

A Proposal on De-Escalating the Situation in Hong Kong

by Mark J. Ma

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Executive Summary

President Trump's responses to the Hong Kong situation as of today, 8/14/2019, have been measured, proportional and thoughtful. In short, the President's responses have been **PERFECT** so far.

The President's offer of direct talks with Xi is certainly an effective method to solve the problem. Should China decline, a **Special President Envoy** to help facilitate de-escalation in Hong Kong can also achieve the goal and pave the way for a face-to-face meeting between President Trump and Xi.

Without a doubt, it is better for the President and the United States to take a somewhat neutral position and play the role of a mediator when it comes to Hong Kong, instead of giving the impression of unconditional support to the protestors, which can actually embolden them and escalate the situation.

A public message along the following lines would provide the President and the US with the most flexibility in future diplomatic and trade negotiations with China:

- **In principal, the United States supports the desire for democracy of people all around the world, provided such desires are expressed in a peaceful manner.**
- **Specific to the current situation in Hong Kong, it is regrettable to see serious injuries on both sides.**
- **It is also regrettable to see the livelihood of millions of people in Hong Kong being impacted and the global financial markets affected by the situation.**
- **Therefore, we are calling for immediate direct dialogues between representatives of the protestors and the government of Hong Kong, to work on specific and verifiable steps to de-escalate the situation.**

It is further advantageous for the President to offer to send a **Special Presidential Envoy** to help facilitate the talks. However, in order for this to work, we have to be somewhat transparent with Beijing, and at least have some kind of understanding, if not outright blessing from Beijing, on this course of action. It is hard to imagine the government of Hong Kong receiving the Envoy without a nod from Beijing.

Thus, the Envoy should NOT be someone who is hawkish towards Beijing like Advisor Bolton. Beijing has made it very clear that they do not trust the hawks. Instead, someone like **HUD Secretary Ben Carson** might be perfect. Dr. Carson has the calm demeanor and empathetic heart necessary to be a great peacemaker and facilitator. He also had zero prior beef with Beijing.

Dr. Carson is someone whom all sides can respect and listen to.

The History

One must understand the history of Hong Kong in order to fully understand the complexity and delicacy of the current situation. It is also beneficial to look at Hong Kong from different perspective – the Chinese, the residents of Hong Kong, and the British.

Hong Kong was ceded to the British Empire as a colony in 1842 by China (then ruled by the Qing Dynasty), after China lost the First Opium War. Thus, the territory in and of itself has huge emotional significance to the Chinese people, not just the government in Beijing.

The First Opium War, for those unfamiliar with the history of the British Empire or East Asia, was Qing China's war on drugs. Due to the huge trade imbalance with China, the British Empire was encouraging the East India Company to sell opium to China. Governor Lin Zexu, under the order of Emperor Daoguang, confiscated and destroyed 1,210 tons of opium in 1839. The British sent in their troops and defeated the Chinese to ensure that they can sell drugs freely in China. As one of the conditions of the peace treaty, Hong Kong was given to the British as a colony.

This history is why Hong Kong has so much significance in the Chinese psyche. It was a symbol of humiliation for the Chinese, a glaring sign of the decline of a once grand civilization, an albatross around the collective necks of the Chinese people, so to speak. The agreement with the UK to transfer Hong Kong back to Chinese rule was reached under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980's. When Hong Kong was transferred back to Chinese rule in 1997, it was seen widely by the Chinese people as a sign of China's resurgence and a closure to more than a century of foreign invasions and interference in China.

The narrative is very different to the residents of Hong Kong, especially those living there today.

Along with South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, Hong Kong benefited greatly economically from the Asian economic boom in the 1960's and 70's. In fact, the four were collectively called the "Four Asian tigers." In comparison, China was under Mao's rule at the time and the Chinese people were going through some of the worst times in modern Chinese history. Thus, Hong Kongers used to look down on their cousins in the Mainland. This is very apparent in novels, films and television shows from the 1980's and early 90's.

Things started to change with China's own economic rise.

First, light manufacturing industries started leaving Hong Kong for mainland China, where labor was cheaper. Then, a significant amount of physical trade as well. After all, Hong Kong was acting as a window to China, and much of the physical goods that ended up in Hong Kong's ports were destined for China anyway. With China building up its own infrastructure, much of that trade no longer needed to be routed through Hong Kong.

Finally, the income level of the people living in mainland China started to catch up to those in Hong Kong about a decade after the transfer back to Chinese rule. The problems that this presented to ordinary Hong Kongers were two-fold. One, many mainlanders with some money to spend on a trip, but not rich enough to go to Japan or Europe chose Hong Kong as their destination. Unfortunately, some of

these tourists from the mainland are not exactly the kind of guests you want in your house. Several high-profile cases of loud and obnoxious mainlanders being in scuffles with local shop owners or allowing their kids to urinate or defecate on public streets turned public opinions against mainlanders.

What was worst, higher-income mainlanders were starting to buy apartments in Hong Kong, pushing the already high housing prices in Hong Kong through the roof. This last fact, the fact that Hong Kong is becoming increasingly unaffordable for its young people is by and large the root cause of the protests going on right now.

The British had done a decent job running Hong Kong with the introduction of the British Civil Service system. The establishment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974 further ensured that Hong Kong had one of the most transparent governments and free economies.

However, it should be pointed out that under British rule, the people of Hong Kong never had a chance to elect the Governor. The Governors were appointed by the British Monarch and often did not have prior experience in the City or speak the local language.

The last governor of Hong Kong – Chris Patten, for example, was a Conservative Party member of parliament from 1979 to 1992, and had not spent any significant amount of time in Hong Kong prior to assuming the office in 1992.

Under British rule, the Governor appointed most of the members of the Legislative Council and Executive Council. In other words, the British never allowed the people of Hong Kong to elect more than a quarter of their legislators during their reign.

These facts gave the British very little moral high ground when they argue for direct elections in Hong Kong after the handover to China. Thus, in the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini-constitution, no timetable was given on implementing direct elections. It was merely stated as the ultimate goal.

The Problem

The most pressing problem is mistrust.

Although the ultimate root cause of most of Hong Kong's problems is the growing wealth gap, the most pressing problem is mistrust. The protestors do not trust the government of Chief Executive Carrie Lam or Beijing. For its part, Beijing continues to push the "black hand" theory that British and American intelligence agencies are behind the protests. Carrie Lam is stuck in the middle, between a rock and a hard place, with her hands tied behind her back.

Obviously, the protestors have some legitimate concerns. But, at the same time, one cannot argue that all of Beijing's concerns are completely illegitimate. Losing Hong Kong would be a death sentence to any Chinese leader, let alone Xi, who presents himself as a nationalist.

Having this situation end with a repeat of Tiananmen 30 years ago, with Beijing sending in tanks and hundreds of dead bodies winding up on the streets of Hong Kong is **NOT** good for anybody. Besides the obvious implications of bloodshed, the West will be forced to enact immediate sanctions and the already precarious world economy will likely go into an immediate downward spiral.

Therefore, it is in the United States' best interest to help solve the problem. It is also in line with our values, and indeed Christian values in general, to prevent bloodshed.

President Trump is in a unique position to be the peacemaker in this situation.

The Solution

The solution is direct dialogue.

The protestors and the Hong Kong government have been talking past each other. Beijing was not helping with the talks of "black hand" and the build-up of paramilitary PAP troops and armored vehicles across the border.

Popular opinion in mainland China has turned against the Hong Kong protestors since a mainland reporter was tied up and beaten at the airport for having an "I [heart] the police" tee shirt. Xi is on the verge of feeling confident enough that true internal public sentiment will be on his side even if he sends in troops.

This is **NOT** good.

President Trump has been doing all the right things up to this point and striking the perfect balance. If the United States is too vocal in supporting the protestors, we not only give Beijing more ammo in pushing their "black hand" narrative, but might also embolden the protestors into thinking that they can escalate the situation.

We need to make it clear publicly that although we support efforts to strive for democracy, we do NOT want violence or bloodshed.

Hence the following lines in messaging:

- In principal, the United States supports the desire for democracy of people all around the world, provided such desires are expressed in a peaceful manner.
- Specific to the current situation in Hong Kong, it is regrettable to see serious injuries on both sides.
- It is also regrettable to see the livelihood of millions of people in Hong Kong being impacted and the global financial markets affected by the situation.

- Therefore, we are calling for immediate direct dialogues between representatives of the protestors and the government of Hong Kong, to work on specific and verifiable steps to de-escalate the situation.

The President's proposal of a face-to-face meeting with Xi is definitely the quickest and most direct approach. However, if Xi declines that option for whatever reason, a Special Presidential Envoy can be sent to Hong Kong to pave the way.

The following actions can be taken:

1. Inform Beijing of our intentions to help facilitate talks between protestors and the government, and de-escalate the situation.
2. Publicly announce that we intend to be the mediator in this case, not just support the protestors with rhetoric.
3. Once the choice of the Envoy is finalized, inform both Beijing and the government of Hong Kong that we will be sending a Special Presidential Envoy, who is NOT a hawk or long time China hand, but a peacemaker with a good heart.
4. Announce the choice of the Envoy publicly.
5. Propose and announce a series of measurable steps for both sides to de-escalate.
6. Invite media from around the world to be present at the talks, to ensure that they are completely transparent to the people of Hong Kong and the world.

The rest will be up to God.

References:

1. Donald J. Trump, *The Art of the Deal*
2. Xi Jinping, *On Running a Country and Handling Politics*
3. Ben Carson, *America the Beautiful*
4. Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*

(All pictured on the next page.)

