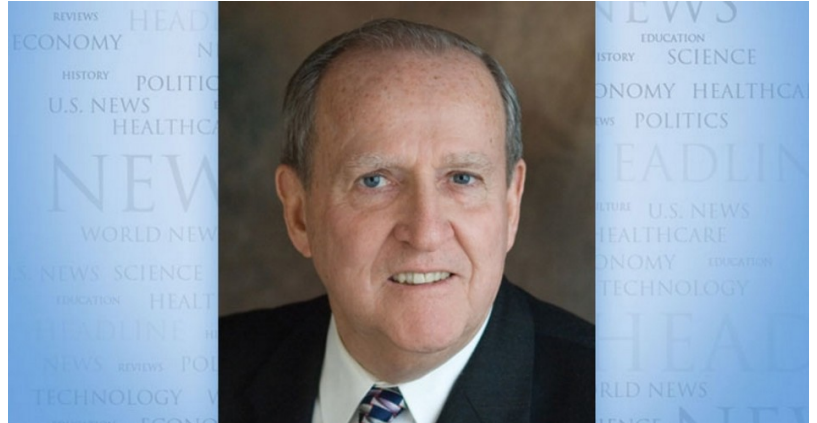




Written by [John F. McManus](#) on June 12, 2020

## China's Communist Government Flexing Its Muscles

On June 4, 1989, Chinese military forces brutally terminated a “pro-Democracy” demonstration in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. Tanks and heavily armed soldiers killed a substantial but unknown number, jailed many more, and effectively sent a message to potential challengers of the communist-led government that opposition to its rule would not be tolerated. Within China itself, there have never been any further “pro-Democracy” demonstrations.



Right next to mainland China, however, a bastion of economic and personal freedom existed during the time of the Tiananmen Square massacre and continued to exist afterward. Hong Kong, once a British colony that grew into a prosperous financial and trade center, is more recently a remnant of the “one country, two systems” arrangement agreed to by Beijing’s communist leaders when British rule ended in 1997. In simple terms, Big Sister Beijing has tolerated Baby Sister Hong Kong because of some benefits the Big Sister has gotten from the arrangement. But that may be changing, and by its actions China has demonstrated itself to be the ultimate ruler of Hong Kong and its 7 million people.

Hong Kong’s prosperity and personal freedom hasn’t been kept a secret from the billion-plus Chinese living under communist coercion. The desire for a change in their status led an unknown number of demonstrators to march into Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in 1989 seeking relief from iron-clad regimentation. As noted above, they were met with military force that cost many lives. Each year since the Tiananmen Square massacre, huge numbers of Hong Kong residents have gathered in their enclave to remember both those who died and the goal they sought. But this year, the Hong Kong vigil remembering the 1989 victims of Communist brutality was prohibited by Communist China’s rulers. The authorities in Beijing claimed concern about a possible spread of Covid-19 as the reason. While that claim can surely be questioned, Hong Kong’s residents were certainly reminded about who really controls their homes, businesses and livelihood.

Another example of Beijing’s power over Hong Kong can be noted in the huge numbers of Hong Kong residents who have been gathering almost weekly to protest an unsettling alteration in the way their people have been governed. Any citizens who were deemed lawbreakers — even those accused of violating minor laws — had always been dealt with by Hong Kong officials who handled such problems justly. But the Beijing rulers changed that into requiring that lawbreakers of any kind would have to appear in a mainland court, not have their infraction dealt with by Hong Kong jurists. That edict handed down by the Communist government was immediately perceived by Hong Kongers to be a step toward undoing the “one country, two systems” agreement. It resulted in weekly demonstrations by a huge number of Hong Kong residents who gathered and paraded in the streets of their home colony. The thinking of these demonstrators is that such a change is only the beginning of Beijing’s intent to take complete control of their home. Hence, numerous protests.

In addition, Hong Kong has been the scene of an annual remembrance of the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. The planned 2020 continuance of that demonstration was, for the first time,



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forbidden by Beijing. The Chinese Communist leaders claimed a need to ban mass demonstrations because of the threat of a spread of Covid-19. Pro-democracy leaders, however, sensed that the Beijing government was taking another step to tighten control over Hong Kong's freedoms.

The crackdown has also included dealing with religion. For several recent years, Beijing's rulers have mandated that China's Catholic priests and people must break any ties to a foreign ruler such as the Pope. They have established a separate sect known as China's Patriotic Catholic Church. Its adherents renounce their affiliation with the pope in Rome and are, therefore, allowed to function free of harassment. Any priests who do not accept the new status are labeled "underground Catholics" and are dealt with harshly.

Any realistic assessment of these developments brings one to conclude that President Xi Jinping and the leaders of China's ruling Communist Party are tightening their control wherever they sense the existence of any form of competition or resistance. They won't be satisfied until Communism is completely unchallenged and the "one country-two systems" arrangement is done away with.

All of this leads to consideration of the status of Taiwan. Will its existence as an example of freedom and resistance to Communist rule be next? The island, home to 25 million Chinese living in freedom and prosperity, claims to be independent of Mainland China. But ever since 1949 when China's anti-Communist forces fled the mainland and took control of Taiwan (once known as Formosa), the Communist Chinese have maintained that the island remains China's property and is not an independent nation.

Communist Chinese threats to recover Taiwan must never be discounted. Should the threats escalate into action, the United States would be expected to honor a long-standing pledge to defend the island. That might lead to a struggle between American forces and China's huge army. It might even trigger the start of Pacific war, maybe even a World War III. China's moves against Hong Kong are worthy of close attention.

*John F. McManus is president emeritus of The John Birch Society.*



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