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## Negotiations carry significant risks

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After President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) said in an interview with the journal *India and Global Affairs* last month that he hoped to sign a cross-strait peace agreement, China responded a week later when Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Vice Chairman Wang Zaixi (王在希) said the next step for both sides would be the signing of a peace accord on the basis of the “1992 consensus.”

However, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) 17th National Congress report stated on Oct. 15 that a peace deal should be reached under the “one China” principle.

Ma has attempted to play a peace card and resolve the cross-strait conflict using the “1992 consensus” to maintain the “status quo,” but the consequences will likely be the opposite.

First, the “1992 consensus” is not the same as the “one China” principle. Ma views the “1992 consensus” as meaning “one China, with each side of the Taiwan Strait having its own interpretation.” In other words, the CCP could interpret “one China” as the “People’s Republic of China” while Taiwan could interpret it as the “Republic of China.” By this logic, the “1992 consensus” means “de jure one China, de facto two Chinas.”

The CCP’s interpretation of the “consensus,” however, is “each side of the Taiwan Strait is entitled to define the meaning of ‘one China.’” The ARATS definition is that “both sides insist on the ‘one China’ principle and strive for national reunification; however, the “political meaning of ‘one China’ shall not be involved in cross-strait talks of a functional nature.”

The Straits Exchange Foundation’s (SEF) position is that it will interpret the “consensus” in line with the Guidelines for National Unification and the resolution on the meaning of “one China” adopted by the National Unification Council.

However, China interprets the SEF’s statement as meaning “Mainland China and Taiwan are both territories of China and encouraging unification is a responsibility that should be shared by all Chinese people,” and that “although Taiwan is part of China, mainland China is also part of China.” That is, there is only one China, legally and in reality.

As both sides have radically different interpretations of the “consensus,” to alleviate cross-strait tension it is tolerable for each to have its own definition and take what it needs. But with highly political peace talks upon us, the “one China” principle will be an unavoidable subject.

The Ma administration realized the issue had to be resolved before China would come to the table, so it said in early September that the cross-strait relationship was not “state-to-state” in nature but that

between a Taiwan region and a “mainland” region.

This trashed Taiwan’s previous interpretation of the “consensus” and accepting the CCP’s definition. Since the “one China” principle has been included in China’s interpretation of the “consensus,” Wang proposed using it as a basis for a cross-strait deal.

The government has put a great deal of effort into maintaining the “status quo” and there have been many achievements since Ma took office five months ago. For instance, the government’s diplomatic truce has gained a tacit agreement from China; Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) showed his support for Taiwan’s participation at the World Health Assembly at his meeting with SEF Chairman Chiang Pin-kung (江丙坤); and Ma’s proposal to sign a cross-strait peace deal has received a positive response from Beijing. Both sides seem to be moving toward a win-win situation.

But risk remains. If the Chinese version of the “consensus” were written into a peace deal draft, Taiwan would suffer from civil strife. Even though Taiwanese have the final say on the matter, the Ma administration would be placed in a predicament regardless of whether the agreement passed. If it were to pass, revolution would be inevitable.

Were the agreement not to pass, diplomatic hostilities would increase cross-strait tensions.

The Ma government played a peace card to make the CCP remove its missiles and dissolve other cross-strait threats to help ensure national security. But the domestic response is worrying.

China played a peace card to win Taiwanese hearts, to further peaceful development and so engage Taiwan in talks of a political nature. But this has prompted Beijing to show its cards earlier than it hoped.

The time and conditions are not right for either side to discuss a peace agreement. Haste will only harm these policies.

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