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Hong Kong Security Law - China NPC

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BBC WORLD NEWS

China new Hong Kong law
New law can be imposed directly

BBC HOST: Hello and a warm welcome to audiences in the U.K. and around the world. That has been strong international condemnation today of China's proposed new security law for Hong Kong. Britain, Australia and Canada have said introducing such legislation would undermine the principle of "one country, two systems". The U.S. secretary state, Mike Pompeo, called it disastrous.

Let's talk more then with Robert Lawrence Kuhn. He's a longtime adviser to the Chinese government and he joins me from Los Angeles.

Robert, it's really lovely to have you with us. We've had plenty of reaction from Hong Kong in the last 24 hours, but I want to understand where Beijing is coming from on this? What do you think the thinking is behind it?



▪ Hong Kong: Pompeo condemns China's law as 'death knell' for freedoms

ROBERT LAWRENCE KUHN:
It's critical to understand the importance of this year 2020. China has set what they call "Two Centenary" goals: 2020 for the so-called "moderately prosperous society" (as next year is the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China), and then 2050 for "full modernization" (2049 is the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China). So, focus on this year: the moderately prosperous society. What does that mean?

There are two big pillars of this concept, which President Xi Jinping has called the "Chinese Dream", or the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation. One pillar is economic development and increasing the standards of living of the Chinese people — symbolized this year by the elimination of all extreme poverty in China, a remarkable accomplishment.



KUHN: The other pillar is national pride, the sovereignty of the country. And Hong Kong has been a sore in this side of this vision of China's rejuvenation — in terms of national pride.

The [proposed] national security legislation was part of the original Basic Law. Hong Kong was supposed to do it itself. It tried in 2003 and then, of course, the events of last year. And so, this is the time — as part of this moderately prosperous society, the first step of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people — that President Xi and Chinese leadership has determined that this [Hong Kong] must be solved — and it has the great support of the vast majority of the Chinese people.



BBC HOST: So, on the sovereignty issue internationally, should we see the fight over Hong Kong as a perhaps a precursor of the fight that will come over Taiwan?

KUHN: I think there are certain similarities. But as I see it with Hong Kong, there will be protests — but at this point, with most of the world focused on the COVID-19 epidemic, I think there will be more words than action. And frankly, from the business community — I hate to be a little cynical — but they will look upon stability as a critical foundation for their economic success and will continue to use the Hong Kong financial markets.

This is not a harbinger of significant encroachment in judicial independence and all the other things that China would say as part of the “one country, two systems”. It [National Security Law] is focused on the very specific issues of what they would call secession, or anti-China forces, or using Hong Kong as a base to undermine the Communist Party. These are absolutely sacrosanct redlines that China will have the legal capacity to enforce — once they pass this law — to intervene for those cases. But it won't affect the vast majority of activities in Hong Kong. And most estimates say that protests from international governments will largely be words, no actions.



BBC HOST: It's interesting you say that because I don't know if you heard earlier we had on Gary Cohn, the president's former economic adviser. He was a former president of Goldman Sachs. So he will know that their operations in Hong Kong. He was saying that this is leverage and that if they took away the special status that Hong Kong currently enjoys — because it's no longer independent — the banks would withdraw.

KUHN: Well, look, that's a possibility, I don't see this being such a critical issue for the West that it's going to make those kinds of interventions right now.

But clearly, China will not back down. I mean, that's for sure. The hope is that this could be some sort of an accommodation that will benefit all. This is a very critical issue, because if it speaks to one of the key foundations of what China has promised, what President Xi has promised, to be the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. So they're not going to back down as far as that. What this means for Taiwan in the future: this will be an additional reason that Taiwan will continue to keep its distance.



BBC HOST:
Robert, it's very good to get your thoughts. We're enjoying your artwork, as well.

KUHN: Thank you. They're all my brains. My PhD is in neuroscience, so I keep them there to remind myself.

BBC HOST: Very good. I wondered what it was. Robert, lovely to speak to. Thanks very much.



