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CHINA INSIDER

CHINA INVESTING IN

'ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE' WARFARE

TO THREATEN US MILITARY SUPERIORITY

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A surveillance drone on the runway of the airport in Hotan in China's western Xinjiang region on May 30, 2019.

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HONG KONG PROTESTS

Hong Kong Protests

Reach New Intensity

CATHY HE

The city of Hong Kong has seen regular eruptions of violence and chaos over the course of almost six months of mass protests. But the level of intensity over the past week has prompted fear that the crisis may never reach a resolution.

It started with the death of a 22-year-old student on Nov. 8, who died from his injuries after falling one story from a parking garage where police had fired tear gas to disperse protesters—the first fatality connected to police actions in the continuing pro-democracy movement. His death triggered a wave of protests over the weekend.

On the morning of Nov. 11, an unarmed protester was shot at close range by a police officer—the third demonstrator injured by a live round fired by police. That sparked fresh waves of anger toward Hong Kong authorities as protesters called for a citywide strike and disrupted traffic to try to pressure the government into hearing their demands.

Tensions escalated on Nov. 12 when protesters and police engaged in an hours-long standoff lasting late into the night at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). Police fired 1,567 canisters of tear gas, 1,312 rounds of rubber bullets, and 380 bean-bag bullets—most of that at CUHK to disperse students who had set up blockades, hurled bricks, and threw petrol bombs to keep police from the campus.

A day earlier, police had charged into CUHK, other universities, and a church to make arrests—the first time authorities had entered those properties to crack down on protesters.

"Things are escalating both in frequency and in degree," said Jason Ng, lawyer and convener of Progressive Lawyers Group, a local

I hope the government can seriously consider the protesters' demands and settle this crisis. Otherwise, there will be many casualties. Hong Kong will head toward the path of no return.

Protester surmamed Chan

group of lawyers who advocate for pro-democracy causes. "That's what makes it troubling. And what makes it worse is that there's no end in sight."

Direction From Beijing?

The Hong Kong government has maintained that it can put an end to the crisis, repeatedly blaming "rioters" for intensifying the situation. The city's leader, Carrie Lam, at a recent press conference, again vowed that she wouldn't give in to protesters' demands, which include universal suffrage and an independent inquiry into alleged police brutality against protesters.

Lam's remarks came after a visit to Beijing in early November, when Chinese leader Xi Jinping and the regime's top official overseeing the city's affairs publicly backed her handling of the protests. The trip was read by some commentators as a sign that Lam received support from Beijing to harden her stance toward the protesters.

There has been a "remarkable change in her behavior, both in speech and in action," since Lam's meetings with Beijing leaders, Ng said.

"The rhetoric [used by Lam] has become much more uncompromising," he said, adding that the unprecedented police enforcement over the past week has demonstrated that such rhetoric has been matched by action.

There has been a "clear shift" by Chinese and Hong Kong authorities toward a willingness to use lethal force to reassert control of the city, Dan Garrett, author of "Counter-hegemonic Resistance in China's Hong Kong: Visualizing Protest in the City," told The Epoch Times via email.

He said the communist leadership in Beijing appears to have decided that sending in the Chinese military to quell protests would be untenable due to the potential international backlash, so they've

instead adopted the approach of militarizing riot police to forcibly subdue the protests.

"This, however, requires an aggressive ... campaign to frame the protesters as extremists and terrorists using exceptional violence, thereby necessitating and legitimating the use of lethal force," Garrett said.

The Chinese regime has been doing so for months. Chinese officials and state-run media frequently paint protesters as criminals and "extremists," and have urged a tough response by local authorities.

Geng Shuang, Chinese foreign affairs ministry spokesperson, at a regular press briefing on Nov. 13 labeled protesters as the "enemy of the people," echoing Lam, who used the same wording to describe protesters days earlier. Geng also reiterated the regime's "resolute support" for the Hong Kong government, police, and courts in taking "effective measures to severely punish illegal and criminal activities."

Top officials at a Party conclave held in late October also emphasized the need for "perfecting" Hong Kong's "legal system and law enforcement mechanism" to "safeguard national security," according to the communiqué.

That directive was reflected in recent statements made by senior regime officials, such as Zhang Xiaoming, director of the Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office within the cabinet-like State Council, who, in an article published on the office's official website on Nov. 9, said that strengthening Hong Kong's "law enforcement power" is an urgent task for the Hong Kong government.

Anger and Despair

Protests show no signs of easing, with claims of police violence growing by the day, aggravating the unrest. Social media is awash with video footage that shows instances of police aggression, including of-

icers beating subdued protesters, and pepper-spraying bystanders and journalists.

The Hong Kong police have also attracted international condemnation. A September report by Amnesty International found that police had engaged in a "disturbing pattern of reckless and unlawful tactics against people during the protests."

"You can't expect protesters to ... just roll over and let you beat them up, let you arrest them, let you even shoot them with live bullets," Ng said.

But the more the protesters push back, the more reason the police have to crack down on them, he said. "So it just becomes a vicious circle," Ng said.

Besides public anger, a growing sense of despair appears to have spread among protesters. "I feel helpless ... I don't know how to achieve my political ideals," an office worker surnamed Chan told the Hong Kong bureau of The Epoch Times. He took part in a demonstration in the central business district on Nov. 13.

Chan, an alumnus of CUHK, said he understood the actions of students who clashed with police at the university on Nov. 12, one of the most intense confrontations since the mass protests began.

"They don't know what to do to resolve the problem. They're using their last resort," he said, as he begins to cry. "I hope the government can seriously consider the protesters' demands and settle this crisis. Otherwise, there will be many casualties. Hong Kong will head toward the path of no return."

Ng believes that the movement may have reached the point where it's "never going to end." It's going to turn into a "rolling crisis," Ng said, in which the city will "simmer constantly for months or even years to come."

Eva Fu contributed to this report.

STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



Chinese military personnel gather near parked trucks and armored personnel carriers at the Shenzhen Bay stadium in Shenzhen, bordering Hong Kong in China's southern Guangdong Province, on Aug. 16, 2019.

OPINION

Is Foreign Aggression the Next Step for China?

A flagging economy and rising instability may push China's leadership to foreign adventurism as a way out of its legitimacy crisis

JAMES GORRIE

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is in crisis. That may seem to be an exaggeration, but it's not. The Party is facing the greatest challenges to its leadership since Tiananmen Square in 1989. In fact, the risks to the Party's legitimacy are even higher today because the Party could rely on rising levels of exports to the West and direct investment from it. That's no longer the case.

The trade war is helping to both reveal and exacerbate some of the deep fissures that exist in the relationship between the Chinese people and their leadership. These rifts of dissatisfaction were there long before Trump arrived, but as they grow more pronounced, they pose potentially explosive consequences for China and its leadership.

Communist Party Dissatisfaction Hurting Party Loyalty

These rifts are certainly not just about Hong Kong or even Taiwan, although they're definite factors. More concretely, it's the deep alienation that much of the mainland Chinese populace feels with regard to the Party that is the clear and present threat to domestic stability. Furthermore, this is no secret in China; everybody knows it.

The CCP most certainly understands its now-tenuous position within the minds of its subjects. In his address to the National Congress in March of this year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, acknowledged it in unusually frank terms, saying that, "Instability and uncertainty are visibly increasing and externally generated risks are on the rise." He also admitted that China's problems are "of a kind rarely seen in many years."

Thus, the Party faces growing public dissatisfaction on a variety of fronts, not just the with the economy, although that is huge, since economic growth is central to the Party's claim to political legitimacy. Additional criticisms include rampant state corruption, such as state theft of property and businesses, uncontrolled pollution, poor social services, including healthcare and unemployment benefits, as well as many other complaints.

The Party's "cure," for what ails the country, however, may be just as bad, if not worse, than the disease.

Power at Any Cost Is the CCP's Priority Some of the people may still believe that economic growth is the Party's top priority, but it isn't. Remaining in power is the Party's top priority, and containing internal instability is the key to doing so. Delivering continuous economic growth has been the

heart of that effort for decades. But that's no longer happening.

The trajectory of China's economy, at least in the near term, remains downward. This reality is only accelerating China's problems as well as the CCP's deteriorating reputation. This explains the expanding state control over the population via its "social credit system" that includes growing surveillance and punishment powers.

That may also be why, after 40 years of Party rule by consensus, that the Party has allowed Xi Jinping to take on the mantle of supreme leader, a role last held by Mao Zedong. They may have decided that one, powerful and charismatic personality will engender more loyalty than a phlegmatic council of faceless elders devoid of personality.

But that move comes with serious risks as well. Consolidating power into the hands of one person is, by definition, a destabilizing factor. Information channels and decision-making processes are narrowed, political paranoia clouds perspective and self-preservation may come at the expense of the greater good. Historical examples of the dangerous excesses of one-man rule are plentiful and recent.

What's more, resorting to the old ways of creating "economic growth" through redundant development will also prove futile. It further distorts prices and triggers bubbles without delivering ongoing economic benefit. Building more roads to nowhere and empty cities won't revitalize China's economy.

Oppression Will Shrink China's GDP and Increase Instability

Furthermore, the Party's claim that only it can guide China to a prosperous future while admitting that things are getting worse is a tough pill for the public to swallow. Undoubtedly it's an effort to rally the public's continued patience and support for the Party. But ordering expanded levels of control over the economy and greater oppression of political and religious expression in the face of deteriorating conditions won't raise GDP, either.

The reality is that as the impact of the trade war with the United States deepens and spreads out into the economy, conditions will continue to decline. The CCP's totalitarian approach will only lead to greater instability, generating more unrest, not less. The Party finds itself in a vicious downward spiral.

Playing the Foreign Aggressor Card

As noted in earlier posts, China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR, also known as Belt and Road) initiative has been a part of China's effort to expand its economic, political and cultural footprint. But it has not yet deliv-

ered the resources and economic growth needed to offset the current economic challenges. Nor will manipulating GDP data for public consumption be enough to change the reality on the ground.

As conditions get worse, the Party will certainly appeal to Chinese nationalism against the United States, commonly portrayed as a nefarious, meddling foreigner. That's what makes both Hong Kong and Taiwan quite convenient and powerful propaganda tools. Consider, for instance, that Taiwan's per capita income is almost two-and-a-half times that of China, while Hong Kong's is almost four times higher. This simple reality is undeniable proof that the CCP is not needed in China for the people and the country to prosper.

But rather than change the political and economic system in response to that fact, which would certainly mean the eradication of the Party from China, the CCP would prefer to change the facts. Both Taiwan and Hong Kong are allied with the West, specifically, the United States. Hongkongers waving the American flag and appealing to the United States for protection against any crackdown by the CCP have provided the Party with the perfect foil: the return of the threat of foreign intervention in China.

The Taiwan situation, with its de facto alliance with the United States, may be even more of a catalyst for China's military intervention than Hong Kong. Xi Jinping has explicitly stated that "re-unification" with the "renegade province" is inevitable. The aggressive policies of the Trump administration may well have accelerated those plans.

Since 2016, Beijing has systemically isolated Taiwan from most of its regional allies. That's more than just a message. It's an effort by China to set the regional political table prior to taking some sort of political, if not military, action against Taiwan. The CCP's public accusations against the United States of "interfering in China's internal affairs" and "damaging its sovereignty" with its arms sales to Taipei underscores this narrative.

Concurrently, as things become worse in China, the more instability will rise and the people's patience with the CCP will fall. This dynamic will only deepen the crisis in the Party. It also makes it more likely that China will turn to nationalistic militarism to divert the people's focus away from the worsening conditions and their cause.

James Gorrie is a writer and speaker based in Southern California. He is the author of "The China Crisis."

Views expressed in this article are the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Epoch Times.



Protesters and journalists react, after police fired tear gas at the Chinese University of Hong Kong on Nov. 12, 2019.

DALE DE LA REY/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



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