

**For discussion
on 6 July 2021**

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Strengthening Prevention and Tackling of Terrorist Activities

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the latest situation regarding the terrorist threat in Hong Kong, as well as prevention and response strategies of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“HKSAR”) Government.

Latest Situation

2. The threat of terrorist attacks faced by Hong Kong remains “moderate”, which means there is the possibility of an attack, but there is no specific intelligence suggesting that Hong Kong is likely to be a target. However, despite the rampant global epidemic, the global terrorism landscape remains complex and ever-changing and the threat of domestic terrorism has yet to be dispersed. Various government departments have all along stayed highly vigilant, and members of the public should also remain on guard.

Global landscape and impact on Hong Kong

3. On the global landscape, various forms of terrorist incidents occurred over the past year in countries around the globe, including France, the United States, Austria and the Philippines. Most of these incidents were “lone-wolf” attacks, increasing the difficulty for law enforcement agencies worldwide to identify extremists and intervene ahead of time. Some terrorist organizations make use of the Internet to disseminate seditious promotional materials and advocate violence in an attempt to spread extreme and radical ideologies to various parts of the world. Having accessed such promotional materials online, the extreme beliefs of some individuals are reinforced under the gradual influence of massive and intensive extremist information, leading these individuals to become “self-radicalized” and launch terrorist attacks. It is noteworthy that most violent extremists are “self-radicalized” under the influence of extremist propaganda disseminated via the Internet and social media. Not only have

major terrorist organizations been constantly urging their members and supporters to launch attacks all over the world, some overseas violent radicals have also exploited certain local issues of controversy or concern to legitimize their acts of using extreme violence in pursuit of their own political or ideological assertions.

4. Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city with free flow of information. Thus, we could not ignore the threat of the “self-radicalization” trend spreading to the city. Nor could we rule out the possibility that some individuals may imitate the way terrorists launch violent attacks to initiate acts of extreme violence in Hong Kong, threatening security.

Threat of domestic terrorism

5. Locally, since the promulgation and implementation of the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“NSL”) on 30 June last year, there has been a significant drop in violent acts. However, some radicals continue with their propaganda to spread hatred on the Internet from time to time in an attempt to revive violence in Hong Kong.

6. Also, in the past two years, the Police cracked down on over 20 cases relating to explosives and firearms, in which more than 93 persons were arrested and 2.6 tonnes of explosives and 36 firearms seized. One such case involved the Police arresting a man in July 2019 for possession of one kilogram of high explosive triacetone triperoxide (“TATP”) at an industrial building unit in Tsuen Wan. The man was prosecuted for attempting to cause explosion with intent to endanger life or cause injury to property. He pleaded guilty in April this year at the High Court and was sentenced to imprisonment for 12 years. Since December last year, several worrying incidents have also taken place, showing that the threat of domestic terrorism still exists:

- (a) In December last year, three radicals hurled at least nine petrol bombs at the Police Sports and Recreation Club in Prince Edward during the small hours of one morning, causing severe damage to a Government truck at the car park. The Police later arrested three young persons, including a secondary four student, aged 16, and seized some raw materials for making petrol bombs. The three arrestees were prosecuted by the Police for arson;
- (b) In February this year, the Police cracked down on a severe case of explosives in Fanling, in which two men were arrested and more

than 20 kilograms of raw materials for making explosives were seized. Various weapons (including bows, arrows, stun guns and extendible batons) and a large number of gas masks, helmets, protective suits, etc. were also seized. It was suspected that they planned to make explosives during the Lunar New Year, with a view to causing serious casualties. The two arrestees were later prosecuted by the Police for possession of explosive substance and possession of offensive weapon or instrument fit for unlawful purposes respectively; and

- (c) In April this year, someone on social media threatened to place explosive devices at locations such as police stations and hospitals, claiming that the explosion would be powerful enough to cause serious casualties. The Police is conducting investigation in full swing.

7. The abovementioned incidents show that local violent extremists still have a strong intention and capability of launching attacks, and that domestic terrorism activities show signs of going underground and becoming clandestine, posing severe challenges to security locally.

Prevention and Response Strategies of the HKSAR Government

8. The HKSAR Government has all along been fully committed to counter-terrorism (“CT”) efforts. Strengthening CT work is one of the operational priorities of the Commissioner of Police. In view of the complex global landscape and lingering threat of domestic terrorism, the Security Bureau and the Inter-departmental Counter-terrorism Unit (“ICTU”) with its member departments (namely the Hong Kong Police Force (“HKPF”), Immigration Department (“ImmD”), Customs and Excise Department (“C&ED”), Correctional Services Department, Fire Services Department and Government Flying Service) are adopting the following series of strategies for strengthening prevention and tackling of terrorist threats.

(I) Vigorous combat in accordance with the law

9. The Police is deeply concerned about cases of extreme violence, and is committed to fully investigating such cases and tracking down the sources of the seized items and organization involved, with a view to vigorously combating such cases under the law.

10. Based on the actual circumstances and evidence collected, the Police will suitably handle these cases under the relevant legislation. If sufficient evidence is found upon investigation, the Police and the Department of Justice will consider prosecution under the United Nations (Anti-Terrorism Measures) Ordinance (“UNATMO”) (Cap. 575), and will also consider freezing the property related to terrorist activities to cut off the funding sources of offenders and thereby prevent them from recruiting members. Regardless of whether prosecution is made under UNATMO, terrorist acts (such as cases of explosives and firearms) per se are very serious crimes, which are subject to the maximum penalty of life imprisonment under the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200), the Firearms and Ammunition Ordinance (Cap. 238) and the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 455).

(II) Strengthening CT preparedness

11. Having regard to the latest situation on Hong Kong’s threat of domestic terrorist activities, the HKSAR Government has enhanced internal CT preparedness. Established in 2018, ICTU has been working on four areas, namely CT-related intelligence and strategic research, training, CT exercises as well as public education and publicity, to strengthen collaboration among member departments and enhance Hong Kong’s overall CT capability. Among such efforts, as the forefront CT agency, HKPF has maintained high vigilance against terrorist activities and made appropriate deployment and preparation in light of the current threat assessment. In addition, C&ED has all along adopted relevant control measures and conducted customs clearance at various boundary control points. It is now training dogs for gun detection, which are expected to enter into service in 2021-22 to further step up enforcement against illegal import and export of firearms, ammunition, weapons, explosives and strategic commodities. Other member departments of ICTU have also adopted various measures, including enhancing equipment for detecting toxic industrial chemicals and providing air support, as well as formulation of relevant action plans, with a view to enhancing CT capabilities for immediate and effective response in the event of terrorist attacks.

(i) Strengthening intelligence collection

12. On intelligence collection, ICTU adopts a multi-pronged approach, including:

- (a) Intelligence exchange among government departments:* ICTU actively coordinates, facilitates and reinforces intelligence**

exchange among member departments to ensure the adequacy and continuous strengthening of the HKSAR Government's capability in collecting and analyzing intelligence for the prevention of and response to terrorist incidents which could threaten the security of Hong Kong;

- (b) CT intelligence exchange with Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies: HKPF, C&ED and ImmD exchange CT intelligence with Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies through different channels, conduct analysis and investigation on intelligence obtained, and strategically deploy CT resources based on the prevalent situation for ensuring timely, effective and coordinated measures against terrorist activities;
- (c) Security and property management personnel of public and private organizations: ICTU strives to strengthen communication and collaboration with public and private organizations to enhance their security and property management personnel's CT awareness and capability in identifying suspected terrorist activities or related threats. This enables them to promptly report suspicious persons or suspected terrorist activities to the Police, thereby expanding the CT intelligence network of the Police in the community; and
- (d) Reports from the public: As reports from the public could provide important leads for CT efforts, ICTU has launched an online reporting system (www.ictu.gov.hk) this year. Apart from usual channels, members of the public may report any suspected terrorism-related information of non-urgent nature to ICTU by filling out an online form. They are however reminded to call 999 directly in case of situations which are urgent, possibly urgent or situations which require or possibly require immediate police assistance at scene.

(ii) Strengthening training

13. ICTU has all along attached great importance to CT training for officers of disciplined forces. Since establishment, ICTU has provided various forms of CT training to more than 16,000 officers of disciplined forces to enhance their awareness of the terrorism landscape and their professional capability in intelligence collection as well as reporting and handling of suspected terrorist incidents.

14. In addition, as mentioned in paragraph 12(c) above, ICTU is actively strengthening communication and collaboration with public and private organizations, particularly for facilities with higher risks of attack, such as airports, major shopping malls and hospitals. Training or briefing is provided to the personnel of the relevant organizations to enhance their alertness and awareness on the prevention and response against suspicious objects and bombs. Since April last year, ICTU has provided 20 training sessions for more than 1,000 participants of these organizations.

(iii) CT exercises

15. ICTU continues to coordinate inter-departmental CT exercises on a regular basis, with a view to strengthening the capability of member departments in handling terrorist attacks, educating the public to raise their vigilance against terrorist activities, and maintaining public confidence in the HKSAR Government's CT capability.

16. Over the past five years, the Police organized a total of 56 CT exercises to simulate emergency situations where various locations/important facilities were under attack and to test the responses and coordination of the relevant departments. In April this year, the Police organized a CT exercise codenamed "IRONWILL" at the Hong Kong International Airport, which simulated the situation where terrorists attacked passers-by with knives, took hostages and threatened to detonate a bomb at the terminal, and showcased to the public the coordination and response capabilities among police units and relevant stakeholders in tackling a terrorist incident.

(iv) Strengthening public education and publicity on CT

17. The Government has all along attached great importance to public education and publicity on CT. In the past year, ICTU continued to focus on promoting the educational themes of "Run, Hide and Report" and "Stay Vigilant to Bomb" to help enhance CT preparedness among the public.

18. In September last year, ICTU collaborated with the Information Services Department and Police's Public Relations Branch to launch a Government Announcement in the Public Interest on the theme of "Run, Hide and Report". ICTU conducted publicity via channels such as social media, mass public transport carriers and outdoor advertisements and paper water bills, and distributed publicity materials to members of the public to remind them to take the following appropriate actions in the event of terrorist or violent attacks:

- (a) “Run” means staying away from the attacker’s visual range as soon as possible and leaving the scene via a safe route. More importantly, members of the public should not stay at the scene for taking photos or videos. They should leave immediately to avoid danger;
- (b) “Hide” if leaving the scene is impossible. Members of the public should hide at a sheltered place or in a lockable room, mute the phone and turn off the vibration function. They should not use any item that gives out light and sound. They should stay calm and wait for rescue; and
- (c) “Report” means calling 999 to report to the Police under safe conditions or when personal safety is secured (such as after making a successful escape and being away from the scene under attack).

19. Given the numerous cases involving explosives and their raw materials in Hong Kong during recent years, ICTU continues to instill the concept of “Stay Vigilant to Bomb” among the public to educate them on how to identify suspicious objects and remind them to report to the Police immediately and stay away from such objects to protect their personal safety in case suspicious objects are found.

20. In May this year, ICTU established a public website (www.ictu.gov.hk) to provide the public with the first comprehensive CT information platform in Hong Kong. Currently, the website covers contents including the global and local CT landscape, self-radicalization, suspected activities and suspicious objects. Advice on CT response and security is also provided to the public and organizations for reference. Besides, an online reporting system is available on the website, where members of the public may report any suspected terrorism-related information of non-urgent nature to ICTU via an online form.

21. More interactive elements will be introduced to the ICTU website in future to enhance public engagement and enrich public experience. ICTU will continue to closely monitor the trend of terrorism and disseminate the latest information through its website to maintain public awareness on the threat of terrorism.

(III) Strengthening protection for critical infrastructures

22. Making reference to the global landscape in recent years, the Police have noted that targets of about one-fourth of terrorist attacks involved critical infrastructures. For example, the explosion occurred during a concert at Manchester Arena in the United Kingdom in 2017 resulted in 22 deaths and more than 100 injuries. An attack to a critical infrastructure will not only cause substantial impact on public safety and public services, but will also seriously undermine the overall economy and weaken social stability.

23. Established by the Police in 2011, the Critical Infrastructure Security Coordination Centre (“CISCC”) is committed to strengthening protection of more than 200 critical infrastructures in Hong Kong under the following strategies:

- (a) Public-private partnership: Maintaining close liaison and collaboration with operators of critical infrastructures proactively to strengthen their self-protection capabilities;
- (b) Risk management: Conducting timely security assessment for the relevant facilities, identifying potential loopholes, offering improvement suggestions and coordinating enhancement measures;
- (c) Resilience enhancement: Assisting operators to examine and formulate standard operating procedures, contingency measures and emergency recovery plans to enhance resilience of their personnel, systems and facilities, thereby minimizing the time and impact of interruptions on critical businesses in the event of incidents;
- (d) Proactive follow-up on development of major infrastructural projects: Incorporating the concept of “security design” in the early planning stage of major infrastructural developments under an effective monitoring mechanism and by negotiation with various parties. In parallel, assistance is also provided to stakeholders to conduct long-term planning and formulate basic security requirements as the blueprint for “security design” of new facilities in future;
- (e) Strengthening liaison: In order to assist critical infrastructures to cope with security threats and enhance their professional

capabilities in handling emergencies, CISCC provides stakeholders with direct communication channels around the clock and holistic support to make immediate risk assessment, formulate strategies, implement measures, conduct on-going review and assist in devising contingency plans; and

- (f) Enhancing security awareness: To establish the first virtual reality training venue on security of critical infrastructures in Hong Kong and a thematic website to provide the industry with more comprehensive security information through diversified interactive modes and three-dimensional digital images.

(IV) Improving the legal framework

24. At present, “terrorist act” is clearly defined under UNATMO¹. There are also a series of laws prohibiting acts of extreme violence such as those in cases involving explosives and firearms. Implemented by the HKSAR Government on 30 June 2020, NSL has in place provisions on terrorist offences under which anyone who organizes, plans, commits, participates in or threatens to commit any of the five types of terrorist activities² causing or intended to cause grave harm to the society with a view to coercing the Central People’s Government, the HKSAR Government or an international organization or intimidating the public in order to pursue political agenda shall be guilty of an offence.

25. There has always been stringent control over genuine firearms and their component parts in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, there has been an increase in cases involving genuine firearms in recent years where criminals exploit the loophole in the existing definition of “arms” under the Firearms and Ammunition Ordinance (Cap. 238) to smuggle component parts of genuine firearms into Hong Kong in separate shipments for

¹ According to UNATMO, an action is a “terrorist act” if such action or such action threatened to be carried out would have the effect of causing serious violence against a person, causing serious damage to property, endangering the life of any other person, creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public, seriously interfering with an electronic system or seriously interfering with an essential service, facility or system, and the intention is to compel the HKSAR Government or to intimidate the public for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause.

² According to Article 24 of HKNSL, the five types of terrorist activities include (A) serious violence against a person or persons; (B) explosion, arson, or dissemination of poisonous or radioactive substances, pathogens of infectious diseases or other substances; (C) sabotage of means of transport, transport facilities, electric power or gas facilities, or other combustible or explosible facilities; (D) serious interruption or sabotage of electronic control systems for providing and managing public services such as water, electric power, gas, transport, telecommunications and the internet; and (E) other dangerous activities which seriously jeopardize public health, safety or security.

assembly into fully functional genuine firearms to evade the law. In view of this, we submitted the Firearms and Ammunition (Declaration of Arms) (Amendment) Regulation 2021 (“Amendment Regulation”) to the Legislative Council on 9 June this year to clearly list out, by way of subsidiary legislation, specific essential firearm (i.e. genuine firearm) component parts as “arms” under the Firearms and Ammunition Ordinance (Cap. 238) to provide a clearer and more concrete definition of genuine firearm component parts, with a view to combatting the misuse of firearms by criminals in threatening the lives and property of the public. The Amendment Regulation will come into effect on 1 November this year.

Conclusion

26. The combat against terrorism requires concerted efforts and vigilance of everyone in society. Terrorist attacks pose harm to everyone in the community. Bombs, once exploded, will harm people in the vicinity, destroy buildings and cause casualties. In view of the global landscape and to tackle the threat of domestic terrorism, the HKSAR Government will continue to stay vigilant at all times and spare no effort to prevent any form of terrorism from emerging in Hong Kong. Through the series of strategies mentioned above, the HKSAR Government will vigorously combat the relevant cases under the law; strengthen CT preparedness, response capability, intelligence collection, training and exercises; enhance protection for critical infrastructures; improve the legal framework; and step up public education and publicity on CT, such that the relevant risks can be minimized.

Security Bureau
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