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Police Scramble to Prevent Crush at Sydney Protest March

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New South Wales Police executed one of their largest public safety operations in recent years on August 3, 2025, deploying more than 1,000 officers to manage a massive protest on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and prevent a potentially catastrophic crowd crush.

The pro-Palestine demonstration, organized by the Palestine Action Group, drew an estimated 90,000 participants—far exceeding the expected turnout of 50,000. Authorities were forced to close the bridge from 11:30 AM to 5:00 PM, one hour longer than planned, due to extreme crowd density and inclement weather, according to The Sydney Morning Herald.

NSW Police Acting Deputy Commissioner Peter McKenna described the scene as “perilous,” warning that the risk of crowd collapse and entrapment was high. The operation relied on real-time risk assessment, air surveillance, and coordinated redirection measures, including geo-targeted text alerts urging participants to move southbound toward Sydney’s central business district to avoid dangerous congestion at northern train stations such as Wynyard and North Sydney.

Acting Assistant Commissioner Adam Johnson, a veteran of 35 years, said the situation was one of the most dangerous he had encountered in crowd control operations, according to The Guardian. He noted that the force’s rapid response protocols, combined with strong crowd cooperation, averted injuries and maintained order throughout the event.

The operation comes amid heightened scrutiny over public order capabilities and legislative preparedness. NSW Premier Chris Minns had publicly opposed the protest, citing 2022 anti-protest legislation that allows for fines of up to \$22,000 or two years’ imprisonment for obstructing major thoroughfares. However, the NSW Supreme Court ruled on August 2 that the protest could proceed, reinforcing the legal right to peaceful assembly, per ABC News.

Despite the risks, the event concluded without arrests or injuries. Police leadership praised the professionalism of frontline units and the effectiveness of crowd management planning. However, Opposition Leader Mark Speakman warned that such large-scale unregulated events could strain emergency services and undermine public safety if left unchecked.

The incident has renewed calls for updated operational frameworks for high-volume protest security, with senior police officials reportedly reviewing tactical planning protocols to better anticipate surge scenarios in future mass gatherings.