



# The Bottom Line

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## HONG KONG PROTESTS CAUSE DISRUPTIONS

### Summary

Legislation passed in June allowing the extradition of suspects between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China sparked immediate protests by supporters of democracy in Hong Kong. Five months later, both sides have escalated tactics causing disruptions throughout the city.

### Background

Hong Kong, long a British territory, was regained by China in 1997. The 1984 Sino-British joint declaration, which set out the terms of the handover, included guarantees of free speech, a free press, capitalist markets, and English common law for 50 years. That arrangement, known as “one country, two systems,” is almost halfway to its expiration date. Many in Hong Kong don’t want to give up those freedoms and are demanding greater self-determination—a call that’s gained urgency as China increasingly asserts its authority over restless outposts, such as Taiwan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong itself. The current crisis was sparked by a murder. Chan Tong-kai was arrested in Hong Kong in March 2018 and admitted to killing 20-year old Poon Hiu-wing, his pregnant girlfriend, while on vacation in Taiwan. Hong Kong and Taiwan do not have an extradition agreement, and do not usually provide cross-border legal assistance. After serving 19 months for money laundering, resulting from cash and valuables stolen from Poon, Chan was scheduled to be released. Hong Kong’s leader, Carrie Lam, proposed changes to the extradition law to allow fugitives to be sent to Taiwan, China, and Macao. Hong Kong officials have described the lack of an extradition treaty as a “loophole,” but according to former British foreign secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, “the UK made a conscious decision to create a clear divide between the two systems so that the rule of law remains robust.” Former Hong Kong lawmaker, Emily Lau, agrees that “nobody can guarantee that anyone sent to mainland China would get a fair trial.”

### Current Status

Protestors fear allowing China to encroach on their freedoms. As the standoff with the government stretches on, what began as peaceful mass marches increasingly descend into violent clashes with police. The movement has published their demands as follows:

- Withdraw the extradition bill completely (accomplished in October)
- Set up an independent inquiry to probe police brutality
- Withdraw a characterization of early protests as “riots”
- Release those arrested at protests
- Implement universal suffrage in Hong Kong

City-wide strikes have been aimed at the transportation network, including HK International Airport, where flights were canceled several days in August. Protestors have been routinely setting up roadblocks and disrupting service at rail and bus station causing traffic delays in the city center. Last week, the U.S. Senate passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, which bans the export of crowd-control munitions (tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets, and stun guns) to the HK Police and enacts sanctions against officials responsible for human rights violations. The bill would require annual certification that Hong Kong is sufficiently autonomous from China to justify its special trading status. China has condemned the move as a “violation of international law.” China also contends that the bill endangers U.S.-China relations and the current trade negotiations, already tenuous at best.

### Impact

The measure was passed nearly unanimously by both the House and Senate, and is headed for President Trump’s desk. Although the president may be hesitant to anger the Chinese at this phase of the trade negotiations, Congress appears to have the votes to override a veto. Beijing is now closely monitoring the U.S. president’s next move and may decide to ‘fight and talk alternatively.’