

Tracking Foreign Interference in Hong Kong

Lawyer Lawrence Ma claims the US has been supporting the protests via groups such as the NED

By [Pepe Escobar](#)

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Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

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***Lawrence YK Ma** is the executive council chairman of the Hong Kong Legal Exchange Foundation and director of the China Law Society, the Chinese Judicial Studies Association and the Hong Kong Legal Exchange Foundation. He also finds time to teach law at Nankai University in Tianjin.*

Ma is the go-to expert in what is arguably the most sensitive subject in Hong Kong: He meticulously tracks perceived [foreign interference](#) in the Special Administrative Region (SAR).

In the West, in similar circumstances, he would be a media star. With a smirk, he told me that local journalists, whether working in English or Chinese, rarely visit him – not to mention foreigners.

Ma received me at his office in Wanchai this past Saturday morning after a “dark day” of rampage, as described by the SAR government. He wasted no time before calling my attention to a petition requesting a “United Nations investigation into the United States’ involvement in Hong Kong riots.”

He let me see a copy of the document, which lists the People’s Republic of China as petitioner, the United States of America as respondent nation and the Hong Kong Legal Exchange Foundation as ex parte petitioner. This was submitted on Aug. 16 to the UN Security Council in Geneva, directed to UN **Secretary-General Antonio Guterres**.

In the document, Issue II deals with “funded, sponsored and provided supplies to any organizations, groups, companies, political parties or individuals” and “trained and frontline protesters, students and dissidents.”

Predictably, the US National Endowment for Democracy is listed in the documentation: its largest 2018 grants were directed to China, slightly ahead of Russia.

The NED was founded in 1983 after serial covert CIA ops across the Global South had been exposed.

In 1986, NED President **Carl Gershman** [told](#) the New York Times:

“It would be terrible for democratic groups around the world to be seen as subsidized by the CIA. We saw that in the ‘60s, and that’s why it has been discontinued.”

As the Times article explained about the NED:

In some respects, the program resembles the aid given by the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1950s, '60s and '70s to bolster pro-American political groups. But that aid was clandestine and, subsequent Congressional investigations found, often used planted newspaper articles and other forms of intentionally misleading information. The current financing is largely public – despite some recipients' wish to keep some activities secret – and appears to be given with the objective of shoring up political pluralism, broader than the CIA's goals of fostering pro-Americanism.

Soft power at work

So it's no secret, all across the Global South, that under the cover of a benign umbrella promoting democracy and human rights, the NED works as a [soft-power mechanism](#) actively interfering in politics and society. Recent examples include Ukraine, Venezuela and Nicaragua. In many cases, that is conducive to regime change.

The NED's board of directors includes **Elliott Abrams**, who was instrumental in financing and weaponizing the Contras in Nicaragua, and Victoria Nuland, who supervised the financing and weaponizing of militias in Ukraine that some but not all experts have [described](#) as neo-fascist.

The NED offers grants via various branches. One of them is the National Democratic Institute, which has been active in Hong Kong since the 1997 handover. [These](#) are some of the grants offered by the NED in Hong Kong in 2018.

At least [one Hong Kong-based publication](#) took the trouble of studying the NED's local connections, even publishing a chart of the anti-extradition protest organizational structure. But none of the evidence is conclusive. The most the publication could say was,

“If we analyze the historical involvement of NED in Occupy Central and the sequence of events that took place from March in 2019, it is highly possible that the Americans may be potentially involved in the current civil unrest via NED – albeit not conclusive.”

Issue III of the petition sent to the UN deals with “coordinated, directed and covertly commanded on-ground operations; connived with favorable and compatible local and American media so as to present biased new coverage.”

On “coordination,” the main political operative is identified as Julie Eadeh, based at the US Consulate after a previous Middle East stint. Eadeh became a viral sensation in China when she was caught on camera, on the same day, meeting with **Anson Chan and Martin Lee**, close allies of **Jimmy Lai**, founder of pro-protest Apple Daily, and protest leaders Joshua Wong and Nathan Law in the lobby of the Marriott.

The US State Department responded by calling the Chinese government “thuggish” for releasing photographs and personal information about Eadeh.

The NED and Eadeh are also the subjects of further accusations in the petition's Issue IV (“Investigation of various institutions”).

All in the Basic Law

Ma is the author of an exhaustive, extensively annotated book, *Hong Kong Basic Law: Principles and Controversies*, published by the Hong Kong Legal Exchange Foundation.

Maria Tam, a member both of the Hong Kong SAR Basic Law Committee and of China's National People's Congress, praises the book's analysis of the ultra-sensitive interpretation of the Basic Law, saying "the common law system has remained unaffected, its judicial independence remaining the best in Asia", with Hong Kong firmly placed - so far at least - as "the third most preferred avenue for international arbitration."

In the book, Ma extensively analyzes the finer points of the China containment policy. But he also adds culture to the mix, for instance examining the work of Liang Shuming (1893-1988) on the philosophical compatibility of traditional Chinese Confucianism with the technology of the West. Liang argued that China's choice, in stark terms, was between wholesale Westernization or complete rejection of the West.

But Ma really hits a nerve when he examines Hong Kong's unique role - and positioning - as a vector of the China containment policy, facilitated by a prevailing anti-communist sentiment and the absence of a national security law.

This is something that cannot be understood without examining the successive waves of emigration to Hong Kong. The first took place during the Communist-Nationalist civil war (1927-1950) and the Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945); the second, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1977).

Ma significantly quotes a 1982 poll claiming that 95% of respondents were in favor of maintaining British rule. Everyone who followed the 1997 Hong Kong handover remembers the widespread fear of Chinese tanks rolling into Kowloon at midnight.

In sum, Ma argues that, for Washington, what matters is to "make China's island of Hong Kong as difficult to govern for Beijing as possible."

Integrate or perish

Anyone who takes time to carefully study the complexities of the Basic Law can see how Hong Kong is an indivisible part of China. Hundreds of millions of Mainland Chinese now have seen what the black bloc brand of "democracy" - vandalizing public and private property - has done to ruin Hong Kong.

Arguably, in the long run, and after an inevitable cleanup operation, the whole drama may only strengthen Hong Kong's integration with China. Add to it that China, Macau, Singapore, Malaysia and Japan have separately asked Hong Kong authorities for a detailed list of black bloc rioters.

In my conversations these past few days with informed Hong Kongers - mature businessmen and businesswomen who understand the Basic Law and relations with China - two themes have been recurrent.

One is the weakness of Carrie Lam's government, with suggestions that the outside non-well-wishers knew her understaffed and overstretched police force would not be up to the

task of maintaining security across town. At the same time, many remarked how the response from Washington and London to the Emergency Regulations approval of the anti-mask law was – surprisingly – restrained.

The other theme is decolonization. My interlocutors argued that China did not “control” Hong Kong; if it did, riots would never have happened. Add to it that Lam may have been instructed to do nothing, lest she would mess up an incandescent situation even more.

Now it’s a completely new ball game. Beijing, even discreetly, will insist on a purge of anyone in the civil service who would be identified as anti-China. If Lam just continues to insist on her beloved “dialogue,” she may be replaced by a hands-on CEO such as CY Leung or Regina Ip.

Amid so much gloom, there may be a silver lining. And that concerns the Greater Bay Area project. My interlocutors tend to believe that after the storm ends and after carefully studying the situation for some months, Beijing will soon come up with a new plan to tighten Hong Kong’s integration to the mainland’s economy even more.

The first step was to tell Hong Kong’s tycoons to get their act together and be more socially responsible. The second will be to convince Hong Kong’s businesses to reinvent themselves for good and profit as part of the Greater Bay Area and the New Silk Roads, or Belt and Road Initiative.

Hong Kong will thrive only if plugged, not unplugged. That may be the ultimate – profitable – argument against any form of foreign sabotage.

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Featured image: More than a million Hong Kongers joined marches in June to oppose a China extradition law. But some say the US is quickly backing the protests. Photo: Don Ng/ EyePress

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