

BATTLE FOR HONG KONG

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

As Hong Kong gets caught in the Cold War between [China](#) and America, India will have to pay close attention to the economic and strategic consequences of the current churn. The application of the principle of “one country, two systems” for Hong Kong when Britain restored it to China in 1997, after nearly 150 years of colonial control, seemed like a stroke of genius. Designed to satisfy the needs of the people of Hong Kong, Beijing and the Anglo-American powers, the special status of Hong Kong was to last until 2047. Half a century looked long enough for Hong Kong's painless integration into China. But the compact has been under stress for many years.

China's growing emphasis on the principle of “one country” has met resistance from Hong Kong's young activists, who underline the idea of “two systems”. China's recent focus on extending its national security laws to Hong Kong has sharpened the inherent contradictions in the Anglo-Chinese compact and triggered large-scale protests against Beijing's effort to tighten its grip over the city. Unable to push them through the Hong Kong legislature, Beijing has now taken direct charge. Last week, China's National People's Congress authorised a standing committee to draft a national security law for Hong Kong. The law is expected to be approved by September and adopted in Hong Kong. If Beijing's patience with the Hong Kong protests has worn thin, Washington has announced plans to revoke the special privileges that Hong Kong enjoys, as a distinct and autonomous Chinese region, under US law.

While the details of the Chinese law and the US response will unfold in the days ahead, an important era in Hong Kong's history is coming to an end. India has been an intimate part of Hong Kong's founding and its rise as a critical player in Asia's economic transformation. If Indian soldiers and traders were involved in securing and developing the city in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Indian migrants and entrepreneurs in the 21st century are adding to the city's dynamic business environment. Like the rest of the world, India, too, has benefited from Hong Kong's special status. Hong Kong today is one of the top trading partners of India and hosts a sizeable Indian community of nearly 40,000. Until now, India has carefully avoided being sucked into Hong Kong's politics — both internal and international. It is time for Delhi to take a fresh look at its multiple interests in Hong Kong and how they might be affected by the triangular dynamic between China, US and the city's young protestors.

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