

## “Taiwan Can Help” Hong Kong



---

*By Dr. Jonathan Z. Ludwig  
Non-Resident Fellow Russia-Central Asia-US  
Member of the SIA Advisory Board &  
Teaching Assistant Professor of Russian at Oklahoma State University,  
Stillwater, OK, USA*

---

The phrase “Taiwan Can Help” is now known the world over, as Taiwan has donated 51 million face masks to more than 80 countries to help fight COVID-19. Taiwan has shared their successful experiences with other countries on how to contain the virus.

Less known, however, is how Taiwan is helping Hong Kong’s future. Every time Hong Kong has protested on the streets, it echoes in Taiwan, where support for the protesters can be found. This includes the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the anti-extradition protests in 2019. Most recently, on 1 July 2020, after the Hong Kong National Security Law was passed, the Taiwanese government launched a dedicated office to assist Hong Kongers in need. The office is tasked with helping those who plan to study, work, invest, start a business, or settle in Taiwan. Before the office was established, however,

the government had already taken actions with the effort of several NGOs to help many young Hong Kong protesters self-exile to Taiwan.

Taiwan is uniquely positioned to help Hong Kong, not only because of geographic proximity, but also because of Taiwan's experience in striving toward democracy. Taiwan suffered through martial law for 38 years. Before 15 July 1987, all political parties were prohibited except for the Kuomintang (KMT). All kinds of publications were politically censored, and the right of assembly was denied beginning in 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek's government, the exiled Republic of China, came to the island. Those years caused more than 140,000 Taiwanese to be arrested, tortured, or imprisoned, with between 3000–4000 people executed, for real or perceived opposition to the KMT. In 1960s and 1970s, more and more people dared to go out onto the streets to challenge the authoritarian government and to fight for freedom of speech and other fundamental democratic rights until the government finally lifted martial law. This led to Taiwan's first presidential election in 1996. Thus, Taiwan has the ability to show Hong Kongers the path from totalitarianism to democracy because they themselves took that path.

Meanwhile, other nations, primarily in the Anglosphere, are also trying to help Hong Kong's citizens. The United Kingdom (UK) proposed a path to citizenship for Hong Kongers after Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared "the enactment and imposition of this National Security Law constitutes a clear and serious breach of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. It violates Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and is in direct conflict with Hong Kong's Basic Law. The law also threatens the freedoms and rights protected by the Joint Declaration. We made clear that if China continued down this path we would introduce a new route for those with British National Overseas (BNO) status to enter the UK granting them limited 'leave to remain', with the ability to live and work in the UK and thereafter to apply for citizenship, and that is precisely what we will do now." Dominic Raab, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, has since confirmed the procedure for BNO holders to acquire British citizenship. After an initial five-year limited right to remain, BNO holders will be able to apply for settled status, after 12 months of which they will be eligible to apply for British citizenship. There will be no quota on numbers.

Australia is considering a program similar to that proposed by the UK.

Since 27 November 2019, the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act has been United States law. It requires the Department of State to certify annually whether Hong Kong should keep its special status as stipulated in various laws, treaties, and agreements. Namely, it requires proof that Hong Kong is upholding the rule of law and protecting the democratic rights of its citizens as laid out in 1) the agreement between the UK and China, and 2) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With China's imposition of the National Security Law as of 1 July 2020, Hong Kong is no longer eligible for consideration of special status, and the President is required to impose

sanctions and visa restrictions against those who violate the human rights of Hong Kong citizenry.

As of 2 July 2020, the Congress unanimously passed the Hong Kong Autonomy Act. This bill, which is still awaiting the President's signature, requires the Department of State to report on those foreign individuals and entities that contributed to China's failure to comply with the Joint Declaration/Basic Law and those foreign financial institutions that knowingly conducted a transaction with those individuals and entities. Once it becomes law, the President is required to impose sanctions, including visa-blocking measures, against those individuals or entities. In the case of a financial institution, the President is required to prohibit the institution from receiving loans from US financial institutions. This law will severely inhibit Chinese-based banks in Hong Kong from conducting international business, meaning it will be harder for Chinese officials to launder money through Hong Kong. It will also be increasingly difficult for such officials to travel abroad.

While Australia, the US, and the UK are leading what will be a robust response to Chinese actions in Hong Kong, the EU, vaguely led by Germany, has taken moments to express "worry," "concern," and even, upon occasion, "grave concern," primarily over what this means for China's reputation and, undoubtedly, their own corporations' pocketbooks. Thus, it is likely that the EU will not be of any benefit to Hong Kongers and their fight for the same democratic rights citizens of the EU so blithely enjoy.

It is possible that much of this current crisis could have been avoided if the UK had either offered the right to emigrate immediately after the hand-over of Hong Kong in 1997 or if the UK had kept the parts of Hong Kong to which, by treaty, they were entitled to hold on to permanently. However, the UK, under the leadership of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, decided to walk away entirely, as this would have meant keeping only 8% of Hong Kong's territory, an amount Thatcher did not think viable. This is despite Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten's attempt to ensure a better deal for Hong Kong that followed the path of autonomy the UK had set out since the 1950s, when their attempt to make Hong Kong an independent country failed in the face of a threatened Chinese invasion. Of course, another option would have been to turn Hong Kong over to Taiwan, as Taiwan – the Republic of China – holds the original copies of the relevant treaties.

While the Anglosphere is enacting programs to help Hong Kongers, they also must step forward to support Taiwan. While Taiwan is on the front lines of helping Hong Kong and standing up to China, it is now in China's crosshairs as China is making more and more demands on territories they claim belonged to them long, long ago, including Vladivostok in Russia and a wildlife sanctuary in Bhutan. The world must stand united in promising to defend Taiwan against Chinese aggression should China make a move toward Taiwan. China is already making almost daily flights that violate Taiwanese air space, forcing Taiwanese Air Force fighters to chase them away.

Fortunately, the response among Western nations has generally been strong in defense of Taiwan since before these most recent actions. A French frigate sailed through the Taiwan Strait on 4 April 2019, joining a series of similar British maneuvers that continued through December 2019. More British ships are currently on the way to the region. The United States currently has two carrier groups, headed by the USS Nimitz and USS Ronald Reagan, sailing in the South China Sea, having stated that their “purpose is to show an unambiguous signal to our partners and allies that we are committed to regional security and stability.” These actions come on the heels of the introduction of the Taiwan Defense Act by Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) and Representative Mike Gallagher (R-WI) that ensures the United States continues to meet its obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act in the face of China’s aggressive military build-up. It requires the Department of Defense to maintain the ability to defeat a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. One way to accomplish this is to station American troops in Taiwan, including some to be removed soon from Germany. The US has already placed Marines in Darwin, Australia, to be better positioned to respond to Chinese aggression. Other like-minded nations can join American forces in Taiwan.

Although there is increasingly bipartisan support for Taiwan, Hong Kong, and others threatened by China, there should be concerns no matter the outcome of the US Presidential election.

As former Secretary of Defense and CIA Director Robert Gates sagely noted, Joe Biden has “been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades.” Although Biden is the only US Presidential candidate to have spoken out about the Uyghurs, his career has been one largely opposed to US military actions and support missions, so it is unclear whether his words would translate into meaningful deeds. Meanwhile, his son’s murky business relationship with China raises red flags as to how this might affect Biden’s dealings with China, especially if China has evidence, real or fabricated, of something untoward having occurred. Moreover, Susan Rice, former US Ambassador to the United Nations and National Security Advisor, has been quite critical of Trump’s increased support of Taiwan and for not being “pragmatic” with China. She is likely to play a key role in a Biden administration and, based on her history in foreign affairs, cannot be counted on to be tough with China or supportive of Taiwan.

A second Trump term also raises concerns. It is clear the world would continue to regard China as a country that can be managed pragmatically, while ignoring its numerous atrocities, if not for Trump’s outspokenness on trade issues. However, without allies, joint action, and an ability to stick to his position for the long haul, will this pressure on China continue? It is fortunate, therefore, that Australia, the UK, along with Taiwan, the Czech Republic, Sweden, and others who are being regularly threatened by China, and who are visionary enough to understand the threat that China poses, have been

much more willing to step up and take a stand on their own in recent months. That may be enough to keep the pressure on Trump to stick to this approach.

Regardless of the outcome of the American election, those who care about democracy, democratic institutions, and the rule of law will need to keep a close eye on China's actions and continue to press their elected officials throughout the democratic world to put real pressure on China to correct their behavior to meet expected international norms. If, as has been erroneously attributed to Thomas Jefferson, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" within the United States, then it is true everywhere in the democratic world, and the democratic world must be eternally vigilant in the face of increased Chinese aggression throughout that world, in spite of the numerous other challenges each nation faces at home and abroad.

**Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of  
SAGE International Australia**

\*\*\*