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Foreign Policy/International Relations

US taps allies to pressure China over Hong Kong national security law (SCMP, May 29): The US has stepped up diplomatic pressure against China's move to impose a national security law on Hong Kong, forming a common position with the UK, Australia and Canada. In a four-nation statement, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his counterparts called on China to work with Hongkongers on forging a way forward to honour its commitments made under the Sino-British Joint Declaration. The four foreign ministers say the national security law would undermine the 'one country, two systems framework'. Beijing has said the joint declaration, reached between UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang in 1984, was no longer valid since Hong Kong's handover of sovereignty in 1997.

Hongkongers with BN(O) passports could get British citizenship if Beijing imposes national security law, Dominic Raab says (SCMP, May 29): About 300,000 Hongkongers hold the BN(O) passports, which were issued to Hongkongers born before the 1997 handover. "If China continues down this path and implements this national security legislation we will change that status, and we will remove that six-month limit and allow those BN(O) passport holders to come to the UK and to apply to work and study for extendable periods of 12 months, and that would itself provide a pathway to future citizenship," Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said. "In the meantime we urge China to step back from the brink and live up to its responsibilities as a leading member of the international community," he added.

What to expect now US deems Hong Kong no longer autonomous (SCMP, May 28): US President Donald Trump has to decide what actions to take after the US state department told Congress that Hong Kong was no longer considered autonomous from China, an assessment that could threaten the city's long-standing special trading status. "A lot of options were being considered, including personnel and sanctions as determined in the United States-Hong Kong Policy Act of 1992 and in the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act [of 2019]," US State Department said. A revocation of Hong Kong's special trading status with the US will put an end to the preferential economic and trade treatment the city has enjoyed and which has, at least partly, contributed to making it the financial and business hub in the region.

Taiwan will help fleeing Hongkongers move to island, Tsai Ing-wen says (SCMP, May 27): Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has assured Hongkongers that her government would come up with special measures to help them relocate to the island. Tsai said her cabinet would form an ad hoc committee to work out a humanitarian action plan for Hong Kong people. Under the plan, the Mainland Affairs Council, the island's top mainland policy planner, would establish concrete ways for the administration to help Hongkongers "live, relocate and work in Taiwan", Tsai said.

EU leader promises to put pressure on China over Hong Kong security law (SCMP, May 27): Charles Michel, President of the European Council, has promised to put more pressure on the Chinese authorities over their plans for a Hong Kong national security law, saying the bloc is "not naive" about China's behaviour around the world. "Of course we attach great importance to the preservation of Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy. We are in permanent dialogue with the Chinese authorities in order to express our opinions and to defend our interests. You know we also support the important principle, 'one country two systems'," he said.

Office of China's foreign ministry in city hits out at certain countries for making 'irresponsible comments' about law (SCMP, May 24): Office of the Commissioner of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong condemned certain countries' interference in Hong Kong affairs, urging them to respect China's sovereignty and abide by international law. "Some countries made irresponsible comments, accusations and even threats" after the resolution was revealed, a spokesman said. Those countries held "double standards" and "bandit logic" when they upheld national security values on one hand, but on the other, tried to undermine China's efforts to maintain sovereignty, he said.

More than 200 parliamentarians and policymakers from 23 countries condemn Beijing's proposed national security law for Hong Kong (SCMP, May 24): More than 200 parliamentarians and policymakers from 23 countries have issued a joint statement condemning Beijing's move to introduce a national security law for Hong Kong and calling for governments to raise a voice against it. The signatories were led by Hong Kong's last colonial governor Chris Patten, former British foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind, US senators Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, Marco Rubio, 12 US congressmen, dozens of British MPs, as well as parliamentarians from Europe, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, India, Indonesia, South Korea as well as Malaysia.

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International opposition mounts against China's proposed security law for Hong Kong (SCMP, May 23): Foreign ministers of Britain, Australia and Canada issuing a joint statement of alarm about the move and the European Union calling for the need to preserve the city's high degree of autonomy. "Making such a law on Hong Kong's behalf without the direct participation of its people, legislature or judiciary would clearly undermine the principle of 'one country, two systems', under which Hong Kong is guaranteed a high degree of autonomy." They stressed that the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 remains legally binding and requires the city to maintain a high degree of autonomy until 2047. The European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, issued a statement on behalf of the entire bloc, containing a thinly veiled criticism of China's bid to unilaterally impose security laws on Hong Kong.

Mainland Relation

Beijing will not be swayed over national security law for Hong Kong (SCMP, May 25): Beijing's determination to implement a new national security law for Hong Kong must not be underestimated, as the decision was reached after careful consideration of the interests of the country and city, Vice-Premier Han Zheng told local deputies to China's legislature. Han is the state leader overseeing Hong Kong and Macau affairs. "Don't underestimate Beijing's determination. When the decision is made, we will implement it till the end," the delegation's deputy convenor, Wong Yuk-shan, quoted the leader as saying. "Han stressed that the move was made after careful deliberation, taking into account the long-term interests of Hong Kong, and more importantly, of the state and the nation."

National security law will not damage Hong Kong's freedoms, Chinese foreign minister says (SCMP, May 25): Beijing's national security law for Hong Kong will not damage the city's autonomy or freedoms, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said. The proposed legislation was aimed only at a "very narrow category of acts that seriously jeopardise national security", such as "treason, secession, sedition or subversion", he said. The law would have "no impact on Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, the rights and freedoms of Hong Kong residents, or the legitimate rights and interests of foreign investors in Hong Kong", Wang said.

Keep 'political virus' of unrest off streets, Beijing urges as Covid-19 eases (SCMP, May 6): In its sixth such statement since April, the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office says 'forces orchestrating the black violence' want the city to break from China. Beijing has ramped up its broadsides against a return to chaotic anti-government protests in Hong Kong on the back of an easing coronavirus situation, this time warning that it will not allow the "political virus" of violence to turn the city into an independent entity.

Domestic Policy/Politics

Police draw on past 'mistakes' to break up gatherings early with quick-fire arrests (SCMP, May 28): Attempts by anti-government protesters to stage large-scale demonstrations in Hong Kong against two controversial proposed laws were foiled on May 27 by officers making swift arrests under a more robust strategy refined from lessons learned during last year's unrest, according to police. Many of the more than 360 arrested were caught even before protests had started against Beijing's planned national security law for Hong Kong and the national anthem bill, which local lawmakers were debating. Hong Kong police chief Chris Tang hailed the proactive tactics as a success, adding that the professionalism of officers had rendered radical behaviour futile.

Bar Association questions Beijing's legal power to enact national security law, identifies 'problematic' features (SCMP, May 25): Beijing appears to have no legal authority to enact its proposed national security law for Hong Kong by promulgation, according to the Hong Kong Bar Association, who said the plan contained "a number of worrying and problematic features". It also expressed concern over suggestions that mainland agencies would be set up to safeguard national security within the city. It also pointed out there was no assurance that the proposed legislation – given its status as a national law – would comply with provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Hong Kong is a signatory.

Tear gas fired, arrests made as thousands protest against Beijing's planned national security law for Hong Kong (SCMP, May 24): Police fired multiple rounds of tear gas in shopping district as thousands took to the streets to protest against Beijing's planned national security law for the city, even as top Chinese officials sought to ease fears about its impact on local freedoms but remained stern about seeing it implemented. Police said at least 180 people were arrested – mostly on suspicion of unauthorised assembly, unlawful assembly and disorderly conduct in a public place. The Hong Kong government said it strongly condemned rioters' illegal acts and supported the resolute enforcement actions of police.

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Chief Executive Carrie Lam vows ‘full support’ for national security law (SCMP, May 23): Chief Executive Carrie Lam met the press with her full cabinet on hand to support national security law. She insisted Hong Kong’s freedoms and fundamentals would remain sound. She sought to assure residents and investors that the law would protect, rather than hurt, their rights. She maintained that it would not undermine the governing principle of “one country, two systems” for Hong Kong, its high degree of autonomy or the cherished principle of “Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong”.

Pro-establishment bloc installs chairwoman on key committee (SCMP, May 19): Hong Kong’s pro-establishment lawmakers seized control of an influential legislative committee in a chaotic meeting as they reinstated one of their own as chairwoman, ending a deadlock that had sparked a row between Beijing and the opposition bloc. Starry Lee was re-elected to lead the powerful House Committee. Civic Party lawmaker Dennis Kwok had presided over the previous 17 meetings as deputy chairman and was accused of deliberately delaying the election as a political manoeuvre to block the passage of laws the opposition disagreed with, most significantly the national anthem bill.

No systemic problem with policing, but room to improve, watchdog concludes (SCMP, May 16): Policing in Hong Kong has no systemic problem and the use of force was only in response to violence during last year’s chaotic anti-government protests, Independent Police Complaints Council IPCC’s long-awaited report has concluded, while also recommending areas for improvement in internal enforcement and communication with the public. While the IPCC maintained that investigating individual officers’ conduct was beyond the scope of its statutory powers, the report was widely criticised by opposition politicians, human-rights watchers and others who renewed calls for an independent commission of inquiry into allegations of police brutality.

Coronavirus shutdown eases (SCMP, May 5): Hong Kong will start reopening most public entertainment venues and allow people to go out in groups of up to eight from May 8 as the city begins easing social-distancing rules, on the back of 16 straight days without a new local coronavirus infection. But nightclubs, saunas, party rooms and karaoke lounges must remain shut under the new measures. School pupils would return to classes in stages from May 27.

Economy/Finance

City’s future is in servicing Chinese firms, says top city economist (SCMP, May 29): Hong Kong’s economic role has been gradually shifting towards serving mainland firms in a way that will eventually make the city indispensable to Beijing, Professor Francis Lui said, as China moved a step closer to imposing a new security law on the financial hub. “A lot of capital flows from China into Hong Kong, and then flows back to China, making a circle of funding. This is the role that Hong Kong plays,” said Lui, who is also a regular government adviser. Hong Kong could build on its trusted financial system that have proved crucial in enabling Beijing to allocate capital more efficiently, and helped mainland firms, he said.

City awaits Trump’s response, casting shadow over long-term economic status (SCMP, May 28): Economists, diplomats and business figures were scrambling to quantify the effect of Washington’s decision to deem Hong Kong “no longer autonomous” from China. Should Trump go gung-ho on China, there would be no direct change to Hong Kong’s international status. It would remain a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation group. The direct economic impact would be sharp, but short-term, analysts said. But in the long run it will be a huge blow to Hong Kong’s image as an international commercial centre – even as a gateway to China. “Hong Kong cannot be replicated, the unique density of professionals, the transparency of the system, the rule of law, the kind of debate possibilities, the openness. They’re definitely important for developing business in China, for many of us it’s being challenged right now,” Joerg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce for China in Beijing, said.

Trade declines in April, but drop-off eases slightly (SCMP, May 26): Exports fell by 3.7 per cent against a year earlier to HK\$309.5 billion (US\$39.89 billion), less than the 5.8 per cent drop recorded in March, the Census and Statistics Department said. The value of imports fell by 6.7 per cent against a year ago, to HK\$332.8 billion in April, following an 11.1 per cent decline in March. For the first four months of the year, exports decreased by 8.1 per cent over the same period a year ago, while imports were down by 9.1 per cent.

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National security law adds fresh risks to Hong Kong's status as business hub, commerce chambers warn (SCMP, May 23): The proposed national security law for Hong Kong could undermine the city's status as a business hub and worsen risks it already faces from the economic war between China and the United States, the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong has warned. Any moves that questioned the integrity of the one country, two systems policy, which ensured the city's high degree of autonomy and transparency, were "a cause for great concern", the German Industry and Commerce warned. The benchmark Hang Seng Index slumped 5.56 per cent, its worst daily drop in nearly five years. The Hong Kong dollar weakened against the US greenback, to which it is pegged, hitting HK\$7.756, its weakest in more than two weeks. ING chief economist Iris Pang predicted the new law will trigger more violence and protests, wreaking further havoc on retailers and other businesses, deepening Hong Kong's recession.

Jobless rate rises to 5.2 per cent, highest in more than a decade (SCMP, May 19): Jobless rate rose to 5.2 per cent for the February to April period, the highest in more than a decade, as the coronavirus pandemic continued to hammer businesses across the city. The figures came as Secretary for Labour and Welfare Dr Law Chi-kwong said more than 90 per cent of employers were expected to apply for wage subsidies under the HK\$81 billion (US\$10.5 billion) coronavirus relief scheme.

Tourist figures collapse, with arrivals down almost 100 per cent in April (SCMP, May 15): The havoc wreaked on Hong Kong's economy by the coronavirus pandemic spilled into April as the number of tourists arriving in the city crumbled almost 100 per cent year on year. There were only about 4,100 arrivals for the month because of the global lockdown. In the first four months of this year, tourist arrivals slumped 85.3 per cent, to 3.49 million, from the same period last year.

Finance chief sees hope for third quarter, but warns return of protests could derail retailers' prospects (SCMP, May 10): Financial chief Paul Chan said there could be light at the end of the tunnel for the city's economy in the third quarter of this year, while doubling down on his call for an end to protests, which he warned could further hurt local businesses and restaurants. It was worrying that anti-government protests had revived recently, Chan said, especially when the government had relaxed some Covid-19 social-distancing measures.

Macao

What can Hong Kong learn from Macau's experience of national security legislation? (SCMP, May 22): Macau brought in the national security legislation on its own in 2009 but commentators warn of its limitations as a model for Hong Kong. Its Legislative Assembly passed a bill last year to amend the Judicial Organisation Framework Law, and stipulated that all cases involving national security would only be tried by local judges of Chinese nationality. "It would also trigger another round of social unrest as Hong Kong people treasure the rule of law and freedom more than Macau people do," said political scientist Eilo Yu. Yu said due to the lack of judicial professionals in the casino hub, Chinese authorities have started sending mainland-born judges to work in Macau courts.

Special Focus

National People's Congress approves resolution to impose security law on Hong Kong (SCMP, May 29): China's top legislature approved a resolution for a national security law tailor-made for a troubled Hong Kong, defining in its final version a firm role for the city's leader to educate residents on sovereignty and drawing a line against independence advocacy. Chief Executive Carrie Lam herself issued an open letter to the people of Hong Kong the same evening, urging understanding and acceptance of the reasons behind the legislation as she warned that the city had been "traumatised" by a year of violent protests, leaving it as a "gaping hole" in the country's national security. Opposition lawmaker Tanya Chan, convenor of the pro-democracy camp, said the NPC's approval was tantamount to announcing the death of "one country, two systems".

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