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The Prospects of the U.S.-China Conflict after the Annual Yanghui and Hong Kong Security Law

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English Abstract

The Annual Yanghui (兩會), China's biggest political event held every March, was postponed for the first time in 22 years due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019), and was held on May 21 this year. There was no mention of a set GDP growth target for 2020 during the Yanghui because of the severe economic pressure caused by the COVID-19 shock. Instead, the focus was on the plan to spend 5.75 trillion yuan as an economic stimulus to improve people's lives, expand employment opportunities, activate domestic market, revitalize spending, stimulate private economy, and promote corporate investment. In the wake of COVID-19, China is expected to promote a state-led R&D (research and development) and provide financial support in relevant areas of the 4th industrial revolution, such as AI (Artificial Intelligence), big data, cloud, and block chain, in order to establish a public health information system, digitalize hospital system, and share medical data.

The most noted subject of discussion in the Yanghui was about the new Hong Kong national security law. "The decision to establish and improve a legal framework and enforcement mechanism for safeguarding national security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (全國人民代表大會關於建立健全香港特別行政區維護國家安全的法律制度和執行機制的決定)" was unanimously approved during the plenary session of the National People's Congress on May 28, 2020. The Hong Kong national security

law contains the details of criminalizing acts of secession, subversion, and terrorism, preventing foreign interference, and establishing a dedicated agency to enforce the new law. When enforced in Hong Kong, under the “one country, two systems” principle, legal punishments ranging from arrest to imprisonment from 10-30 years to life may apply to issues ranging from simple protests to subversion.

The Chinese government’s stance on the Hong Kong national security law can be interpreted as a countermeasure to prevent subversion, foreign interference in domestic affairs, and separatism in order to protect national security. Emphasizing the importance of one country more than that of two systems, the Chinese government may take extremely tough measures against Hong Kong’s anti-Chinese or pro-democracy movements. It made its position clear by indicating that it regards the Trump administration’s criticism over the enactment of the Hong Kong national security law as a form of foreign interference in domestic affairs and an infringement of sovereignty. The Chinese government implied that it will respond to any retaliation with another retaliation. The relationship between China and the U.S. is expected to worsen after the enactment of the Hong Kong national security law. Although China currently faces economic difficulties due to the COVID-19 and the China-U.S. trade war, there is little hope for a compromise between Beijing and Washington over the enactment of the Hong Kong national security law, which directly relates to China’s one party system under the principle of “one country, two systems.” Tensions between the U.S. and China are likely to continue; therefore, it is necessary to monitor Hong Kong’s situation at home and abroad after the enactment of the Hong Kong National security law and adopt new political countermeasures. ❖

※ Translator’s note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.

※ This article is written based on the author’s personal opinions and does not reflect the views of the Sejong Institute.