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Panel on Security

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 4 May 2018

Strengthening Hong Kong's counter-terrorism preparedness and public education

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions of the Panel on Security ("the Panel") on issues relating to the Administration's counter-terrorism measures and related public education.

Background

2. According to the Administration, Hong Kong has a strong legal framework and law enforcement capability to prevent and tackle terrorist activities. Specifically, any person who commits a terrorist offence in Hong Kong is punishable under the common law and various local ordinances, such as the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200) and the Offences Against the Person Ordinance (Cap. 212). In addition, a number of international conventions against terrorism have been made applicable to Hong Kong through local legislation to combat terrorist activities, such as collection of funds and supply of weapons to terrorists. Under the United Nations (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance (Cap. 575), the authority may, from time to time, specify terrorists and terrorist bodies in accordance with the latest announcement of the United Nations. The Police have put in place an established mechanism of assessing the terrorist threat against Hong Kong, which will take into account a wide range of local, regional and international factors, including the currently available intelligence, recent incidents and the trend of international terrorist activities.

Deliberations of the Panel

Counter-terrorism information and public education

3. Some members noted with concern that when a bomb-like object was identified near Ocean Terminal in May 2017, many people were standing and watching outside the police cordon line, without awareness of the safety risks involved. These members considered that the Administration should step up public education on what members of the public should do in different dangerous situations. They were also concerned about the channels for dissemination and publicity of counter-terrorism information by the Administration.

4. The Administration advised that the Security Bureau ("SB") had produced illustrated booklets to advise the public on what a person should do when encountering emergency incidents. The Police disseminated anti-terrorism posts through various social media to enhance the alertness of the public to terrorism and major dangerous incidents, including the need to leave dangerous scenes as soon as possible. In order to facilitate public understanding of the Administration's work on safeguarding public safety as well as measures to be taken and first aid methods in case of emergency, the Administration had produced several booklets to advise the public on how to handle suspicious or emergency incidents, for example, ways to handle suspicious objects, suspected bombs and postal items containing suspicious powders/substances as well as emergencies in public areas or transport. The information had been uploaded onto the website of SB. Via its mobile application "Safeguard HK", SB from time to time disseminated to the public instant updates on major emergencies through push notifications, and provided them with useful information on safety during travel and daily life.

5. Members were concerned about the prevalence of "lone-wolf" terrorist attacks with the use of vehicles in other countries. Information was sought on whether intelligence was exchanged with other jurisdictions and whether the Administration would educate the public on what to do when encountering terrorist attacks.

6. The Administration advised that the exchange of intelligence with other jurisdictions was an important element of its counter-terrorism work. It would continue to instill safety knowledge among the public, thereby enhancing their alertness and responsiveness to major dangerous incidents.

Counter-terrorism exercises and measures

7. Given that the terrorist threat level in Hong Kong remained "moderate", some members were concerned about whether swift responses could be made by the Administration in case of terrorist incidents. The Administration advised that training and multi-agency exercises were conducted regularly to practise and enhance counter-terrorism contingency plans as well as ensure emergency preparedness. A large-scale counter-terrorism exercise coordinated by SB had been participated by approximately 40 government departments and organizations whereas some other exercises involved different modes of public transport, airline companies, power plant, ship dockyard, school and water treatment plant.

8. Some members expressed concern about whether the Administration would strengthen counter-terrorism measures at venues where major events were held. Members were advised that the Administration would assess the risks involved in each event and adopt appropriate measures as necessary, having regard to the nature of activities and circumstances of individual events. The Police provided advice to organizers of high risk major events on security measures, equipment and security manpower. The Police would also assess the safety risks concerned and deploy appropriate manpower as necessary. The Police had stepped up patrol at high-risk locations and examined different methods as well as equipment for combating such terrorist attacks.

Inter-departmental Counter-terrorism Unit

9. Members noted that as stated in the 2017 Policy Address, a dedicated Inter-departmental Counter-terrorism Unit ("ICTU") would be established in 2018-2019 to enhance the coordination work on counter-terrorism. Led by Police and composed of members of relevant law enforcement agencies ("LEAs"), ICTU would serve as the counter-terrorism network and platform of LEAs to monitor the global terrorism trend and regimes on countering terrorism, review and improve counter-terrorism strategies in Hong Kong, and formulate measures and action plans in collaboration with relevant departments.

10. Members were concerned about how ICTU would collaborate with various government departments and overseas counterparts in its counter-terrorism work. Information was also sought on the division of work between ICTU and the Police's existing counter-terrorism units.

11. The Administration advised ICTU would add on to the existing counter-terrorism structure and system and strengthen coordination. The duties of ICTU, which would not replace any of the Police's existing counter-terrorism units, would mainly involve formulation of counter-terrorism strategies and enhancing intelligence gathering, as well as exchange of intelligence with other jurisdictions and review of counter-terrorism equipment, etc. ICTU would also coordinate education of the public to enhance their alertness and preparedness towards emergency situations.

Relevant papers

12. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
27 April 2018

**Relevant papers on
strengthening Hong Kong's counter-terrorism preparedness
and public education**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	26.3.2014	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 14)
Legislative Council	22.4.2015	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 1)
Legislative Council	6.1.2016	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 5)
Legislative Council	31.5.2017	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 22)
Panel on Security	6.6.2017 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	3.11.2017 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes

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