



## [United States Imposes Sanctions on Chinese Officials for Disqualifying Elected Opposition Legislators in Hong Kong](#)

Earlier this week, the United States imposed financial sanctions and a travel ban on 14 Chinese officials for their role in disqualifying several elected opposition legislators in Hong Kong last month. The Beijing-backed government in the special administrative region (SAR) had expelled the opposition members from its legislature after city authorities there were given new powers to curb any form of perceived dissent. The move prompted a slew of pro-democracy legislators in the territory to resign in solidarity with their disqualified colleagues. The sanctions against the targeted Chinese officials will prohibit them and their immediate family members from traveling to the United States, and will also freeze any assets they might have in the country and prevent American companies from dealing with them. The Chinese government has vowed to retaliate against the measures, calling them “malicious actions by the U.S. to safeguard our sovereignty, security, and developmental rights.” However, observers note that the sanctions are justifiable considering that the central government in Beijing has blatantly ramped up its efforts to repress pro-democracy voices in Hong Kong – particularly in the aftermath of the controversial national security law that was implemented earlier this year.

This recent wave of measures is merely the latest effort to punish those who have been deemed to be suppressive towards rights activists in Hong Kong. Back in August, the United States also imposed sanctions on Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam, police chiefs, and other top officials for their alleged role in cracking down on the territory’s pro-democracy movement. The disqualification of the four legislators last month is especially worrying due to the fact that the individuals were elected representatives who had been voted into office by the citizenry of Hong Kong. It also casts doubt on the “One Country, Two Systems” policy by which China is meant to abide by in order to protect Hong Kong’s autonomy. Instead of functioning in line with this formula, it appears as though the centralized government in Beijing is more concerned with ensuring that officials in the SAR are voices which fall in line with those from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on the mainland.

Even with these newest sanctions, analysts contend that they are unlikely to slow down authorities’ crackdown on dissent in Hong Kong, which has escalated in recent months following the implementation of the June national security bill. Just last week, Hong Kong rights activist Joshua Wong and two others were given prison sentences for an “unauthorized” protest outside of police headquarters in June of 2019. Additionally, several days ago, police arrested at least eight opposition figures over a July 1st protest that took place mere hours after Beijing imposed the controversial new national security bill. Overall, thousands of protesters have been arrested on highly questionable charges since pro-democracy demonstrations sprung up earlier this year in response to the legislation.

One of the aspects that has been especially problematic is the vague nature of the “crimes” outlined in the legislation, a feature that has allowed authorities to arbitrarily arrest and charge citizens. As such, human rights groups have expressed serious concern with the notable uptick in detentions since the adoption of the June national security bill, pointing out that it demonstrates how the law is aimed at hindering and deterring peaceful political expression in the territory of Hong Kong – a worrying development for freedom activists not only in the region but around the world.