



CNN – Today

Hong Kong Protests, China Meaning Robert Lawrence Kuhn, August 12, 2019

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HONG KONG PROTESTS
BEIJING'S PATIENCE APPEARS TO WEAR THIN
Beijing warns protesters showing "signs of terrorism"

LIVE
CNN
12:06 AM CET

CNN TODAY Goldman Sachs CEO: Recession chances are "relatively low"



CNN HOST [Michael Holmes]: Now Beijing's rhetoric about the demonstrations is becoming increasingly ominous. It is now using the word "terror" to describe the protesters actions. In its latest statement, officials accusing them of pushing Hong Kong towards a quote "bottomless abyss" if the terror atrocities are allowed to continue. And the Hong Kong and Macao Office says quote, "In the past few days, Hong Kong's radical demonstrators have repeatedly attacked police officers with extremely dangerous tools. They have already constituted serious violent crimes and have begun to show signs of terrorism." And as the protests continue, Beijing's comments on them and its threatening tone have become much more harsh, after as many as a million people marched against the proposed Extradition Law on June the 9th.





CNN HOST: Beijing's had simply said it supports the law, but it didn't comment on the protests. But then on June 12, when thousands blocked Hong Kong's legislature from considering the law, Beijing called it "lawlessness" and a "riot". And then, July 1st, when protesters stormed that legislature, China branded it a quote "serious illegal act". Well, as the protests continued and demonstrators clashed with police, Beijing seemed to be losing patience. On June 22nd, China's Foreign Ministry said quote "Radical protesters were testing the limits of 'One Country Two Systems'." You can see how the comments have grown over time. Then, that brings us to Monday when China now says the protests are degenerating into terrorism.





CNN HOST: Let's get some perspective now from Robert Lawrence Kuhn. He is a longtime adviser to Chinese leaders and corporations and the author of "*How China's Leaders Think*". He joins us now via Skype from New York. This language, starting to show signs of "terrorism". Terrorism is a trigger word, isn't it? It can give the mainland the justification for sending security forces into Hong Kong, is that right?





RLK: Stability is the highest priority in China. It's the foundation of China's economic development; it has been the byword for decades in China. And China's watching very closely. The other principal you mentioned — "One Country Two Systems" — is almost equally important to China. And so we have a tension that has been building. The Mainland government, Beijing, will defer as much as possible to the local government in Hong Kong to protect "One Country Two Systems" principle. But then again, stability is a major factor.





RLK: There are at least three "red lines" for China. The first, is any movement towards independence or even quasi independence by Hong Kong. The second, is any sort of using Hong Kong as a base to undermine the political system of the mainland. And, third, of course, is the growing chaos, where chaos would undermine the economic viability in Hong Kong, because Hong Kong is so important to China on so many levels.





RLK: You have these tensions rising and you see it in the rhetoric, just as you said, an increasing recognition that China might have to do more than it would like — it would like to just support the local government and have them ratchet up as much as possible. But if they were not able to contain the violence over time, China would resort to whatever it would have to do. China will do the absolute minimum it has to do, but it will not allow those three red lines to be crossed.





CNN HOST: So, how long do you think it can go on like this? I mean, daily, weekly, protests that are becoming more and more violent. When does patience run out? What is the breaking point? And what would it look like if Chinese security came across?





RLK: Once again, China will do, I believe, the absolute minimum it has to do to maintain order, to maintain stability, and prevent those red lines from being crossed. I think this is an open question about what they will do. The first thing they want to do is to support the local police, the local government, and encourage them to ratchet up their capacity to deal with the violence.





RLK: If that should turn out to not be successful over time, China will intervene in some matter, once again trying to do as minimum as possible, so as not to disrupt the "One Country Two System" concept — but in fact China saying it's defending that concept by defending rule of law and defending stability, which affect the whole relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland.





RLK: You have to remember that Hong Kong is enormously important for China on many levels. It's now the center of what's called the "Guangdong Hong Kong Macao Greater Bay Area"; it's an integrated economic development plan, which is designed to transform the Chinese economy. This is a big deal. The GDP of the Greater Bay Area is about \$1.7 trillion dollars, 12 percent of the whole country's GDP, projected to be \$3.5 trillion by 2030. Hong Kong is a major factor in this Plan; Hong Kong is central to that.

And if this is undermined, that's a big problem for China.





CNN HOST: We're just showing video of China, some Chinese government video of basically war maps for how they might deal with any dissent — and they are really sending a very big message. And as you, if they came across, they may do so in a minimalist way, but it is in some ways “crossing the Rubicon” to come in at all. What are the political risks of going in, in terms of the special status of Hong Kong? If they come over, “One Country Two Systems” becomes “one system” in terms of security, if nothing else.



RLK: I think you put your finger on the right word and that is "risk". President Xi Jinping has talked about "three major battles" over the last several years since the 19th Party Congress. The first is broad risk — financial risks, social risks — and then also fighting poverty and fighting pollution. But "risk" is number one. And so, you have this tradeoff between "What is the risk of letting the violence go on?" and "What is the risk to the 'One Country Two Systems'?" What is the risk to the rule of law, to Hong Kong as an economic center of China's future development plans, versus the other side, by crossing the border, crossing the Rubicon, that is obviously a difference to the "One Country Two Systems" concept.





RLK: So, you have a tension between different kinds of "goods" [principles] , as the Chinese leadership would look at it.



CNN HOST: Robert Lawrence Kuhn always great to get you on and your perspective. Thanks so much.

