



SVA Update Number 3 – Hong Kong Protests – Threat Assessment - 21 June 2019 – 1200 hrs

A range of student groups and other organisations, such as Spark Alliance HK and Civil Rights Observer, issued an ultimatum to the government on 20 June, threatening protests if their demands were not met.

These groups called on the government to: withdraw a controversial extradition bill; retract claims that a Wednesday 12 June 2019 protest was a “riot”; release arrested protesters, and promise not to conduct further arrests; and punish police for excessive use of force.

The government has not met these demands. The students are now extremely agitated, and in favour of radical action. They planned to “besiege” the government complex in Tamar, although the Hong Kong Government responded by closing the building for the day. Student groups have collected in Admiralty, and around Police Headquarters in Wanchai, if in limited numbers, as of 1200 hrs on 21 June.

A number of loose, running protests may follow, focused both on government buildings and on other chokepoints. These protests may involve smaller numbers of people than



hitherto, but target key infrastructure, so as to cause disruption on the Hong Kong MTR, the roads, or perhaps areas close to the airport. The area around Police Headquarters will likely be heavily affected. Activities may extend into Friday evening, and over the weekend.

Protest actions may also pop up in other districts, such as Mong Kok or Causeway Bay. However, it is possible that such action, particularly on the trains, will anger ordinary people, and damage the demonstrators' credibility.

The Police Response

New demonstrations will pose a dilemma to the Police, who find themselves caught between protesters demanding their "punishment", and a government with little scope for manoeuvre, and leaden feet.

The Police will want to ensure that protests are peaceful, and cause minimal disruption. They will be mindful not to escalate a combustible situation.

Nonetheless, the Police must hold the line, and, if necessary, respond to major disruption, or attacks on government buildings; and the students may wish to provoke heavy handed action, calculating that further use of crowd control measures will stoke support.

The question of police morale is of great importance in this context. Any withdrawal or failure to act by the police – if they feel let down by officialdom, for instance – will leave the government with little choice but to draw on assistance from the mainland to maintain stability. Needless to say, any such deployment is not in Hong Kong's interests.



The Wider Outlook

The protesters represent a wide church, of which the radical students are a minority. Indeed, senior pro-democracy leaders have sought to discourage the students from excess, hoping they “bank the victory”. These seasoned heads fear that the students will push too far, losing popular support and perhaps provoking a crackdown.

Moderate groups, such as the Civil Human Rights Front, which led the huge protest on 16 June 2019, support peaceful protests, but have deferred a rally scheduled for Sunday. Instead, they will focus on a march on 1 July, the date of Hong Kong’s reversion to mainland China.

This move is canny. The 1 July march has long welcomed various groups, including those from pro-democracy movement, but attendance had fallen in recent years. Now, the dispute over extradition law seems sure to bolster numbers.

Indeed, six months ago, the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong was moribund, its leaders in jail. Today, the movement is riding high, reinvigorated by the government’s mishandling of what was a single-issue protest. Protester excess, though, could quickly change that.

Response of Pro-Beijing Camp Deferred

In the interim, Beijing’s patience is wearing thin, despite a desire to tamp down tensions ahead of the G20 meeting on 28 June. State media and senior officials have issued warnings about foreign forces stoking instability in Hong Kong, and remain deeply hostile to the pro-democracy camp.



The pro-Beijing camp in Hong Kong will probably respond after the G20 summit. Already, various pro-establishment groups plan activities for 30 June, in an effort to demonstrate their sway. More will follow. The dispute may take on a nastier tone, not least if confrontation between camps occurred.

The Threats to Business

The threats to business are thus real, rising, and will last for some weeks to come. In the short term, the possibility of agitators creating conditions that justify a police crackdown cannot be ruled out, with the attendant risk of violence and disruption.

If agitators create a major problem, then the nature of the interaction between the various actors involved in protests could worsen dramatically, especially if large numbers of demonstrators decide to stand their ground, rather than disperse peacefully.

If Police move forcibly against the protestors, then considerable disruption and the widespread use of force, including the deployment of pepper spray, CS smoke, projectiles and other internal security equipment, must be anticipated, as on 12 June.

As such, if Police action looks likely to commence, or if agitators become obviously active, company personnel and their families should avoid the affected zones or other locations where crowds gather, especially in Mong Kok, Tamar, Wanchai and Causeway Bay.

Companies should also prepare plans for or revisit alternative arrangements for working from home, and as to access to offices, so as to account for any disruption. They should also assume that this disruption will continue for some weeks to come.

In the longer term, the government's handling of the extradition bill issue has reinvigorated what was an ailing pro-democracy movement. As such, the number of organised protests may grow in the coming months, starting with that on 1 July.

This revival could harm pro-government political groups' prospects in forthcoming district council elections in November 2019, and so affect the broader political constellation in the months ahead. A more combative political environment seems likely to emerge.

What to do

SVA recommends that all companies likely to be affected evaluate their risk profiles, and monitor developments closely. In the immediate term, planners should examine the following:

- Safety and security of staff;
- Protection of plant and property;
- Possible denial of access to business premises;
- Business disruption – reaction and priorities;
- Offsite operations for key assets, if necessary;
- Rescheduling of planned business events and meetings, and;
- Developing first aid capabilities – such as dealing with CS smoke affecting staff or its introduction into building air-conditioned systems.

Of course, different businesses have widely varying requirements, and thus all plans need to be practically tailored to meet specific needs.



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SVA stands ready to assist companies as may be necessary.

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About Us

Steve Vickers and Associates (SVA) is a specialist risk mitigation and security consulting company. The company serves corporations, high net-worth individuals and insurance companies around the world. SVA assists clients both in mitigating risk and when necessary to respond swiftly and effectively to incidents and crisis situations.

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(+852) 9196 2350

[Steve Vickers & Associates](#)

Unit 1501, BEA Harbour View
Centre, No. 56 Gloucester Road,
Wanchai, Hong Kong

Phone: **(+852) 2528 1230**

Fax: **(+852) 2528 1231**

mail@stevevickersassociates.com

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