



CNN – Today

Hong Kong, Violent Protests, China
Robert Lawrence Kuhn, July 1, 2019

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BREAKING NEWS
HK POLICE SECURE LEGISLATIVE BUILDING AFTER PROTESTS

Robert Lawrence Kuhn | Author, "How China's Leaders Think"

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Host: My next guest is a long-term advisor to China's leaders and corporations, and he's the author of "How China's Leaders Think." Robert Lawrence Kuhn joining me now from New York with his perspective. A pleasure to have you on, sir. First of all, I just want to get your take on the police response and the fact that it was delayed by hours. We had our Matt Rivers, our correspondent on the ground there, who was in the legislative council while the protestors were vandalizing the walls and ruining the furniture, you know, putting graffiti on the walls for at least two hours, he said.

Host: Police finally moved in and you had the police commissioner just moments ago saying that there were safety precautions that they had to take into account, but a pro-democracy lawmaker by the name of Fernando Chung told CNN this. Quote, "This is a complete trap. I'm sorry that people played into it. Police did not do anything, they wanted this to happen. They wanted the public to see this." Is that a far-fetched idea?



RLK: I'm not a great fan of conspiracy theories, no matter where we find them. But there's certainly been a lot of different kinds of activities and motivations in Hong Kong now. Clearly the violence of a few hundred people undermined the peaceful protests and thoughtful ideas of more than 2 million people. Hong Kong people in general are not political. But many of them do not want their freedoms, which they've had for obviously decades, to be interrupted. The violence undermines that. Whether there was a police conspiracy to let them do it, to allow the violence to severely undermine the protest — some people might have thought that way. I doubt that there was some massive conspiracy — in today's world, that gets out quickly. It's a nice thing to say, but I really don't buy it.



Host: Okay. Well I appreciate that perspective. Carrie Lam, she spoke out as well, before the police commissioner did. She condemned the violence, as she should. But she also gave a concession, she didn't really give a concession. What were your thoughts on the fact that she said, look, there's no time timetable to debate the bill, the extradition bill that everyone is protesting over. We're just going to let that die in July of 2020, a year from now. Why not just take decisive action and kill the bill immediately then?



RLK: If she would be too accommodating to the protests, not just the peaceful protest, but now the violent protest, that might encourage more of the same. To let it play out over a year, I think, is the minimum that she could do and still let the bill die and still show the people that she has been responsive to their interests. So, I think that was well thought through and well calculated to give a concession but not encourage further violence which might be encouraged by such concessions.

Host: How is Xi Jinping looking at all this? A man who recently consolidated power. I mean he has a strong man, powerful image to uphold. And this is obviously speaking against that.





RLK: One has to appreciate the importance of Hong Kong to all of China, to mainland China, to Beijing, including President Xi. I would propose there are four separate categories, two economic, two political. First of all, Hong Kong has been the window of the outside economic world to China for decades, which has enabled China's reform and opening up. So that was critical. But that's less important today with the rise of Shanghai and Shenzhen and other places in China.





RLK: The second economic reason is extremely important for the economic transformation that President Xi wants to do, that needs to do, for China's economy. And that is regional coordination. So Hong Kong, it's part of what's called the Guangdong Province, Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau, Greater Bay Area, and it's a coordinated development plan. The area has north of \$1.5 trillion GDP, 12% of China's GDP. If it were a separate country in the world, it'd be close to the top 10, and this is going to be a driver of China's new economy. Hong Kong would play a critical part.



RLK: Politically, there are two reasons. Hong Kong is the exemplification of the "one country, two systems" idea, which was promulgated in order to have the repatriation of Hong Kong. And it is held out as a model for Taiwan in the future by China. So this causes problems for that. And finally, Hong Kong is a representation of China to the world, China's soft power. And this is a problem for that too. So you have this broad picture. I think it's important to understand it for its economic importance first and for its political importance second.





Host: Just quickly, cause we do have to go, is this a turning point for full-fledged democratic rights or a turning point for Xi Jinping, who's going to allow the erosion of freedom, the semi-autonomy of Hong Kong to go away?

RLK: I would reject both extremes. I think both are really impossible to happen. China will not let Hong Kong even move towards quasi-independence, certainly not allow chaos either. And there's no way that, they're going to right now impose a much more strict controls. Over time, I think there will be internal pressures to get more control of Hong Kong, maybe through education of its young people in different ways. But history has shown that will be problematic.

Host: Yeah. A pleasure to get your expertise on this. Robert Lawrence Kuhn, thank you for your time.

