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Hong Kong —The End of Freedom Begins

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"Hong Kong is not China." This was the battle cry of many protesters in Hong Kong on Sunday as they entered into their seventh week of demonstrations. But the activists were met that night with a new level of violence that shows how intolerable such words are to Beijing, and that indicates how these protests might end.

To understand the deepening political crisis in Hong Kong today, we must consider the territory's history. Before the year 1841, Hong Kong Island was a sparsely inhabited area of just a few small and scattered villages. In *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, Steve Tsang writes: "This beautiful subtropical island ... was at that time home to fewer than 7,500 Chinese residents, mostly fishermen and farmers."

But on Jan. 26, 1841, the British Empire raised its flag on Hong Kong and began investing vast resources into the territory's development. Hong Kong immediately became an attractive destination for European and British entrepreneurs who aimed to promote their China trade under protection of the British flag. Chinese nationals also flocked there to take up jobs building a new town. By the early 1900s, the population had swelled to 300,000. The numbers grew still more dramatically after the 1911 overthrow of the Qing dynasty sent a deluge of Chinese refugees into the territory. After Shanghai fell to the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, yet another torrent of Chinese took refuge there. By 1955, the population of Hong Kong stood at 2.5 million.

And the territory was taking on an utterly unique identity. "British rule," Tsang writes, "led to the rise of a people that remains quintessentially Chinese and yet share a way of life, core values and an outlook that resemble at least as much, if not more, that of the average New Yorker or Londoner, rather than that of their compatriots in China."

The trade growth during this era was equally energized: In 1860, 2,889 ships pulled into Hong Kong's excellent natural harbor; by the early 1960s, the number had increased by a factor of 10.

As the 20th century progressed, Hong Kong's population continued to explode. It became the world's third highest-ranking center of global finance and one of the most densely populated and wealthy places on Earth. Under the British, it was dramatically transformed into a beacon of prosperity and modernity.

But in the postwar era, the British Empire went into sharp decline. And in 1997, despite opposition from a strong majority of Hong Kong's population that had by then reached 6.4 million, the British handed Hong Kong over to Chinese sovereignty.

At this time, the people of Hong Kong had been separated from China by 156 years of ideological and institutional differences. Most of the territory's residents were profoundly uneasy about the transition. The sentiments that later gave rise to the modern battle cry, "Hong Kong is not China," were already intense. And this was perfectly understandable. Hong Kong was wealthy and free, a paragon of economic advancement. China was impoverished and oppressed, a byword for the failures of communism. Hong Kongers feared they would be swallowed up by the authoritarian mainland.

But the British negotiated an agreement for the colony it was leaving behind. According to the terms, China vowed to let Hong Kong retain its distinct identity under a rubric called "one country, two systems." This model meant that—for 50 years—China would allow Hong Kong to continue its economic policies, and Hong Kong could maintain what its mini-constitution,

the Basic Law, called a “high degree of autonomy.” This included a right for Hong Kong to keep operating its own judicial system based on the rule of law.

Why would the nationalist leaders of China allow such a period? Why would they risk allowing a part of their country to have far broader freedoms than the mainland and to remain largely outside of Beijing’s domineering governance?

Because the success of the Hong Kong model was undeniable. In 1997, China’s total population was 1.2 billion. At 6.4 million, Hong Kong made up only half of 1 percent of the total. Yet Hong Kong’s economy was around *20 percent the size of that in mainland*. Despite the Chinese leadership’s deep abhorrence of the West in general and Britain’s colonialism in particular, they could not deny that the system the British had established in Hong Kong was extraordinarily successful.

“The real measure of Hong Kong’s extraordinary achievement was confirmed,” Tsang notes, “as the Communist and highly nationalistic government of the People’s Republic of China committed itself to maintain the system and way of life in Hong Kong for 50 years.”

In the early years, the “two systems” model was carefully followed. Soldiers from the People’s Liberation Army kept a low profile in Hong Kong. Law enforcement bodies from the mainland had no jurisdiction in the territory. And mainland officials refrained from disquieting Hong Kong’s public spaces with their breathless Communist lectures.

But in 2003, after some 500,000 Hong Kongers filled the streets to protest a national security law that the local government was pushing, Beijing took action. The Chinese government launched a campaign demanding patriotism among Hong Kongers and calling for the territory to be governed only by leaders who “love the country and the city.” Beijing asserted its right to interpret the Basic Law at will.

A decade later, in June 2014, the Chinese State Council dropped a bombshell. In a 15,500-word white paper clarifying “one country, two systems,” it said that the Chinese government in Beijing has “comprehensive jurisdiction” over Hong Kong. It said that rather than having autonomy, Hong Kong was given only whatever authority to run its affairs that were approved by Beijing.

So little by little, despite the promised 50 years of autonomy, China was tightening its grip on Hong Kong. And now, 22 years after the handover, China’s encroachment is palpable in most every aspect of life in Hong Kong. “As a local Hong Konger,” an analyst in the territory told the *Trumpet* on the condition of anonymity, “I can tell you that everything is under China’s control, either directly or indirectly.”

That’s the situation in Hong Kong today. The current protests were sparked seven weeks ago by a proposed law that would allow China to easily transfer individuals—including foreigners—in Hong Kong to the mainland if they are suspected of breaking Chinese law.

The possibility of suffering such a fate is terrifying to Hong Kongers because, unlike Hong Kong’s rules-based judicial system, China’s court system is notoriously corrupt. There is no check-and-balance configuration among the organs of law enforcement—such as police, lawyers and judges—and Chinese Communist Party leaders are above the law. They weaponize the judicial system to punish their enemies and tighten their grip on power. Authorities routinely arrest individuals who are critical of the party, and they use torture to extract confessions. The conviction rate for Chinese courts is an astounding 99.9 percent, and those who are convicted are often executed just 72 hours after a verdict is rendered. China executes more prisoners than the rest of the world combined.

Fear of being subjected to this corrupt Chinese system is what has driven 2 million Hong Kongers—more than a quarter of the territory’s total population—into the streets in recent weeks. Protesters scored a victory on June 15 when Hong Kong’s chief executive, Carrie Lam, suspended the proposed extradition law. But a suspension is not a withdrawal. And protesters fear the move was designed to sap their movement’s momentum so the Communist Party can quietly push the law through later.

So they continued demonstrating and their aim was broadened to confront not just the proposed extradition bill but China’s general encroachment on Hong Kong’s autonomy. It is fear over China’s tightening grip that gave rise to the battle cry “Hong Kong is not China.” In a clear sign of their resolve to keep the territory’s colonial legacy alive, many of the protesters brandish the Union Jack and the colonial era Hong Kong flag. And on July 1, demonstrators stormed Hong Kong’s legislative building, removed the emblem of Chinese Hong Kong, and raised the colonial British flag.

On Sunday, July 21, Beijing showed that it would not allow this battle cry, nor the separatist thinking that gave rise to it, to continue indefinitely. During protests that night, demonstrators defaced Beijing’s Liaison Office in the territory and pelted the building with eggs. This marked the first time the protesters directed their ire at China itself in a direct way. A short time later, hundreds of pro-China “triad” gangsters stormed Hong Kong’s Yuen Long district. Just after Hong Kong police furtively left the area, the gangsters began beating the protesters. “In the past,” the Hong Kong analyst told the *Trumpet*, “we have never seen these triads beat up normal people.”

Meanwhile, absolutely astonishing scenes in Yuen Long, where Triad members clad in white are attacking anyone suspected of being a pro-democracy demonstrator (people wearing black are a target as that’s been the dress code for some marches, hence why triads are all in white). pic.twitter.com/lo13nRGp0L

— Jack Hazlewood (@JackHHazlewood) [July 21, 2019](#)

Further building the case of government complicity, police refused to take calls to the area during the mayhem and in its aftermath not a single triad gangster has been arrested. Hong Kong's police commissioner has denied colluding with Beijing or its puppets in the Hong Kong government, but the denials ring hollow. "All of this basically is suggesting either China backed this, or the Hong Kong government backed this to please China," the analyst said.

The crackdown on protesters was localized and not on the same scale as China's all-out slaughter of pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square back in 1989. But it was still a joltingly violent crackdown. And it provides an indication of how China views these protests and how it will handle those who reject the idea that Hong Kong is part of China.

This shows that China will not let go of Hong Kong. And if China begins to see the protests as a movement that could spread into the mainland or otherwise threaten its authority, it will use any force necessary to quash the dissent.

It is possible that the protests will prompt China to slightly loosen its grip on Hong Kong in the near term. But in the long term, Beijing's encroachment on the territory will only grow more heavy-handed. Despite the battle cry, Beijing will ensure that Hong Kong is and remains part of China. This is largely because Hong Kong serves as a "gate" to the South China Sea. Around 30 percent of the world's maritime commerce sails through this sea, and China's economy depends heavily on it both for imports of energy and for exports of Chinese goods.

In the July 2016 issue of the Philadelphia *Trumpet*, editor in chief Gerald Flurry wrote about Hong Kong's role as a gate to the South China Sea, and he explained where China's tightening grip on the region is leading. In "China Is Steering the World Toward War," he wrote:

Britain actually gave the South China Sea prize of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China in 1997. Now that U.S. military presence in the area has been drastically reduced, China is claiming the entire South China Sea as its own! ... Whoever controls these vital sea gates controls one third of the world's maritime commerce. ... EVERYTHING IS HEADED IN THE DIRECTION OF WAR.

Mr. Flurry's understanding of the dynamics in this volatile region is based on Bible prophecy. In Genesis 22, God makes several specific promises to the patriarch Abraham. One recorded in verse 17 says that Abraham's descendants (mainly the British and the Americans) would come to "possess the gate of his enemies." The context and companion scriptures show that this concerns the modern era and such strategic locations as the Suez Canal, Sri Lanka, the Panama Canal, Singapore and Hong Kong.

This prophecy was fulfilled with stunning precision prior to World War I, when Britain and the U.S. came to control *virtually every major sea gate in the world*. For decades, possession of these locations allowed Britain and the U.S. to control the seas and bring stability to much of the world.

But Britain and America have rejected God. A prophecy in Deuteronomy 28:52 states that, as a punishment for this rejection, the British and Americans would later lose those sea gates.

Mr. Flurry explained that this warning is for the modern day. He wrote: "This warning is not just for an ancient nation. It is a prophecy for the *modern-day descendants* of Israel! Two nations in particular represent Israel in this end time: America and Britain."

Britain's handover of Hong Kong to China—along with Britain's and America's loss of numerous other invaluable gates—fulfilled this prophecy in Deuteronomy. And it was tragic not just for the British but also for the Hong Kongers. The tragedy is becoming more evident as China removes Hong Kong's freedoms and increasingly asserts its oppressive rule over the territory, well ahead of schedule.

The *Trumpet's* contact in Hong Kong said China's increasing aggression in Hong Kong and beyond should "concern anyone in any country." It is true that these events and trends should concern each one of us. But these developments—and seeing ancient Bible prophecies fulfilled by them—should also push onlookers beyond concern. It should stir us to work toward getting to know God and His precious instruction manual for mankind.

To begin that important effort, carefully study Mr. Flurry's article "China Is Steering the World Toward War." ■