

April 7, 2008

## Protests of China Make Olympic Torch Relay an Obstacle Course

By [JOHN F. BURNS](#)

LONDON — Shouting “Shame on China!” and waving Tibetan flags, pro-Tibetan demonstrators and others protesting Chinese human rights abuses turned the running of the Olympic torch through the streets here on Sunday into a tumult of scuffles. The police said that one man broke through a tight security cordon and made a failed grab for the torch, and that 35 people were arrested.

The torch completed a seven-hour journey from the new Wembley soccer stadium in northwest London to the principal site for the 2012 Summer Olympics in Stratford on the city’s east side. Along the way, numerous protesters seeking to reach the torch were wrestled to the ground by police officers. One man carrying a fire extinguisher narrowly failed to reach the person carrying the torch, but he set off the extinguisher anyway, dousing police officers with foam.

The torch’s London relay was the fourth stop of a global itinerary that began last month in Greece, where pro-Tibetan demonstrators briefly interrupted the torch’s lighting and its subsequent progress through Athens.

Tibetan organizations have said they plan protests at every stop on the torch’s 21-nation tour. Its next stops are Paris, where it arrived late Sunday, and San Francisco, its only American stop, on Wednesday. The monthlong tour is scheduled to end in Vietnam in three weeks. That is to be followed by a six-week, 46-stop tour of China.

Judging by the events in London on Sunday, the tour could prove jarring for Beijing. What organizers had billed as an occasion to celebrate the Olympics’ sporting ideals of peace and harmony turned into a daylong contest between China’s supporters and demonstrators protesting China’s crackdown in [Tibet](#) and its wider human rights record.

To get the torch safely to its destination, more than 2,000 police officers were deployed along the route. The security cordon around the torch was so dense that the flame and those carrying it were barely visible to crowds along the route for much of the day.

Caught in the middle on the issue was the British government, which has sought to protect delicate trade and diplomatic relations with China while supporting the Games and yet to also placate those who oppose holding the Olympics in a country with one of the world's harshest records for punishing dissent.

The centerpiece of the torch parade — and the focal point of the protests — was a stop at 10 Downing Street, where the Chinese torch contingent was greeted by the prime minister, [Gordon Brown](#).

Mr. Brown, like President Bush, has said he plans to attend the Games' opening ceremonies in Beijing in August. That stand has drawn contrasts with the French president, [Nicolas Sarkozy](#), who has hinted that he may not attend if China's recent crackdown on Tibetans does not relent.

Under pressure from human rights groups in Britain, Mr. Brown has said that he sympathizes with the Tibetan protests. He has also said that he will meet the [Dalai Lama](#) in Britain next month, and that he has informed China's leaders about the symbolic step.

The most intense scuffles in London occurred as the torch moved through the heart of the city. The torch, which was carried by a chain of British sports heroes and television celebrities, was protected by an inner guard of Chinese security men in blue and white Olympic tracksuits and an outer cordon of yellow-jacketed British police officers. Some were on foot, while others rode bicycles, motorbikes or horses.

At points along the route, Scotland Yard security chiefs had deployed double rows of crush barriers in an effort to keep protesters back.

For one long stretch, where streets narrowed and crowds were heavy, the torch was placed in the back of a single-decker bus and driven past the crowds until the police judged it safe for the runners to resume.

But for all the safeguards, the organizers had many tense moments when the denouement many had feared — the torch's being seized or extinguished — was only narrowly avoided. In one incident in the Notting Hill area, a man broke through the police cordon and struggled for control of the torch with a popular children's television host, Konnie Huq. He was wrestled to the ground by police officers and was led away in handcuffs.

The warmest reception for the torch came as it passed through the Chinatown area of central London. It was a diversion from the announced route that was adopted to let the Chinese ambassador to Britain carry the torch.

There, and elsewhere where knots of Chinese supporters had gathered, there were chants of "one

world, one dream,” the motto of the Beijing Games. A Chinese spokesman, Qu Yingpu, said Chinese officials were grateful to the police “for their efforts to keep order.” He added: “This is not the right time, the right platform, for any people to voice their political views.”

The BBC reported on Sunday that Chinese state television limited references to protests in its coverage of the London relay. China’s state media on Monday condemned the “vile misdeeds” of the London protesters, Reuters reported.

One protester who broke through the police cordon, David Allen, said his anger flared at the sight of British sports stars being guarded in the streets of London by Chinese security men.

“What really got my goat was our sporting heroes being surrounded by the Chinese security heavies guarding the torch,” he said. “It makes us complicit in the regime’s repression. You have to ask: Where were these security men last week? Beating up people in the villages of China, no doubt.”

One of the protesters who sparred verbally with pro-China groups in Trafalgar Square was David Phillips, a 25-year-old American from Austin, Tex., who said he had worked for six months at the American Embassy in Beijing.

Now working at a travel agency in London, Mr. Phillips said he had witnessed human rights abuses in China. “There are serious human rights violations going on, and you can’t ignore that,” he said. “And this is an appropriate place for us to voice our feelings.”

*Sandy Macaskill contributed reporting.*

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