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TECH

Taxi Drivers Block Paris Roads in Uber Protest

Violence boosts pressure on French government to accelerate crackdown on car service



French riot police pushed a car overturned by taxi drivers protesting the Uber car service. 'Uber hurts us, so we are going to make them suffer just as much,' one protester said. *PHOTO: REUTERS*

By **MATTHIAS VERBERGT** and **SAM SCHECHNER**

Updated June 25, 2015 10:48 p.m. ET

PARIS—Black smoke rose from piles of burning tires at Porte Maillot, one of the main gateways to the French capital. As taxi drivers hurled stones at riot police, one screamed his demand: “Uber, go home!”

The war between taxis and Uber Technologies Inc.’s car service spilled into streets across France on Thursday, as thousands of drivers snarled traffic around the French capital and other cities. They blocked access to both of the main Parisian airports and to train stations. Altercations broke out between Uber operators and taxi drivers.

“I’m safer in Baghdad,” singer Courtney Love wrote on Twitter, claiming that taxi



Courtney Love Cobain
@Courtney

they've ambushed our car and are holding our driver hostage. they're beating the cars with metal bats. this is France?? I'm safer in Baghdad

6:47 AM - 25 Jun 2015

6,193 1,914

drivers ambushed her car from Charles de Gaulle Airport and were hitting vehicles with metal bats. Ms. Love said she escaped on the back of a motorcycle taxi, as drivers threw stones.

The mounting violence raises pressure on the French government to accelerate a crackdown on Uber in one of the company's largest European markets. Taxi drivers are demanding that the government move more

quickly to block the company's Uberpop service, which uses drivers without professional licenses. Taxi drivers say that is unfair competition.

"In the 24 years I've been a cab driver, my future has never been in so much danger," said Ahmed Elmoatamid, a 62-year-old Parisian taxi driver who joined a protest at Gare du Nord, one of Europe's busiest train stations, after ending his night shift.

Uber is facing opposition from regulatory authorities around the world. Courts in Spain, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands have banned Uberpop. Earlier this week, Indonesian police said they had opened an investigation of Uber.

French President François Hollande sharply criticized the protests.

"There is violence that is unacceptable in a democracy, unacceptable in a country like France," Mr. Hollande said in the early hours of Friday morning after a meeting of EU leaders in Brussels. "The violence is intolerable not only for the victims, but also for the image of our country."

Still, Mr. Hollande said he understood the exasperation of France's taxi drivers faced with what he described as unfair competition.

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French officials responded to Thursday's unrest by promising tougher enforcement of a law passed last year that makes operating a system like Uberpop punishable with a fine of as much as €300,000 (\$336,000) and two years in prison. The law also makes drivers

without professional licenses liable for fines.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said Thursday he had asked police chiefs to issue decrees banning the service. He also asked prosecutors to begin investigating Uber.

But it is unlikely either move will have any immediate effect. A spokeswoman for the Paris prosecutor's office said a probe of Uber, which began this spring, is still under way. And the company has said it wouldn't stop offering Uberpop until a court orders it to do so.

"Uberpop is illegal," Mr. Cazeneuve said, but he said that the service "can only be banned after a court decision."



Riot police were deployed to Porte Maillot—one of the main gateways into central Paris—where some taxi drivers hurled stones at police. The striking drivers also blocked access to both of Paris' main airports as well as its train stations.

PHOTO: REUTERS

"The government is just trying to make noise to calm down the taxis," said Pierre-Dimitri Gore-Coty, Uber's head of Western Europe. "They are trying to calm things down by saying Uberpop is illegal, but no court has decided that."

Uber has reacted to the new French law with a flurry of legal appeals in France and with the European Union, arguing the law is discriminatory and violates the principle of free enterprise. France's constitutional court is to rule in the coming months. Following an Uber complaint, the EU sent a letter to France last month outlining concerns with the new French law.

So far, the French crackdown has centered on Uberpop drivers. The French Interior Ministry said police have opened cases against 420 drivers, something that can lead to

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impounding of vehicles. Mr. Cazeneuve said Thursday he will instruct police to impound vehicles every time an Uberpop driver is caught in the act.

Taxi drivers are unsatisfied however. "We are fed up with it," said Salahyidin Dahaoui, the president of Collectif des Taxis Parisiens, a union of cab drivers. "Why isn't the government enforcing the law? In this country, it's apparently possible not to respect the rule of law."

In recent weeks, there were several allegations of violence by taxi drivers against both Uberpop drivers and users in several French cities where Uberpop is available. "Last month, I was tracked down by taxi drivers," said a Lyon-based Uberpop driver, who claims they kicked off his rearview mirrors.



Thursday's demonstrations by French taxi drivers snarled traffic around Paris and forced some travelers to walk to the Charles de Gaulle airport. PHOTO: IAN LANGSDON/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

"We obviously condemn every act of aggression," said Jean-Michel Rebours, president of the Defense Union of Parisian Taxis. "But you have to understand where it comes

from. We're constantly being cold-shouldered."

French taxi drivers weren't alone in their protests on Thursday. Drivers from several countries joined them on Paris streets to show solidarity against Uber.

Nuria Navarrete, 35, drove from Spain in her taxi, which displayed a sign that read, "Je suis taxi." She said the protests will go on "as long as it's necessary." "We've managed to stop Uber in Barcelona, and now we're going to do the same thing in the rest of Europe," she said.

Brian Ghairbhain, a driver of a London black cab, also drove to Paris for Thursday's protest, snapping pictures as the tires burned near Porte Maillot. "Uber hurts us, so we are going to make them suffer just as much," Mr. Ghairbhain said as he watched the mayhem. "It's a global fight."

—Inti Landauro and William Horobin contributed to this article.

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May 26, 2015, 11:45 AM HKT

In Uber, Chengdu Cabs Meet an Enemy – and Maybe a Savior



The Uber app is displayed on a phone outside an office building in Beijing.

Associated Press

In the battle for one of the most populous cities in the world's largest transport market, Uber Technologies Inc. is finding potential allies in a most unlikely place – among the ranks of licensed Chengdu taxi drivers who have for months been the ride-hailing service's most implacable foes.

Taxi drivers in the capital of China's central province of Sichuan say Uber has almost halved their daily take in the nine months since it's appeared on the scene. They told China Real Time that Uber has swelled the numbers of the green-and-yellow-liveried licensed cabs on the smoggy streets of Chengdu, and drawn licensed drivers to the streets to protest their plight to city officials.

But they also say they're not above taking up employment with Uber.

Advertisement

"I can't yet because I've signed a four-year contract with my taxi company, and I've only been driving for two years," said Zhang Gang, a 30-year-old driver. "But all drivers are thinking of this."

Uber isn't the only object of ambivalence for drivers like Mr. Zhang. They also single out other ride-hailing

services like Kuaidi Dache and Didi Dache. The drivers' protests against these apps [reflect similar outrage in other Chinese cities](#) like Guangzhou and Shanghai, and [even in global capitals like Paris](#).

Chengdu officials [have descended on the local offices of Uber](#) in heightened scrutiny of the company's operations, and its legality remains unclear. Local Uber and transport officials weren't immediately available for comment.

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Guangzhou [raided Uber's offices earlier this month](#) and has since [sought to launch a rival service](#).

Shanghai officials last week [said they would launch](#) a ride-hailing service combining local apps.

Even as they heap blame on Uber, licensed drivers cast an envious eye on what its fleet can afford. Licensed drivers say they work longer hours for far less money. A licensed driver might take home 4,000 yuan (\$645) monthly, about half of what an Uber driver stands to make, they say.

"I now have to work 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. just to make what I used to be able to from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.," said Lin Daxin, a 54-year-old driver. None of the licensed drivers wanted to drive licensed cabs anymore, Mr. Lin said.

Unlike licensed cabs, Uber dispenses with the get-on fare, which in Chengdu amounts to eight yuan (\$1.29). Uber also gives a bigger cut of the fare to their drivers. The charge for idling is only one-third of the same fee charged in a licensed taxi, drivers say – a meaningful difference for Chengdu residents dealing with chronic traffic jams.

That's been a hit with residents of Chengdu, a city of 14 million people with just two subway lines and hours of daily gridlock. "I've used Uber, it's convenient, and I don't have to wait too long, and it's cheaper," said Zhou Jie, a hotel deli worker. Ms. Zhou forks out 30 yuan (\$4.80) to get to work by licensed cab. Via Uber, she said, the bill comes to just 20 yuan.

Chengdu taxi drivers are awaiting a final decision from their local government by June.

For young drivers like Mr. Zhang, the future looks like it's arrived – unless it hasn't. On its website last week, Uber was continuing to roll out recruitment advertisements in Chinese. A simple online form takes just a couple of minutes to fill out, and after a short training video session – presto! – another Uber driver is born.

Does he think he'll make the switch to Uber? Mr. Zhang mulls it over for an instant.

"It depends on what the government will do," he said. "I don't know what the future will be."

—Chuin-Wei Yap and Kersten Zhang

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India Asks Internet Service Providers to Block Uber Website in Delhi

Move is the latest setback to Uber's rapid expansion in India



An Indian auto rickshaw driver shows the Uber app in New Delhi, India, 12 April 2015. PHOTO: EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

By **R. JAI KRISHNA** and **JOANNA SUGDEN**

Updated May 14, 2015 12:03 p.m. ET

NEW DELHI—India has ordered Internet service providers to block the websites of Uber Technologies Inc. and other car-hailing companies in New Delhi because they have been operating despite a ban.

The order, which affected Uber rivals Ola and TaxiForSure, stopped short of blocking the firms' smartphone apps, the main way their customers book cars.

"There are some technical constraints to blocking apps" in a particular city, said a Department of Telecommunications official who asked not to be named.

The order from the Department of Telecommunications, a copy of which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, was issued on Tuesday. As of Thursday evening the Uber, Ola and TaxiForSure websites had still not been blocked in New Delhi.

A representative from Uber and a spokesman for Ola declined to comment. A TaxiForSure representative couldn't be reached for comment. Ola and TaxiForSure are both owned by ANI Technologies Pvt.

Uber, which has been expanding rapidly in India, ran into trouble in New Delhi in December when a passenger alleged she had been raped by the driver of a car she booked through Uber. The driver has pleaded innocent in court. His trial is ongoing.

The allegation led state authorities in the country's capital city to ban app-based car-booking services that were operating without radio-taxi permits. After a brief break, Uber restarted operations in the city in January, saying it was waiting for its radio-taxi license to be processed. Ola has also been operating despite the ban.

The Delhi Transport Department asked the federal government to block the companies' apps in March as they weren't complying with the ban. The Department of Telecommunications is empowered to block public access to websites under India's Information Technology Act. However, it doesn't have the technical capability to block an app in a particular state without barring access to it in the rest of the country, according to the Department of Telecommunications official.

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