

Hong Kong protest crisis being watched closely by Beijing task force in Shenzhen for nearly a month, with bottom line being 'no bloodshed'

Thursday 4 July 2019, by [CHEUNG Gary](#), [JUN Mai](#) (Date first published: 3 July 2019).

Sources reveal task force sent to neighbouring special economic zone on June 9, when an estimated 1 million people took to streets

Top priority for central government is to keep Hong Kong stable and avoid bloodshed.

Beijing has been closely monitoring the social unrest and protest violence in Hong Kong through a task force stationed across the border in Shenzhen for nearly a month, since trouble first broke out over the government's now-suspended extradition bill, sources have told the Post.

"The central government highly appreciates the work of Hong Kong police and believes they have handled the pressure and protests well, especially the way they handled the clearance operation of the Legislative Council without causing any bloodshed," one source said, referring to the storming of the legislature by mostly young protesters on Monday.

The continuing presence of the task force reflects the gravity of the situation and the serious concern with which Beijing is watching the crisis in Hong Kong.

"The bottom line for Beijing is to keep Hong Kong stable and to avoid bloodshed. The strategy is to avoid escalation of violent confrontation and remain calm but firm over issues of principle," the source said.

The task force was deployed on June 9, when an estimated 1 million people took to the streets to protest against the bill, which would allow the transfer of criminal suspects to mainland China and other jurisdictions with which Hong Kong does not now have fugitive agreements.

Beijing-based academic Tian Feilong, a specialist in Hong Kong studies, said that the central government would not directly intervene in the day-to-day operation of the city's government as long as it did not lose control.

"The central government does not want to get directly involved at this stage," he said, rejecting speculation that Beijing was micromanaging the Hong Kong government's handling of the crisis". Sources also told the Post that top Beijing officials were in Shenzhen last month to assess the mood in Hong Kong after the suspension of the bill.

Two sources said Vice-Premier Han Zheng, the state leader in charge of Hong Kong affairs, had met the city's embattled leader, Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor before June 15, the day she suspended the bill.

All relevant mainland Chinese agencies, including the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office, the Ministry of Public Security and the United Front Works Department, have recently sent officials to Hong Kong to gather intelligence.

On the diplomatic front, Beijing lodged strong protests with London on Wednesday over British

Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt's warning that China would face serious consequences if it failed to honour their 1984 agreement on Hong Kong's transfer of sovereignty.

Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said that Beijing had made "stern representations" to Britain over the comments, and accused Hunt of still harbouring a "colonial illusion".
"We called on the British side, especially Hunt, to stop being overconfident and grossly interfering in Hong Kong affairs. This is doomed to fail," Geng said.

British Prime Minister Theresa May later told parliament that she had been in touch with Beijing to raise concerns about events in Hong Kong.

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"It is vital that Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms set down in the Sino-British Joint Declaration are respected," she said.

Hong Kong's first post-handover chief executive, Tung Chee-hwa, said during a meeting with media executives that Beijing supported Carrie Lam to continue as the city's leader.

Tung, now an elder statesman, said that replacing her would not solve the problem, and called for a stronger executive-led government.

Tung said he had observed several "professional thugs" among the protesters who smashed through Legco's glass doors on Monday, and was angered by the rule of law being undermined.

He did not elaborate on who the perpetrators could have been, but noted that there was no special branch gathering such intelligence, unlike in the pre-handover days.

Tung also branded liberal studies a "failure", although the subject was introduced for senior secondary students to foster critical thinking skills when he was in charge in the early 2000s.

Former Legco president Jasper Tsang Yok-sing suggested that Lam could ease tensions by pardoning those arrested over the protest violence after their cases went through the legal process of prosecution.

An amnesty would help, he said, attributing the crisis to deep-rooted problems in society stemming from the lack of political reform.

Property tycoon Gordon Wu Ying-sheung, chairman of Hopewell Holdings, warned that the protest violence would harm Hong Kong's image as a stable business hub.

Investors would avoid the city if the law-and-order situation continued to deteriorate, he said.

Liberal Party leader Felix Chung Kwok-pan said on a radio programme that the Legco secretariat office had been seriously damaged and some computer servers lost.

"The Legislative Council's operation will basically make no progress for the coming half-year, or even the coming year," said Chung, who represents the textile and garment industry.

Protesters assaulted the Legco building in Admiralty for more than 11 hours on Monday, including a three-hour rampage inside the building that left a trail of damage and an estimated repair bill of HK\$10 million (US\$1.3 million).

Carrie Lam vowed on Tuesday to pursue those who had unleashed the unprecedented chaos "to the end".

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P.S.

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