

# Seven former foreign secretaries urge UK to take lead on Hong Kong

[theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/01/seven-former-foreign-secretaries-urge-uk-to-take-lead-on-hong-kong](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/01/seven-former-foreign-secretaries-urge-uk-to-take-lead-on-hong-kong)

Britain must take the lead in co-ordinating the international response to China's efforts to impose draconian security laws in Hong Kong, seven former Conservative and Labour UK foreign secretaries have come together to declare.

## Hong Kong officials lash out at Trump plan to strip city of special status

The rare cross-party initiative reflects concern that the response to China cannot be left to US president, Donald Trump, and that Britain as a former colonial power has a special responsibility to take a lead. The seven, including former Conservative foreign secretaries William Hague, Malcolm Rifkind and Jeremy Hunt, want the UK to set up an international contact group similar to the one established during the Balkans crisis in the 1990s.

In a letter to the foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, they wrote: "When it comes to Hong Kong's autonomy under the 'one country, two systems' model, many of our international partners continue to take their cue from the British government. I'm sure you would agree, as a co-signatory of the Sino-British joint declaration the UK must be seen to be leading and coordinating the international response to this crisis and ensuring the integrity of the treaty lodged at the United Nations in 1985 and one country, two systems."

Trump has proposed holding a one-off summit on China in September involving leaders of the G7 nations, as well as Australia, Korea, India and Russia.

But there are tensions between the EU and the US over how to respond to China. Only one European country, Sweden, proposed sanctions at an EU foreign ministers meeting on Friday, the day Trump in a bellicose speech laid out plans for a raft of economic punishments against Beijing. A Trump-led response to China in Hong Kong, heavily influenced by Trump's re-election plans, may only divide democracies opposed to what China is doing, some of the foreign secretaries fear.

The seven foreign secretaries, including Labour's David Miliband, Margaret Beckett, Jack Straw and the former Labour peer David Owen, say the UK continues to have a moral and legal obligation to the people of Hong Kong, despite claims by the Chinese foreign ministry to the contrary.

Raab has so far coordinated his global response to China's actions with Canada, Australia and the US, and a joint US-UK effort to raise the issue at a virtual meeting of the UN security council was blocked by China on the grounds that it represented interference with its internal affairs.

Raab has also promised that he will offer a pathway to citizenships to those holding, or eligible for, a British national overseas passport in Hong Kong, an offer that could mean millions of Hong Kong citizens are eligible. Raab told the BBC on Sunday that he did not expect tens of thousands to take up the offer since many in the city may not wish to leave or would go to other countries in the region.

The letter by implication suggests the UK could have been more energetic in its response to China's plan to bypass Hong Kong's legislature to impose security laws.

Lord Hague speaking to the foreign affairs select committee last month urged the foreign office to take more risks with initiatives. He said: "It means the Foreign Office being prepared to 'scratch the Rolls-Royce a bit more often'.

"We always talk about the British diplomatic service as a great Rolls-Royce. It hums along beautifully, keeping out of trouble. Now and again, we have to have the quick manoeuvre where the Rolls-Royce gets a bit scratched but the passengers get to their destination, because if the United States is going to give less leadership in global bodies but the need for that is strong, the UK has to be prepared to launch initiatives and perhaps be a little bit more French in our approach.

"The French do not really hold back on coming up with a new initiative and presenting it to the rest of the world, so I think we should be a little less coy about that."

The Balkans contact group set up in 1994 was seen as a successful way of keeping the international community united in its discussions over the future of Bosnia and Kosovo.