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**(CNN)**President Xi Jinping emphasized [unity, development](https://cnn.com/2019/09/27/asia/china-oct-1-national-day-xi-jinping-intl-hnk/index.html) and strength as he addressed the world on the [70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China](https://www.cnn.com/asia/live-news/china-hong-kong-oct-1-live-intl-hnk/index.html) on Tuesday, saying: "There is no force than can shake the foundation of this great nation."

Standing in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, where Mao Zedong declared the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, Xi added: "Today a socialist China is standing in front the world."

"No force can stop the Chinese people and the Chinese nation forging ahead," he said in front of jubilant crowds cheering and waving Chinese flags.

Xi's address was heavy on nationalist strokes, playing into the long-term Communist Party narrative of lifting China from the "century of humiliation" it suffered under the Qing Dynasty, amid invasion by colonial powers including the United Kingdom and Japan.

Xi pointedly brought up Hong Kong, [where anti-government protests](https://cnn.com/2019/09/29/asia/hong-kong-protests-weekend-before-anniversary-intl-hnk/index.html) have been raging for more than three months, saying that China must remain "committed to the strategy of peaceful reinforcement of one country two systems," the [framework that governs](https://cnn.com/2019/09/15/asia/hong-kong-protest-violence-intl-hnk/index.html) the semi-autonomous Chinese territory. Protests are expected to continue in Hong Kong on Tuesday.

"We will maintain long-term stability of [Hong Kong](https://cnn.com/2019/09/26/asia/carrie-lam-hong-kong-dialogue-intl-hnk/index.html)and Macao, the development of cross-strait relations, and continue to strive for the complete unification of the country," Xi said.

After inspecting troops along Chang'an Avenue, Xi presided over a massive military parade showing off some of the [most advanced weaponry](https://cnn.com/2019/09/27/asia/china-military-parade-analysis-preview-intl-hnk/index.html) the world has ever seen. About 15,000 personnel, more than 160 aircraft and 580 pieces of weaponry and equipment was expected to take part in the 80-minute procession through the Chinese capital. Key among those was drone technology -- of which Beijing boasts some of the world's best -- and advanced missile systems.

Helicopters flew national flags across the sky above Beijing and aircraft flew in formation to create a "70" in the sky, in honor of the 70th anniversary. However the grand effect was spoiled somewhat by high levels of smog -- according to the World Air Quality Index, the AQI in the Chinese capital is 159 today, "unhealthy" on the international scale.

A "citizens march" is due to follow with 100,000 people, 70 floats and 36 formations organized around the themes of founding of a nation, reform and opening up, and great rejuvenation.

Show of strength and unity

Beijing has [been on high alert for weeks](https://cnn.com/travel/article/beijing-october-1-crackdown-intl-hnk/index.html), with a heavy security clampdown including road closures, the banning of flying drones, kites and even racing pigeons, as well as greater restrictions on the already-heavily censored internet.

Early Tuesday, the enormous streets of the Chinese capital were almost completely deserted. Checkpoints manned by dozens of guards and metal barriers had blocked all roads leading to Tiananmen Square, rendering large parts of the inner city entirely inaccessible.

Hundreds of Chinese flags adorned streets and shopping malls, and cinemas were running exclusive screenings of the military parade.

There was an air of excitement among residents. In Dongcheng district, retired 67-year-old Guo Fucheng said he planned to watch the parade at home with his dog, Feifei.

"China has been through so many rains and storms ... I feel very proud of our country, we now have more say on the global stage," he said.

Beijing is hoping to project an image of national strength and unity.

"It is to show how much progress it has made, and how much more advanced it is compared to years before. Now, China has better capability to defend itself. It deserves equal and fair treatment from other powers," Carnegie Tsinghua Center senior fellow Tong Zhao told CNN in Beijing.

The parade is also designed to show the capabilities of President Xi, who is the country's most powerful leader since Mao. "This parade highlights him as the paramount leader in China who is loved and applauded by the general public. Despite external challenges, he can still enjoy wide public support which he sees as necessary for China as a nation to continue this struggle," Zhao said.

A woman takes a selfie during a pro-Beijing flash mob rally in the Tsim Sha Tsui district in Hong Kong on October 1, 2019, to mark the 70th anniversary of communist China's founding.

But Xi is [facing major tests](https://cnn.com/2019/09/27/asia/china-oct-1-national-day-xi-jinping-intl-hnk/index.html) including the ongoing US-China trade war, rising pork prices and his defining Belt and Road Initiative, a hugely ambitious trade and infrastructure mega-project linking China to markets across central Asia, Europe and Africa that is failing to deliver the economic boom it once promised.

Anti-government protests in Hong Kong are also threatening Xi's image of a man in control. Pro-democracy protesters have planned citywide demonstrations across the city on Tuesday, threatening to overshadow and disrupt Beijing's carefully crafted celebrations.

By 9 a.m. local time, there were already reports of protesters being pepper sprayed by police, and more unrest is expected as demonstrators fan out across the city.

The formal celebrations in Hong Kong began with a flag-raising ceremony typical of official holidays at the city's Golden Bauhania Square, while helicopters bearing Chinese and Hong Kong flags also did a flyby.

But the annual National Day fireworks have been canceled and a number of key subway stations closed over safety concerns.

Protesters, many of whom are strongly anti-China, have planned a series of demonstrations in six different districts across the city, as well as a mass march that wasn't approved by police -- making it an unlawful assembly.

The past few days have been marked with violence as protesters clashed with riot police in the 17th consecutive weekend of demonstrations. Protesters [threw petrol bombs and set fires](https://cnn.com/2019/09/29/asia/hong-kong-protests-weekend-before-anniversary-intl-hnk/index.html) as police responded with tear gas, rubber bullets, bean bag rounds and a water cannon tinted with blue dye. An officer also fired one live warning shot into the air on Sunday evening.

At a press conference Monday, local police said the protests were "moving one step closer to terrorism."

"We are on the verge of extreme danger," a police official said. "All acts are one step closer to terrorism. We are deeply concerned about public safety tomorrow and we express the strongest condemnation against all criminal and violent acts."

The protests, initially over a [now-withdrawn extradition bill](https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/04/asia/hong-kong-carrie-lam-extradition-bill-intl-hnk/index.html) to mainland China, have grown more violent as the weeks pushed on, evolving to include five demands including universal suffrage.

Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam attended the celebrations in Beijing alongside 240 other delegates from the city.