

JUL/SEPT 2019

Protests Continue Unabated in Hong Kong

Mass protests in Hong Kong, initially sparked by the local government's proposal to allow the extradition of criminal suspects to mainland China, have shown no sign of abating in the third quarter of 2019. Following the city's largest-ever demonstration on 16 June and the storming of the city's legislature by an aggressive group of protestors on 1 July, demonstrations started to spread from Hong Kong Island to other parts of the city. On 14 July, tens of thousands of protestors peacefully marched in Sha Tin, a district in the New Territories East, until riot police began to clear demonstrators out of a shopping centre, resulting in violent confrontations. One week later, violence reached new levels as a crowd of white-shirted men assaulted protestors and bystanders in a metro station in Yuen Long, a town close to the border with mainland China. In response to such attacks, on 27 July large numbers of black-shirted protestors rallied in Yuen Long, a gathering that ended in more violence when riot police deployed tear gas and high-pressure water to disperse the crowd. On 7 August, two days after a massive strike paralysed the city, China's senior officials in charge of Hong Kong affairs convened an urgent meeting in Shenzhen, during which they rejected one of the key demands of the protesters—i.e. an independent inquiry into the police's use of force. Starting from 9 August, demonstrators began organising large-scale sit-ins at the city's airport, which eventually led to the cancellation of all flights. However, on its fifth day, the largely peaceful airport sit-in turned violent as demonstrators attacked a Chinese man whom they thought was a security agent

from mainland China. Another Chinese man was tied to a luggage cart and was later identified as a reporter for the *Global Times*—China's propaganda mouthpiece.

Following 11 consecutive weeks of protests, on 20 August Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's Chief Executive, announced that the government would enlist foreign experts to perform a fact-finding study into recent incidents, establish a more robust system to investigate complaints against the police, and create a dialogue platform to directly engage with local communities. However, the announcements did little to placate demonstrators. On 23 August, thousands of protestors formed human chains across the city by holding each other's hands, with many of them covering one eye to show solidarity with a girl who lost her eyesight in one eye due to a severe injury suffered during a protest on 11 August. The firing of a live warning shot by a police officer on 25 August and the arrest of six prominent activists on 30 August further escalated tensions between demonstrators and the police, with numerous university and high school students choosing to go on strike on the first day of their new semester. On 4 September, as officials in both Hong Kong and Beijing warned that an emergency could be declared to help settle the ongoing protests, in an unexpected turn of events, Carrie Lam announced the formal withdrawal of the extradition bill. This, nevertheless, still failed to bring the demonstrations to an end. Insisting on the fulfilment of their other demands—including an independent investigation into police violence, the retraction of the labelling of protestors as 'rioters', amnesties for detained demonstrators, and universal suffrage—protestors continued to confront the police on various occasions while forming human chains across the city, singing an anthem specifically composed for the occasion in public areas, and holding rallies in front of foreign embassies. *N Liu*

(Sources: **BBC News; Bloomberg; China National Radio; China Times; CNN; Hong Kong Free Press; Made in China Journal 2/2019; South China Morning Post**)

Rising Tensions on University Campuses Worldwide

The past few months have witnessed heightened tensions on university campuses worldwide, as pro-Beijing demonstrators clashed with supporters of the Hong Kong protests. In late July, a sit-in staged by Hong Kong students at the University of Queensland in Australia to show solidarity with pro-democracy protestors back home turned violent when pro-Beijing students showed up and began to rip up placards and blast China's national anthem through speakers. A week later, similar conflicts happened at the University of Auckland in New Zealand: three male Chinese students argued with a female student from Hong Kong in front of the Lennon Wall on campus, and as their confrontation escalated, one of the male students shoved the female student to the ground. Meanwhile, the pro-Hong Kong Lennon Wall at Simon Fraser University in Canada was repeatedly vandalised, with posts being torn down, tarnished, or covered by rival messages. In this case, the student society at the university decided to install a mobile Lennon Wall to help counter bullying and harassment. More recently, conflicts emerged at Columbia University in the United States, where pro-Beijing demonstrators holding China's national flag assembled at a lecture hall in which pro-democracy activists from Hong Kong were scheduled to deliver speeches. Following the conclusion of the speeches, two Chinese people stood up and started to sing China's national anthem. The escalating student clashes on campus have deepened concerns about China's influence in Western universities. Amid such concerns, in mid-September the student union of Monash University in Australia banned foreign students from running in its election seemingly to avoid the council being controlled by a group of mostly international Chinese students—a move that several commentators hailed as racist. After backlash the election was cancelled altogether.

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(Sources: ABC News 1; ABC News 2; New York Times; South China Morning Post 1; South China Morning Post 2; The Age; The Guardian)

Suspicious Deaths and More Arrests

Persecution of rights activists in China has persisted throughout the third quarter of 2019, with two passing away while in police custody. On 10 July, 'barefoot lawyer' Ji Sizun died of unknown causes two months after leaving prison. He had finished serving his most recent sentence of four and a half years. Activist Wang Meiyu, detained in July after publicly calling for Xi Jinping's resignation and universal suffrage, passed away on 23 September. On 4 July, Zhang Baocheng, an activist who has repeatedly urged officials to disclose their wealth, was arrested for 'promoting terrorism'. Likewise, Cheng Yuan, Liu Yongze, and Xiao Wu, three employees of the anti-discrimination NGO Changsha Funeng, have been held incommunicado since 22 July on charges of subversion, supposedly due to their organisation's links with Hong Kong. On 28 July, 22-year-old Zhang Dongning was arrested for publishing an online series of satirical cartoons depicting Chinese with pig's heads. On 29 July, China's 'first cyber-dissident' Huang Qi received a 12-year jail sentence for 'leaking state secrets'. On 6 August, a provincial regulatory panel stripped rights lawyer Li Jinxing of his licence to practice due to alleged 'improper comments' on social media. Labour activist Meng Han, who only recently emerged from a 21-month stint in jail, was detained again in August. He returned home on 7 October, after spending 38 days in detention in Guangzhou on suspicion of 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble'. There are new developments in the case of Yang Hengjun, a Chinese-born Australian political commentator who has been detained in China since January under the charge of espionage. There are now fears over his health amid reports that he is being bound and shackled during interrogations. This persecution has also extended to Yang's wife, a permanent resident of Australia, who has been banned from leaving China. *TS*

(Sources: The Australian; BBC News; Radio Free Asia 1; South China Morning Post 1; South China Morning Post 2; South China Morning Post 3; The Guardian 1; The Guardian 2; The Guardian 3; The Guardian 4)

Repression in Xinjiang Garneres International Attention

In the third quarter of 2019, the ongoing deterioration of the situation in Xinjiang continued to make waves on the international stage. According to the *Xinhua News Agency*, on 2 July, during a trip to China, Turkish President Erdogan told Xi Jinping that ‘residents of all ethnicities in China’s Xinjiang are living happily’, though Turkish officials later claimed this to be a translation error. On the opposite front, in an unprecedented display of unity, on 11 July, 22 statesco-signed a letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights condemning China’s actions in Xinjiang. The signatories included Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom. In response, ambassadors of 37 other countries—including states with controversial human rights records such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, North Korea, and Qatar (which later withdrew its signature)—retorted by penning a letter praising China’s ‘achievements in the field of human rights’. In the midst of these controversies, China’s State Council Information Office—the arm of government responsible for propaganda—published two white papers. The first, released on 21 July, presented a revisionist account of Uyghur history, positing that the minority was enslaved and forced to convert to Islam. The report claimed that Xinjiang has been an ‘integral part of China’ for a long time and ensured the current Chinese government protects ‘the Muslims’ right to their beliefs’. The second white paper, released on 16 August, focuses on the vocational education and training centres in Xinjiang, detailing their necessity and effectiveness in China’s counterterrorism efforts (see Byler’s essay in the present issue). Later on, some officials in China claimed that up to 90 percent of Uyghurs had been released from the centres and ‘returned to society’, but these claims were met by widespread scepticism. The US government has also taken steps to address the situation in Xinjiang. In August, Uyghur-American Elnigar Iltebir was appointed as the United States National Security Council’s director for China. As the Harvard-educated daughter of a prominent Uyghur intellectual, analysts

have suggested that Iltebir’s appointment may reflect a new attention to Xinjiang in the Trump administration. On 23 August, the US government also criticised a loan of 50 million USD from the World Bank for the so-called ‘Xinjiang Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project’. There are worries the loan, approved in May 2015, was used to fund internment camps in Xinjiang. Since then, increasingly heated discussions of the inhumane treatment of the detained Uyghurs have been sparked by the emergence of a video showing dozens of blindfolded and bound men during what is believed to be a mass transfer at a train station in Xinjiang. At the same time, there have been international calls to halt the execution of Tashpolat Tiyp, a renowned Uyghur academic who was abducted and sentenced to death following a secret trial in 2017, while at the end of September jailed Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti was awarded the Vaclav Havel Prize, which honours outstanding civil society action in defence of human rights. Facing this barrage of criticisms, at an event on the sidelines of the latest United Nations summit in late September, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed that China has not seen a single case of violent terrorism in the past three years, and defended the camps on the grounds that they ‘are schools that help the people free themselves from terrorism and extremism and acquire useful skills’. In a further escalation, in early October the Trump administration imposed visa restrictions on Chinese officials implicated in repression in Xinjiang and blacklisted 28 tech companies ostensibly for their role in violating human rights in Xinjiang. *TS*

(Sources: **ABC News 1; ABC News 2; Business Insider; CNN; Foreign Policy; Global Times; The Guardian; Human Rights Watch; Radio Free Asia 1; Radio Free Asia 2; SBS News; South China Morning Post 1; South China Morning Post 2; State Council 1; State Council 2; SupChina; The Times; Wired**)