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Action needed on piracy

DESPITE the protests of Hongkong authorities, China continues to fail to respond to attacks on ships both inside and outside the territory's waters. Not only have Vietnamese ships been seized, although Vietnam-bound traffic has been a specific target, but other ships – including most recently a Hongkong vessel in international waters off the Philippines – have been boarded and fired upon.

These are not isolated incidents. All too often they seem to involve officials, many of them dressed in the uniforms of the People's Republic of China. However, until Beijing is prepared to make a clear statement of what is happening and what it is doing to curb such lawlessness, one can only wonder whether any of these incursions and apparent acts of piracy have official sanction.

Whoever is responsible, it is clear that Beijing and the provincial authorities in Guangzhou are either unable or unwilling to stop the attacks. Either southern China's readiness to ignore the Central government has developed to the point of anarchy, or the chain of corruption extends all the way up the Chinese security apparatus to Beijing. An alternative explanation – that there is a sinister policy of undermining the security of the international shipping lanes out of and around Hongkong – defies logic. Damaging Hongkong's reputation as a commercial port does equal, if not greater, damage to China itself.

It is time the Hongkong Government took a stronger public stand, raising the issue with the International Maritime Organisation and Beijing to ensure it is taken seriously as a regional problem and not just a local one.