolyU to aid the injured, the police are isolating the protesters by threatening or arresting journalists and medics or barring them entry. Amnesty International has condemned the police for the arrests and for "fanning the flames of violence." Others attempting to mediate a peaceful solution, including parents, teachers, and lawmakers have been turned away.

Thousands of protesters took part in demonstrations yesterday in an attempt to bring supplies to the trapped PolyU students or to distract police long enough for protesters to escape the campus. Sit-ins were organized, including by parents of students and other people upset at the extreme violence the police have employed. Since Sunday evening, four hundred people have been

arrested, while 116 have been injured.

Beijing has responded to the violence by encouraging the police forces. “No one should underestimate China’s will to safeguard its sovereignty and Hong Kong’s stability,” said Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang.

The violence raises the real possibility of a bloodbath. Many have drawn comparisons with the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, particularly after People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers left their barracks on Saturday supposedly to engage in volunteer clean-up work. This was the first time PLA troops have been on Hong Kong’s streets since the protests began in June.

Alvin Yeung, a lawmaker and leader of the Civic Party, a member of the pan-democrat grouping, said of the soldiers’ actions, “If they say they could voluntarily clean up the street, tomorrow they could voluntarily do something else. And that is unacceptable.” While Yeung also offered mild criticisms of the police over the weekend, he stopped short of fully condemning them, calling instead for officers not to use excessive force.

From the outset, however, the pan-democrats, along with their various allies in the trade unions, civic groups and student organisations, have sought to restrict the agenda of the protests to pressuring the Hong Kong administration for limited reforms. None of them has addressed the underlying social grievances fuelling the demonstrations, including the lack of affordable housing, decent jobs and access to welfare and other social services.

The pan-democrats have worked to channel opposition back behind the government, trying to convince people that democratic rights can be protected by the state. On Monday, two High Court judges ruled that the ban on masks in rallies enacted in October was unconstitutional. The case had been brought before the court by 25 pan-democrats.

The pan-democrats represent sections of the Hong Kong business elites concerned that their interests are compromised by China’s anti-democratic methods and intrusion into the city’s affairs. At the same time, they are deeply fearful of the protest movement expanding into the working class and into mainland China where workers and farmers face the same exploitation and abuse of democratic and social rights.

The protest movement will only advance if it breaks

politically with the pan-democrats, rejects all forms of isolationism and Hong Kong nativism and turns to the working class throughout China in the fight for democratic and social rights on the basis of an internationalist and socialist perspective.



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