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Crisis of One China, Two Systems: Great Leap Backward, One Step Backward, or the Old Two Step?

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Abstract. This article explores the political psychology of crisis through analysis of a political document recently released by the top leadership of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The top political leadership of the PRC has recently released a document that threatens PRC military intervention against the Republic of China (Taiwan) in certain situations. For example, the PRC reserves for itself the right of military intervention if Taiwan does not agree to negotiations with the PRC in a manner considered timely by the PRC. The release of this document seems to have generated significant concern among the top leadership of Taiwan as well as that of many Asian countries, the United States, and other nation-states with an interest in PRC-Taiwan affairs and their consequences. The question becomes this: is such concern warranted?

The PRC leadership is simply restating a well-known and long-standing policy that has been accepted by most members of the United Nations. Can a crisis be generated by merely restating this policy? Some analysts might posit that the language of the document is more provocative in that the PRC usually threatens military intervention if Taiwan declares its independence--not if Taiwan prolongs the time before there is truly "one China" beyond some reasonable interval to be defined by the PRC. Yet both stances are based on the fulcrum of there someday being "one China" without pro forma and de facto separation as two different states. Having already waited more than 50 years for "one China" and having reasonably effected unification with Hong Kong and Macao, the PRC leadership does not seem to merit verbal attack as comprising war-mongers with poor impulse control.

A crisis also might be generated by restating policy if the many nation-states that have "bought off" on that policy have done so hypocritically. Such nation-states may have hoped to buy more time until the "one China" policy would be superseded by events--premeditated and/or unintended by said nation-states.

Both rationales for a crisis precipitated by restating a policy have been even more reinforced by the responses of representatives of the leaders of Taiwan. For example, Yu Yuh-Chao, Director of Information, Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, New York New York has asserted that Taiwan is in no way responsible for impeding negotiations. As examples, he has stated that the vice president of Taiwan has proposed regular summit meetings, a hotline between leaders of the PRC and Taiwan, and discussions that could cover "anything...provided there be no preconditions." Yet these proposals are exactly the kinds of activities that two independent nation-states have with one another. If followed, Taiwan would have succeeded in inducing the PRC to subvert the "one China" policy.

In conclusion, a crisis may be warranted. Yet it is not the crisis of a PRC seeking to rock the boat, but of a PRC seeking to keep the boat from sinking. (See Fraser, J.S. (1998). A process view of crisis and crisis intervention: Critique and reformulation. *Crisis Intervention and Time-Limited Treatment*, 4, 125-143; Pearson, C.M., & Clair, J.A. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *Academy of Management Review*, 23, 59-76; Safire, W. (February 28, 2000). Great leap backward. *The New York Times*, P. A23; Schrodtt, P.A., & Gerner, D.J. (1997). Empirical indicators of crisis phase in the Middle East, 1979-1995. *Journal of*

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Conflict Resolution, 41, 529-552; Yuh-Chao, Y. (February 27, 2000). If not one China now, then when? The New York Times, p. A16.) (Keywords: Crisis, PRC, Taiwan.)