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ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY:
CHINA'S CONDITIONAL MULTILATERALISM
AND GREAT POWER ENTENTE

Jing-dong Yuan

January 2000

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FOREWORD

This monograph provides an analysis of the People's Republic of China's evaluation of multilateralism and its place in Chinese foreign relations in the Asia-Pacific region. In contrast to conventional scholarly wisdom, the author, Dr. Jing-dong Yuan, contends that China is not opposed to multilateral approaches. In fact, Dr. Yuan asserts that China has adopted an approach he dubs "conditional multilateralism."

According to Dr. Yuan, China now recognizes that multilateral engagement is unavoidable and indeed can be useful in advancing China's interests. China's embrace of multilateralism, however, varies depending upon the particular forum and specific issue. Furthermore, Dr. Yuan contends China remains leery of entering into arrangements that might constrain its independence and flexibility. This change in China's attitude toward multilateralism is a significant one that has important implications for U.S. national security strategy and for U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this study as a contribution to ongoing analyses and debates over the future roles China will play in the international security environment.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Interim Director
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ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY: CHINA'S CONDITIONAL MULTILATERALISM AND GREAT POWER ENTENTE

Introduction.

The last few years have witnessed the emergence of what may be called Asia-Pacific multilateralism—the multiplication of channels of dialogues on regional security issues at both governmental and nongovernmental (“track two”) levels. It has been acknowledged and increasingly accepted among both policymakers and the academic community that a multilateral approach to Asia-Pacific security issues, with its emphasis on confidence-building, preventive diplomacy, and conflict resolution, can make important contributions to the maintenance of regional stability and the promotion of the region’s economic development and restoration of prosperity in the aftermath of the recent financial crisis. This security-building effort reflects a genuine belief that through regularized dialogues and consultation, existing and potential regional conflicts can be more effectively managed (if not resolved) within the parameters of agreed-upon norms and established procedures, without recourse to threats, coercion, and/or the use of force.

The extent to which this emerging Asia-Pacific multilateralism can succeed as an effective mechanism in promoting Asia-Pacific cooperative security depends on a host of factors. Realist cautions against the “false promises” of neoliberal institutionalism aside, the perspectives and attitudes of major powers toward regional multilateral security dialogues can be important factors in determining their chance of success as viable supplements to traditional bilateral security arrangements and the regional balance of power. That the very catalyst of Asia-Pacific multilateralism can be said to have arisen from uncertainty about

the region's future security outlook in anticipation of U.S. military drawdown, and hence a potential "power vacuum" inviting aspiring regional powers such as China and Japan, further underlines the importance of getting China actively and positively involved in the security- building endeavor.

This monograph traces the evolution of China's thinking on multilateralism and regional security cooperation and discusses some of the factors that have influenced Beijing's approaches over the past decade. While China's general attitude has shifted from suspicion to qualified endorsement, it has yet to demonstrate that it accepts the principles of multilateralism. Indeed, if anything, Beijing is more interested in great power relationships even as it publicly attacks power politics. The ambivalence reflects, to some extent, the uncertainty with which China seeks its place in the Asia-Pacific and the inevitable interactions with other major players. The analysis offered here has important policy implications for the United States, in particular with regard to its East Asian military strategy of peacetime engagement through forward deployment, crisis prevention, and fighting and winning war should deterrence fail.

The monograph is organized as the following. The next section examines the evolution of China's post-Cold War security agenda in the Asia-Pacific and its gradual endorsement of what can be termed conditional multilateralism characterized by low degree of institutionalization. This is followed by discussions of Beijing's approaches to the South China Sea territorial disputes and the management of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. Clearly, China is more interested in great power concert arrangements in which it seeks to play a prominent role in regional affairs; multilateralism in this context only serves to provide an alternative to the existing bilateral military alliances that the United States maintains with its key allies. These remain the core security structures in the region in the absence of Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-type security institutions. Finally, the author

discusses the implications of Chinese policy for U.S. interests and military strategy, and points to the need to resume and maintain stable and regularized Sino-U.S. military contacts as a key component of the U.S. policy of engagement.

China's Regional Agenda.

China's basic assessment of the security situation in post-Cold War Asia-Pacific is a dialectic one. On the one hand, the security environment in the region is characterized by Chinese analysts as stable and peaceful, with economic development the priority for most countries; on the other hand, there remain factors of uncertainty and sources of instability, highlighted by the recent economic crisis in the region and political and social unrest in a number of countries, and the unresolved territorial disputes.¹ Within such contexts, the establishment of a new political order in the region, according to Chinese analysts, requires the following: (1) resolving existing conflicts and preventing new ones; (2) promoting regional arms control and disarmament; (3) establishing state-to-state relations based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; (4) respecting each country's right to decide its own course of democratization conducive to political stability; (5) promoting regional economic cooperation and prosperity; and (6) setting up regional security dialogues based on regional specificities.²

This rhetoric aside, what has really transpired over the past few years is the fact that balance of power continues to feature prominently in Chinese thinking about the post-Cold War order not by choice but out of necessity. While short on specific proposals, there seems to be a working consensus among Chinese analysts as to the preferred mechanism for managing regional security *problematique*. There is a marked emphasis on great power relations and how they may affect the contour of regional security arrangement. What have emerged in recent Chinese

discussions on Asia-Pacific security are such concepts as the “new trilateral relationship” (Japan, China, and the United States) replacing the Cold-War strategic triangle (the United States, China, and the Soviet Union);³ the quadrangular-power relationships (China, Japan, Russia, and the United States), and the five-force interactions (the four powers plus the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Chinese scholars contend that:

the future security of the region will depend primarily on maintaining a balance of power in which no one country plays a dominant role. The prospects for such a stable power balance, . . . have been substantially enhanced by the emergence of a pluralistic regional strategic environment in the post-Cold War era in which the major powers—including the United States, Japan, China, Russia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—constrain each other. Stability of the post-Cold War regional environment is strengthened not only by this increasing diffusion of power, but also by the improvement in relations among the major powers in the region.⁴

That is, stability in the region will be largely affected by the coordination and changes of relationships among the five centers of force in the region—the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and ASEAN.⁵ The dynamics of such relationships, we are told, can play a significant role in ensuring regional security and stability.⁶ One Chinese scholar elaborates:

the international relationship in Asia-Pacific is moving towards a new, relatively balanced pattern membered by quadrangular and multilateral forces. . . . By “quadrangular” we mean a quadrangular relationship among China, Japan, the United States and Russia, which has emerged out of the faded U.S.-USSR-China triangle and resulted from the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the rise of Japan. Either judging from the power equation or from the intra-regional relationship among East Asian countries, the new quadrangular relationship is unprecedented in the history of East Asian international relations. . . . The fore-said “multilateral” structure has dual meanings. First, it refers to the multilateral

relations among the members of the above-mentioned quadrangle. Then it refers to the various rising forces in Asia-Pacific other than the four countries as well as the multilateral relations between these forces and the four countries.⁷

One interesting point is that China seems to have duly recognized the growing role of ASEAN in regional affairs, including its role in building regional multilateral security. Increasingly, ASEAN has been regarded as one of the five power centers in Asia-Pacific, along with China, Japan, Russia, and the United States.⁸ There are a number of reasons for China's taking ASEAN more seriously. There is a common united front in human rights vis-à-vis the West; Beijing can use its economic power as a useful foreign policy tool to foster closer ties with ASEAN to fend off perceived threats such as the one represented by the strengthened U.S.-Japan security pact; and China can play a more confident and flexible and responsible role in regional affairs.⁹ China has recently gone out of its way to reassure ASEAN countries. During the first informal China-ASEAN Summit held in December 1997, Chinese President Jiang Zemin called for strengthening bilateral relations.¹⁰ In his recent Southeast Asian tour, Chinese Premier Li Peng elaborated the so-called five points in China-ASEAN relations and reiterated China's proposal for shelving disputes and joint development of maritime resources. The issue should be resolved peacefully and based on international law and the U.N. Conference on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹¹

China's emphasis on major power relations is based on the principle of multipolarization in which it will have an important place in regional affairs. In addition, regional stability will also be affected by a host of other factors, including continued economic growth and increasing interdependence among the region's countries; Asian values, in that the collective good takes precedence over individual rights; the ASEAN way of nonconfrontation, consultation, and consensus; and simply most countries'

desire for peace and stability.¹² This being the case, regional stability will largely depend on the relationships between the region's major players; how existing disputes are to be resolved, including the establishment of security mechanisms; and how the diversity of the region (history, culture, economic development, political systems, etc.) can be managed.

While proposing general principles for peacefully settling any disputes in the region, China has not so far offered any specific mechanisms for managing potential conflicts. Regarding emerging security-building initiatives, Beijing has been rather cautious in either endorsing or criticizing them, for obvious reasons.¹³ Chinese analysts have viewed the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with mixed ambivalence. For some, the purpose of the ARF in essence is to retain the influence of the United States in the region and to cast some restraining net over the region's major powers.¹⁴ For others, there is the concern that regional multilateral security arrangements would be dominated by the United States and become appendixes to existing military alliances.¹⁵ China is also keen on keeping the ARF process as informal as possible (e.g., Inter-Service Group [ISG] classified as meetings rather than "working groups").¹⁶ For all intents and purposes, China's views of ASEAN's role in regional security are mixed. On the one hand, a greater ASEAN will contribute to the process of multipolarization in the region, and hence can serve to balance U.S. power and the U.S.-Japan military alliance. On the other hand, a more cohesive and integrated ASEAN can pose as an economic competitor and also a potential adversary in South China Sea disputes.¹⁷

Despite its ambivalence toward the regional security mechanisms, China at least shows a toleration of such mechanisms as long as the small and medium-sized countries are taking control, the process itself involves a low degree of institutionalization, and if such forums provide alternatives to existing military alliances.¹⁸ Although ARF serves as a multilateral forum for dialogue on regional

security issues, it is also useful for high-level bilateral encounters, such as one between the United States and China. In this regard, ARF represents ASEAN's ability to engage major powers, which is crucial for regional security.¹⁹ However, its ability to manage regional security issues remains limited due to its own institutional weakness and the fact that great powers continue to exert unsurpassed influence over the agenda, the pace, and mechanisms regarding regional security issues.²⁰ Meanwhile, China is strongly opposed to establishing any institutionalized mechanisms for dealing with regional security issues since the countries in the region are vastly different in terms of history, culture, political and social systems, and different visions of national security and priorities. An OSCE-type institutional arrangement not only will not be able to deal with the complexity of issues but also likely falls under the control of certain powers.²¹

Indeed, Chinese analysts assert that a direct transplant of the CSCE model to the Asia-Pacific region is impractical and may even be counterproductive. And Beijing's understanding of the notion of comprehensive security is premised on the recognition that different countries have different focuses on different aspects of national and regional security: some on economic security; some military security; political and social security; etc. Dealing with this multitude of issues should make use of a combination of political, economic, military, and diplomatic measures instead of solely relying on military force for maintaining security. At the same time, the negative side of the comprehensive security concept is that certain countries may attempt to extend the scope of security; politicize and internationalize domestic economic, social and environmental issues; and use it as a pretext for interference in domestic affairs; and for power politics and hegemonism.²²

Nevertheless, Chinese positions on the multilateral approach to Asia-Pacific security have undergone noticeable changes.²³ China seems to have gradually moved

toward acknowledging the utility of multilateralism, while still hesitating about adopting institutionalized mechanisms right away. In March 1992, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu proposed "to establish gradually a bilateral, sub-regional, and regional multi-channel and multi-layered security dialogue mechanism so as to hold consultations on the issues concerned and to strengthen interchange and confidence."²⁴ Qian Jiadong, the deputy secretary general of the State Council's Center for International Studies, said that a unified regional security mechanism like the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) was not appropriate to the diversity of the Asia-Pacific region; rather, multi-channeled, multi-tiered dialogues that were both bilateral and multilateral, intergovernmental and nongovernmental, were the most feasible answer for the region.²⁵

During the 1994 ARF in Bangkok, Chinese Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen proposed the following principles and measures for Asia-Pacific security cooperation:

- Establishing new types of state-to-state relations characterized by mutual respect and amicable coexistence should be accomplished on the basis of the U.N. Charter and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence;
- Establishing economic ties on the basis of equality and mutual benefit and mutual assistance with a view to promoting common economic development;
- Having consultations on an equal footing and peaceful settlements as norms in handling disputes between countries in the Asia-Pacific region in order to gradually remove the destabilizing factors;
- With the purpose of promoting peace and security in the region, adhering to the principle that armament should only be used for defensive purposes, and avoiding an arms race of any form. Avoiding nuclear proliferation. Nuclear

states should not be the first to use nuclear weapons and should not use or threaten to use them against non-nuclear states or nuclear-free zones. Proposals on establishing nuclear-free zones and zones of peace should be supported; and,

- Promoting bilateral and multilateral security dialogues and consultations in various forms in order to enhance understanding and confidence.²⁶

China's evolving positions on Asia-Pacific security can be characterized as what I call "conditional multilateralism." Its essence is to present China as a supporter of the emerging regional security dialogues, while at the same time avoid committing itself to a more institutionalized arrangement whose norms and rules may constrain Beijing's freedom of action. Conditional multilateralism allows China to be part of the process of building regional security, influencing its agenda, and having a voice in its pace and direction; selective involvement accrues experience in dealing with issues cooperatively while preconditions for its participation would allow Beijing to retain the ability to maneuver. Such posturing has as much to do with Beijing's inherent suspicion about the effectiveness of multilateral approaches in handling regional security as with its concern that multilateral forums may be used for "China bashing."

There are a number of distinct features about China's conditional multilateralism: (1) *The multi-channel approach*. Regional security issues should be dealt with by a variety of channels, including bilateral, multilateral, and sometimes unilateral approaches at governmental and nongovernmental levels. Indeed, China's approach to regional security issues can be seen as distinctly bilateral, arguing that under certain circumstances bilateral approaches can be more appropriate in resolving security issues (e.g., Sino-Russian agreement on reducing military forces in the border areas); (2) *The minilateral approach*. Beijing continues to emphasize the importance of major

powers in managing regional security issues; (3) A *gradualist approach*. The regional security building process should begin with bilateral dialogues, moving to sub-regional, and then region-wide ones. Issues should be dealt with from an order of ascendance, i.e., from the relatively easy to the more difficult; and (4) *An Asia-Pacific approach*. The region, because of its special characteristics—history, culture, economic development, political systems, religion, etc., should not blindly copy the CSCE model; substance is more important than form. Dialogues and confidence-building measures should serve to enhance political trust, which is the basis of stable security relationships.

Multi-channel Approach. China continues to view bilateral approaches as an effective way of dealing with not only security issues but also inter-state relations in general.²⁷ Chinese experts maintain that bilateral relations among the region's major powers, rather than a multilateral security structure, are the primary factors affecting security and stability in Asia-Pacific, with the U.S.-China-Japan relationships as the key.²⁸ Indeed, post-Tiananmen Chinese diplomacy has been characterized by its almost single-minded objective of improving bilateral relations with all neighboring countries.²⁹ China has regarded bilateral security dialogues as the basis of multilateral approaches. One Chinese analyst points out:

bilateral problems can only be solved within the bilateral framework of the countries concerned. Attempts to solve bilateral problems within a multilateral framework often complicate these problems and make them even more difficult to solve. Therefore, the security framework of the Asian-Pacific region should be based on bilateral security relations.³⁰

The large number of local disputes and conflicts may not easily be susceptible to settlement through negotiation mechanisms modeled on CSCE. "A more realistic approach," suggests another Chinese analyst,

would be U.S.-Soviet talks on [the] reduction of military confrontation in the region. And parallel with this, talks among indigenous Asia-Pacific countries concerned on disputes over territorial claims, maritime rights and the like through a certain dialogue mechanism. Thus, a unique form of security mechanism geared to the peculiarities of the Asia-Pacific region will gradually take shape in the course of settling these disputes.³¹

Minilateral Approach. What China has shown more interest in, with regard to Asia-Pacific security, is what can be termed as a “minilateral” approach, i.e., how regional security issues can be managed through cooperation between major powers. Indeed, notwithstanding their customary calls for the equitable participation of states large and small in international affairs, recent Chinese writings on regional security are replete with role prescriptions for major powers. One Chinese scholar holds that the current international order can be characterized as being composed of one superpower (the United States) and four major powers or power centers—the European Union, Japan, Russia, and China. The so-called “four triangles,” with the United States at the core of each spoke, would have much impact on global and regional security orders.³² Another Chinese analyst suggests that:

what merits special attention is that the changes in the relations among the four big powers, the United States, the Soviet Union, China and Japan, are of great importance to the political, economic and security relations in the Asia-Pacific region. . . . the maintenance of a balanced development of relations in the Asia-Pacific region by the four big powers, . . . is of great significance to peace and stability in this region.³³

There is an implied allusion to the concept of a concert of powers, as the emphasis on relations between major powers would attest. In other words, regional security depends on a constructive and cooperative relationship among the major powers.³⁴

Gradualist Approach. Big power relations are not just necessary, but indeed imperative, for regional security. One Chinese analyst goes even further, arguing that:

any structure cannot go without balance of power or equilibrium in some form and to some extent, not to speak of the fact that balance of power has been an important security mechanism dating back to ancient times, and has also been an important constituent part of the present-day international security mechanism.³⁵

Chinese scholars have suggested that the process of building regional security should follow the principles of moving from bilateral to regional/multilateral arrangements; from confidence-building measures (CBMs) to security arrangements to regional disarmament; from informal/nonofficial to formal/governmental discussions, and a gradual process that requires time and patience. Given that the ARF remains limited in playing a meaningful role in regional security issues, as contrasted with that of the Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC), a sub-regional security framework in Northeast Asia might be highly desirable. This design, coupled with the recently launched East Asia informal summits among ASEAN member states, China, Japan, and South Korea, could serve as a model for the development of East Asian regionalism.³⁶ Overnight establishment of a security arrangement modeled after others may not be helpful.³⁷ One Chinese analyst argues that given the region's complexity in terms of the different political systems, the variety of issues, and different priorities countries face, a gradualist approach is more appropriate. The development of cooperative security must be based on common security interests but it takes time to arrive at these common interests, given the divergent security concerns of states.³⁸ The logical steps should be to resolve regional hot spots and other bilateral disputes first; enhance economic cooperation, and then build the foundation for a region-wide, multilateral framework upon improved bilateral relations.³⁹ The emphasis is put on a gradual, step-by-step approach,

“dealing with issues in ascending order of difficulty,” and through preliminary informal consultations and discussions.⁴⁰

Asia-Pacific Approach. Finally, Asia-Pacific’s specific characteristics and diversity in history, culture, religion, and economic development require a distinctly Asia-Pacific approach, particularly at a time when countries in the region are still in the process of adjusting their foreign policy objectives and priorities in view of the post-Cold War realities. The essence of that approach is to recognize that substance is more important than form, that informal relations may be preferred over formal institutions, that dialogue is valuable in and of itself, and that a set of overlapping informal dialogues at the bilateral, sub-regional, and region-wide levels may be more appropriate at this moment than an overly institutionalized European model.⁴¹ Under such circumstances, the European experience can be drawn upon—but not copied—in Asia-Pacific.⁴²

The broader contexts of Chinese approaches toward multilateralism are conditioned by a number of variables. They are the regional characteristics, China’s past experience, and the dynamics of domestic politics. Unlike the case in Europe, where multilateral institutions such as the NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) dominated the security architecture during the Cold War, in Asia-Pacific, approaches to security had been either unilateral (self-reliance) or bilateral; indeed, most defense arrangements have involved the United States at one end and one of the Asia-Pacific countries at the other. The few exceptions to this general rule, such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), or the Five-Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA),⁴³ have not played a predominant role in regional security.⁴³ This probably explains the initial U.S. response, which was lukewarm at best, to initiatives aimed at setting up a multilateral, region-wide security framework.⁴⁴

Asia-Pacific multilateralism will have to take into consideration the particular features of its strategic culture. This includes:

longer time horizons and policy perspectives than those which characterize Western thinking and planning; reliance on bilateral rather than multilateral approaches to conflict resolution and security planning; . . . commitment to the principle of non-interference in the international affairs of other countries; styles of policymaking which feature informality of structures and modalities, form and process as much as substance and outcome, consensus rather than majority rule, and pragmatism rather than idealism; multidimensional or comprehensive approaches to security; and roles for the military that go beyond national defense to include politics, economic development and social affairs.⁴⁵

Indeed, it was with such recognition that the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue (NPCSD), when it was proposed in 1990, deliberately "envisioned a more gradual approach to developing multilateral institutions, recognized the value of existing bilateral arrangements, and encouraged ad hoc, informal dialogues (habits of dialogues), and inclusive participation until conditions mature for more formal institution-building."⁴⁶

Another point that should be kept in mind is that not since the early 1990s have there emerged numerous proposals for the regional multilateral security frameworks, and only since then has there been a general trend toward discussing new mechanisms for regional cooperation on security matters. Today, there are a multitude of security dialogues at various levels, or what may be called "multiplex," "multi-layered," or "multifaceted" structure.⁴⁷ Some of the principles of cooperative security have only recently taken roots: assurance rather than deterrence; multilateral process to replace or at least coexist with bilateral military alliance; and promotion of both military and nonmilitary security. If progress in Asia-Pacific multilateralism must be judged against its own past, considering, for instance, the fact that CSCE/OSCE

has been more than 20 years in the making, while one of the earlier, more serious efforts—the North Pacific Cooperative Security Dialogue (NPCSD) initiative—had its origin merely 9 years ago, and the Asia-Pacific version approximate to CSCE/OSCE—the ARF—only began less than 2 years ago, we may begin to assess China's progress in quite a different light.

The differences between China and its neighbors regarding their attitudes toward multilateralism may simply reflect a matter of degree.⁴⁸ Indeed, it is understood that ASEAN members have rejected the adoption of a CSCE-type institution but are more receptive to informal, looser dialogues and consultations for exchanging views within the sub-region or across Asia-Pacific over security issues.⁴⁹ At the same time, within ASEAN, conflicts are normally resolved through ad hoc, bilateral consultations rather than resort to the more legal, multilateral mechanism within the organization.⁵⁰ And there are some compatibilities between China and ASEAN countries: economic development as first priority, resistance to Western pressure on human rights issues, and political stability.⁵¹

Chinese approaches toward multilateralism should also be judged within the broader contexts of its past experiences, its current concerns, and the dynamics of its domestic politics. China has been cautious about adopting multilateral approaches for a number of reasons: the limited and negative experience; the fear of small states ganging up against China (China bashing); and the concern that multilateral security forums may give legitimacy to Taiwan. China's limited experiences with multilateralism in the past were far from positive. A few examples will suffice: The League of Nations and its acquiescence in the Japanese invasion of China in 1931; the Soviet attempt to control China through both the 3rd Communist International and later the Comecon. China also suspects (and has tried to stop) that the territorial disputes in the South China Sea and China's military buildup may be

turned into *the* issues at regional security forums.⁵² Finally, Beijing is highly sensitive about *de facto* recognition of Taiwan's legitimacy through participation in some of the regional security dialogues. The stalemate concerning membership of both China and Taiwan in the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), which was resolved only recently, to a large extent is due to Beijing's objection to Taiwan's participation.⁵³

Domestic politics has always featured prominently in China's foreign policymaking; indeed, there are discernable linkages between domestic politics and foreign policy behavior.⁵⁴ Such linkages become all the more pronounced during periods of uncertainty due to leadership succession and power transition, which makes flexibility difficult. The current leadership does not wield the kind of power held by the old generation of revolutionaries and consequently initiatives on their part are less of a possibility than negotiated compromises. Within such a framework, important foreign policy decisions that touch upon important and sensitive issues such as state sovereignty and territorial integrity will normally not be subject to multilateral considerations. Another factor that must be considered is that external environment exerts less of a direct impact on Chinese policymaking. While the international system acts to encourage certain behaviors and discourage others, the defining variable remains domestic.⁵⁵

Another way of understanding Chinese approaches to multilateralism is what Samuel Kim regards as the tension between rhetoric and practice, theory and praxis. China tends to propose principles well beyond its capabilities; at the same time, there is the practical side of Chinese foreign policy that seeks to realize maximum-security benefits while minimizing moral and normative costs. This would explain the meshing of principled stand (*jiben luxian*) with practical adaptations under certain circumstances.⁵⁶ Yet a third way to understand Chinese multilateralism is what can be called the rhetorical and substantive of Chinese

foreign policy. This leads to a combination of rigidity and flexibility in Chinese international behaviors. As long as fundamental national interests can be secured, Beijing has been willing to be more flexible with regard to how certain issues should be handled.⁵⁷

China and the South China Sea.

The origins of the South China Sea problems can be traced to the 1960s when deposits of oil and natural gas were discovered. Thus began what China regards as the foreign occupation of what China considers to be its inalienable territories based on historical claims. The matter is complicated also because of foreign powers' interference.⁵⁸ The reasons for the interest in the region are simple enough: the large reserves of untapped oil resources, confirmed or otherwise, serve as a catalyst for claims and counter-claims, and disputes and possibly confrontation. Many claimants have displayed various ways to bolster their claims: occupying islands, setting out exploration, enacting national laws, publishing maps, building markers, and so on.⁵⁹

In addition to territorial disputes, Western analysts suggest that in the future, resource scarcity can become another serious source of conflicts as countries struggle, forever shrinking resources with ever-growing demands. China in particular will pose a challenge to the global resource market as the country builds its prosperity and consumes more energy and food, which it already has to import. The attempt to meet this demand has driven China and other countries looking for maritime resources on a potential collision course. The flashpoint in the South China Sea may be a prime example. The security implications are obvious: unless the countries concerned reach some kind of compromise, the scurry for oil can lead to serious confrontations threatening regional security and international sea lanes of communications as well.⁶⁰

Beijing claims to have been very self-restrained throughout the 1950s to 1970s and has from time to time proposed that countries involved shelve their disputes and seek peaceful solutions; however, other claimants, the Philippines in particular, began to occupy islands in the early 1970s. China only made its move in 1988.⁶¹ Vietnam is seen as particularly active in asserting its territorial control. It is involved in various activities to achieve a *fait accompli* and seek outside powers' support by granting concessions to foreign oil companies.⁶² Given the importance of the marine resources for China's economic development in the decades to come, there has been increasing call for the control of its maritime territories. General Mi Zhenyu, a former vice-commandant of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Academy of Military Science, is quoted to argue that China must develop a strong sea power to protect and not yield a single inch of its three million-square kilometers of ocean territory. China must, according General Mi, "build a new Chinese maritime great wall."⁶³

China's own increasing interest in the South China Sea derives from its overall developmental strategy. One of the motivating factors for Chinese assertiveness with regard to the Spratly islands apparently is oil, for which China will have increasing demands as its economy further develops.⁶⁴ For the Chinese, neither the 200-mile exclusive economic zones (EEZ) nor the 350-mile continental shelf would be sufficient for a country such as China. They note that even for a small country like Japan, whose peace constitution notwithstanding, its interest extends to 1,000-mile sea lanes of communications (SLOCs). Clearly, China should do more for both economic and strategic reasons.⁶⁵ According to one Chinese estimate, China will rely on maritime resources SLOCs for 30 percent of its oil, 50 percent of its iron ore, and 80 percent of its international trade. Indeed, a propaganda campaign has been launched to arouse the countrymen's sea mentality. We are told that historically, great powers, from the Netherlands, to the United Kingdom, to the United States, have also been great

maritime powers. Whoever controls the ocean controls the maritime resources and consequently dominates the world.⁶⁶

At the same time, Beijing's South China Sea policy also reflects its changing maritime strategy, which from 1949 to 1989 was largely concerned with protecting coastal and immediate surrounding sea areas. Since the end of the Cold War, the policy reflects more of Beijing's overall political and strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region in that it both wants to assert its position of primacy and be restrained enough so as not to arouse the fear of a China threat. In this context, China's activities, including taking over the Mischief Reef, can be regarded as an indicator of losing tolerance of encroachment on its maritime territories, but more important, its prestige as a great power, by other claimants. Selective demonstration without alarming neighboring states apparently has been the adopted policy option.⁶⁷

China's Spratly policy must therefore be seen in the broader contexts of its national development objectives and its strategic view of the region as a whole.⁶⁸ This being the case, Beijing's top priority is economic growth as the foundation for building up comprehensive national strength. Therefore Beijing has sought to improve relations with its neighbors as economic interdependence increases, to minimize the disruptive effects of territorial disputes, and, at the same time, to act cautiously regarding Japan's potential and, in actuality, growing role in Southeast Asia.⁶⁹

However, handling the Spratly issue remains a delicate balancing act and poses a dilemma for Chinese policy-makers. On the one hand, sovereignty is nonnegotiable and must be upheld. On the other hand, Beijing does not want to appear too assertive but rather as a responsible power. In other words, Beijing wants to defend its sovereignty and maintain its maritime rights and interests, but also keep good-neighborly relations with Southeast Asian countries. Two tracks are consequently followed: diplomatic

initiatives to maintain the status quo and joint development; naval buildup in case diplomacy eventually fails to protect China's interests and force therefore must be resorted to.⁷⁰

The restraint is in part underlined by the growing economic interdependence between China and other regional states. This is particularly the case in Sino-ASEAN economic relations. Bilateral trade between China and ASEAN member states has increased dramatically over the last decade: China-Indonesia, \$2.15 billion (1994); China-Singapore, \$4.9 billion (1993); China-Malaysia, \$2.27 billion (1994); trade with Thailand and the Philippines has also grown rapidly.⁷¹ China and ASEAN countries have presented a common line in APEC and resisted pressure from Western members for speedy regional economic integration and dismantling of trade barriers. They have also resisted introducing security issues into APEC deliberations.⁷² In addition, China shares with ASEAN members' similar views on questions such as human rights and noninterference in domestic affairs. China appears to want the best of both worlds: mending fences politically with neighbors, or at least not alarming them, without conceding on territorial issues, which Beijing regards as nonnegotiable.⁷³ Others, however, see China's more conciliatory gestures as a tactic to buy time as Beijing at the same time has encouraged if not directly been implicated in various nonmilitary activities to assert sovereignty: oil exploration, scientific research, and lately, radio amateurs' expeditions.⁷⁴

Competing policy objectives have created confusion. On the one hand, official Chinese statements call for peaceful resolution of the issue and shelving disputes and seeking joint developments; on the other hand, actual activities include announcing law on territorial waters and granting foreign oil company concessions in disputed areas. Soon after China issued the legislation on territorial waters in February 1992, Beijing began seismic survey to explore oil and in May that year signed a contract with the

Colorado-based Crestone Energy Corporation, promising to back up exploration with naval forces. These activities soured relations between Vietnam and China and raised concern in the region about China's true intentions.⁷⁵ It should be noted, though, that China has been rather cautious in carrying through its threat to use naval force; indeed, in an incident in 1994 when a Chinese seismic research vessel chartered by Crestone was ordered to leave a disputed area by Vietnamese gunboats, it left accordingly.⁷⁶

China's issuance in 1992 of legislation asserting sovereignty over the Spratly, Paracel, and Diaoyutai island groups drew protests from the other claimants. However, neighboring countries did not want a confrontation with China.⁷⁷ ASEAN's policy of engaging China has been regarded as a viable strategy, at least for now. The hope is that over the long run, networks of security, economic, and political institutions can be established and consolidated, in which China has a clear stake, the framework of which China has helped to build, and hence Beijing will have an incentive to maintain.⁷⁸ The question, of course, remains: what if China does not buy into it? For the time being, "the political costs of defection from a multilateral security forum like the ARF have begun to outweigh the strategic benefits accruing from an uncompromising territorial posture."⁷⁹ Indeed, regional states have misgivings about China's true intentions, Beijing's assurance notwithstanding. They see China bent on using force to exercise its claims over the whole Spratly island group, which is reinforced by its unbending stand on the issue and open conflicts with Vietnam.⁸⁰ The continuing controversy over China's fortification of the Mischief Reef only reinforces the apprehension within ASEAN that Beijing is bent on getting its way: through diplomacy if possible; by flexing muscles if necessary.⁸¹

ASEAN's 1992 Manila Declaration for the first time dealt with security issues, particularly the territorial disputes over the Spratly Islands. In a joint statement, the

six ASEAN foreign ministers called for peaceful resolution of the issues and cooperation in ensuring safety of maritime navigation. China's response was lukewarm in that it "appreciate[d]" certain principles contained in the statement.⁸² If anything, Beijing has deliberately tried to avoid taking the Spratly issue to a multilateral forum, as some of the ASEAN members hoped. Instead, it opts for bilateral talks to resolve the issue.⁸³ According to Beijing, it rejects any attempt to "internationalize" the issue.⁸⁴ At the same time, China apparently regards any openly forceful measures in retaking the islets as contrary to its broader interests in the region.⁸⁵ However, this has not precluded China from participating, informally, in workshops dealing with issues related to the South China Sea, although confined to a more technical manner. Indeed, while China is objects to any suggestion that the sovereignty issue of the South China Sea be discussed in multilateral forums, it has declined Japan's proposal to settle the East China Sea boundary issue bilaterally, insisting that it must involve all claimants, including South Korea.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this selective participation on China's part, and the change of attitudes over the years, at least demonstrate that Beijing is not completely opposed to the spirit of multilateralism, if not its constraining components and obligations.⁸⁷

To date, Beijing seems more comfortable in resolving the disputes in bilateral settings. China and the Philippines issued a joint statement on the South China Sea and pledged to settle their differences peacefully. They also discussed other related issues such as joint development and maintaining regional peace and stability.⁸⁸ The same agreement also has been reached between China and Vietnam. In addition, the China-ASEAN consultative forum serves to keep regular dialogues as a reassurance from Beijing to its neighbors.⁸⁹ Vietnam, for one, has sought to move bilateral disputes to the multilateral forum where Hanoi has called for support from its ASEAN fellow member states. The result is that China called off its exploration

vessel drilling oil 65 nautical miles off the Vietnamese coast.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, if and how ASEAN as a group can deal with China successfully depends on whether its current strategy will work. ASEAN has adopted a strategy of “balance of politics,” that is, siding with either Beijing or Washington, depending on the issue, without tightly tying itself to either of the great powers. This gives ASEAN much needed flexibility in dealing with a variety of issues. The hope is to avoid implicating China as a threat, to imply continued support of U.S. presence in the region, integrate China into the growing regional economic interdependence, and to tie China into the multilateral security arrangement to temper Beijing’s more assertive side of its regional policy by giving it great stakes in maintaining regional peace and stability.⁹¹

Concert of Power and China’s Korea Policy.

It has been pointed out that multilateralism actually disguises what should be regarded as a concert of powers, or what Robert Scalapino called “ad hoc multilateralism”⁹² in which enough common interests drive major powers to coordinate their policies in tackling certain issues such as Cambodia and North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. In order for a concert of powers to work, major powers need to regulate their relations. This may also be its objective. Its size is small and it operates on the principle of flexibility, thus is different from either the general principles of multilateralism and the alliance obligation. What are required are informal negotiations and some sort of consensus on a particular issue. However, for a concert of powers to work, some minimum requirements must be satisfied, such as most powers should be contented with the *status quo* and that they share some common ideologies or agreement on common values like the avoidance of use of force in resolving issues among them.⁹³ Given the difficulty in achieving an ideal state of multilateralism, a concert of powers, while itself certainly is undemocratic and

sometimes imposing, has proved in the past its effectiveness in restraining conflicts and may continue to serve this function better than others for some time to come.

The Korean Peninsula and China's Interests. The Korean peninsula has always been considered as a security buffer zone for China. This is the fundamental factor that influences Beijing's policy. Additional factors include calculating the regional balance of power; ideological and domestic politics concerns; and more recently, economic interests.⁹⁴ China has always highly valued the strategic importance of the Korean peninsula. It is the link between the Asian continent and Japan, between the Eurasian landmass and western Pacific, and sits on important SLOCs.⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, Beijing is acutely concerned with the stability on the Korean peninsula; indeed, any potential or even actual conflicts in the South China Sea would pale against an escalation of tension on the peninsula that could seriously threaten China's security, just as it did in 1950.⁹⁶

Security concerns aside, China's attitude toward the Korean issue must be seen in a broader strategic context. One consideration is the ideological connection between Beijing and Pyongyang, which share, at least nominally, socialism. Therefore, sustaining the survival of North Korea concords with fundamental national interest in protecting socialism. That explains why Beijing pushes Pyongyang to adopt the policy of economic reform while maintaining tight political control. At the same time, China is wary of North Korea's reckless behavior and certainly does not want the nuclear crisis to get out of control lest it lead to serious consequences. Beijing believes that Pyongyang's nuclear gamble stems from its high sense of insecurity and vulnerability and hence any resolution must address this issue first. In addition, China does not believe that North Korea possesses the technical capability to assemble nuclear weapons.⁹⁷

Since the late 1980s, Beijing has shifted its position from a largely pro-Pyongyang policy to a delicate “two Korea” policy. China’s decision to establish diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992 was well-timed and calculated, taking into consideration various strategic, political, and economic factors at both global and regional levels. By so doing, Beijing sought to enhance its position in a multitude of triangular relationships.⁹⁸ For instance, Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen reportedly told the party central committee that by establishing diplomatic ties with Seoul, Beijing had scored a number of points: isolating Taiwan, expanding economic ties with South Korea, diminishing Pyongyang’s constant demands for aid, and gaining bargaining leverage with the United States. The last point, according to South Korean officials, was to demonstrate the indispensability of the China factor in the reshaping of a new regional order in Northeast Asia.⁹⁹

The restructuring of China’s Korea policy from ideological solidarity with North Korea toward a balanced two-Korea policy reflected Beijing’s overall strategic consideration in the post-Cold War era. As economic development takes command, China requires a stable international environment for expanding trade, attracting foreign investment and technology transfers, and hence has a particular interest in seeing a stable, even if a continuously divided Korean peninsula. Managing the Korea policy becomes a delicate balancing act to reconcile different interests: an economic tilt toward South Korea; a security imperative to maintain a political and military relationship with North Korea with the latter serving as a buffer for China; promoting developments that will diminish the presence of external power or at least not harm China’s interests; and using its unique position to both promote peace and stability and enhance its own bargaining position vis-à-vis other powers.¹⁰⁰ One source of that power/international influence stems from being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and Beijing has since the Gulf War realized that

this could be a valuable asset in both projecting China's image and promoting its national interests.¹⁰¹

Chinese analysts' assessment of the Korean situation is that in overall terms the situation has become stable, characterized by the two Koreas' policy shift from confrontation to mutual coexistence. The U.S. role in peninsular affairs has been on the rise, with Washington seeking an eventual development most compatible with its political, economic, and strategic interests. China's position has been to maintain peninsular peace and stability, expand China-Korea economic ties, and probably most important, play a more active role if for no other purpose than to oppose any big power's expansionist and hegemonic pretension in the region. In other words, any development must not affect China's crucial security interests as well as its economic development plans.¹⁰²

Officially, Beijing's position and policy regarding the Korean issue have been summarized as maintaining peninsular peace and stability; playing a constructive role in Korea's peaceful unification; and consolidating and strengthening traditional China-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) friendship while seeking to develop good relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK). In specific terms, Beijing supports (1) dialogues and exchanges between the two Koreas; (2) the two Koreas in their efforts to resolve the problem independently; and (3) denuclearization and peaceful unification.¹⁰³ China holds that the Korean problem can only and must be resolved by the two Koreas themselves. Only through their efforts is genuine and long-lasting peace and stability possible. With the signing of basic accord between the two Koreas in late 1991, some Chinese analysts claimed that fundamental changes had taken place, marked above all by the replacement of antagonism and confrontation with reconciliation and cooperation. It was important for both sides to sustain efforts to carry out the agreement. The international community, and in particular the major powers, should play an active facilitative role in promoting positive

developments.¹⁰⁴ What China can do is to play a constructive role in encouraging and supporting inter-Korean dialogues and exchanges, arms control, confidence-building, the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone, and peaceful unification. Keeping good and cooperative major power relationships is conducive to promoting peninsular peace and stability. The establishment of diplomatic relations between North Korea and the United States and Japan should be encouraged.¹⁰⁵

In practice, though, an even-handed “two Korea” policy proves all but elusive, in particular considering that Beijing seeks to at once maintain political ties with Pyongyang while developing economic partnership with Seoul.¹⁰⁶ But one thing seems quite certain; maintaining *status quo* on the Korean peninsula, and friendly relationships with both Koreas, rather than a disruptive unification and denuclearization through sanctions, is Beijing’s top priority. China gains a lot in keeping the status quo, thus enhancing its own position as a swinging force or balancer. Within this general framework, China tacitly acquiesces the continued U.S.-ROK military alliance as both a deterrence against (the North’s) aggressive intentions and a military resurgence of Japan. However, a united Korea that remains a U.S. ally would pose a severe policy challenge to Beijing’s leadership.¹⁰⁷

Hence China continues to support North Korea’s efforts at seeking recognition from the United States and Japan, which is regarded as a necessary step toward reducing Pyongyang’s sense of isolation and insecurity and addressing its concern over legitimacy. While China’s improved relations with South Korea strains Beijing-Pyongyang relations, both are aware that they have at least some common interests in maintaining a normal relationship.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, Beijing was nervous about both North Korea’s nuclear programs and Washington’s penchant for brinkmanship and sanctions to pressure Pyongyang into submission, which are seen by China as highly destabilizing. An improper handling of the situation,

Beijing fears, could lead to serious consequences ranging from the undesirable, namely, the potential for nuclearization of the sub-region, to the unthinkable.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, China has high economic and security stakes in managing the crisis and peacefully resolving the issues of both North Korea's nuclear programs and unification of the two Koreas.¹¹⁰ In this context, Beijing welcomed the October 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, as it defused a highly explosive crisis.

Chinese analysts in general regard Kim Jong Il as a capable leader without serious challenges. While the regime may be facing some difficulties, the prospect of immediate collapse or the revolt against the junior Kim is unlikely, given the North's political structure. The economic situation is grim, but reform of the Chinese model is unlikely. Meanwhile, the Agreed Framework may open some avenue for expanding economic contacts with the outside.¹¹¹ For the more immediate term, China is concerned with North Korea's economic difficulties and understandably will oppose any overt action that could exacerbate the crisis and lead to a disruptive collapse of the regime. In this context, China advises assistance on a humanitarian basis and advocates resumption of economic and political contacts between the two Koreas. Interestingly enough, China is actually selling its own version of engagement. At the same time, there are identifiable areas of common interest and understanding between Beijing and Seoul on issues of the role of the armistice regime, the need for direct inter-Korean dialogues, and the undeniable role of the South in the implementation of the Geneva Accord.¹¹² And Beijing's continued support of Pyongyang does not preclude it from expanded opportunities in trade, investment, and technology transfers with its new partner in Seoul.¹¹³ This said, China's support in all of these areas is by no means a given; witness the recall of the Chinese delegation from the Military Armistice Committee (MAC).

Beijing's approach toward the Korean nuclear crisis is illustrative. Notwithstanding its declared position on a

denuclearized Korean peninsula, Beijing steadfastly objected to the use of coercive measures including sanctions against North Korea to the extent of an implied threat of veto in any U.S.-sponsored UNSC resolution condemning Pyongyang. Instead, China consistently called for dialogue among the United States, North Korea, South Korea, and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) rather than sanctions.¹¹⁴ China obviously wants to use its unique position to play “honest broker” of Korean denuclearization and its indispensability in other security-related issues, therefore enhancing its own position vis-à-vis the United States.¹¹⁵ However, that perceived influence may be on the wane as North Korea increasingly finds itself isolated and angry with China’s establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea.¹¹⁶

China insisted that the parties involved must remain cool-headed and seek resolution through negotiations rather than confrontation. To a certain degree, China’s stance and in particular its preference for direct DPRK-U.S. dialogues served Pyongyang’s interests in achieving a sort of breakthrough against an otherwise uncomfortable situation it stood in: isolation in the international community. However, as long as the general principle of nuclear nonproliferation on the Korean peninsula remains compatible with China’s overall security interests, Beijing likely will continue its support of the outcomes brought about by the Geneva Accord, although its suggested tactics may be at odds with those preferred by Western powers such as the United States. Indeed, there is strong indication that Beijing is highly interested in seeing the Accord fully implemented.¹¹⁷

But there apparently are additional factors that explain China’s response to the North Korean nuclear crisis, and its Korea policy in general, according to Samuel Kim.¹¹⁸ First are China’s own reportedly irresponsible proliferation activities. This, coupled with Beijing’s high sensitivity toward state sovereignty, underpinned its strong position against the imposition of sanctions, although presented in

different rationales (e.g., ineffective, push North Korea into the corner). Second, China regarded the issue as a dispute purely between the DPRK on the one hand, and the ROK, the United States, and the IAEA on the other and opposed bringing the issue before the UNSC. Qian stated that:

China is opposed to the all too frequent arbitrary use of sanctions by one country to bring pressure to bear on another under the pretext of controlling arms transfers while engaging in massive arms sales of one's own which jeopardize the sovereignty and security of the country concerned.¹¹⁹

Third, China was more concerned with stability than with the immediacy of the nuclear crisis. For the latter, China first doubted Pyongyang's capability to assemble a nuclear device; and even if it could, that would be mainly directed at the U.S. troops in South Korea and the ROK, rather than at China. On the other hand, sanctions might force the Pyongyang leadership to resort to irrational action, with serious consequences for China. Beijing fully recognized that even if it wanted to, it had very limited capability to influence North Korea. But nevertheless, the event could be used to enhance China's bargaining position vis-à-vis the United States, especially in the context of post-Tiananmen difficulties and sanctions.

Finally, China's concern over North Korea's nuclear weapons program derives from its fear of a domino effect: that South Korea and Japan may resort to nuclear weapons development of their own. This would change the regional strategic landscape, certainly one consequence of which would be the reduced stature of China as a nuclear weapon state. Another concern is the dilemma this may cause in that China would have to choose between its wayward ally and the international community.¹²⁰ In this context, Chinese analysts have a positive view of the 1994 Agreed Framework, regarding it as a stabilizing factor. It helped defuse the nuclear tension; and provided an avenue of external contacts that Pyongyang desperately seeks, as well as energy supplies that will relieve not only the pressure to

go nuclear but also China's obligation to provide steady supplies of oil. In addition, the U.S.-DPRK contact will give Pyongyang a sense of balance and reduced sense of isolation. But perhaps more important, the agreement at least will stall any attempt by other concerned parties, Japan and South Korea, to seek their own nuclear options.¹²¹

A Concert of Powers and China's Role. To what extent the external environment can facilitate peace building on the Korean peninsula remains an important variable. This requires a careful analysis of the major-power relationships in East Asia in the post-Cold War. The major powers in the region—the United States, China, Russia, and Japan—harbor different threat perceptions and have different national security interests. The divergent threat perceptions and preferred solutions present serious challenges to how these players can and will come together in a coordinated fashion to design a scheme for peace and stability on the peninsula.¹²² All the major powers clearly want to influence developments on the Korean peninsula. The United States has shifted its policy focus from hard-line, confrontational to a policy of selective engagement and soft-landing for North Korea. The ultimate objective for Washington is to maintain its key role and influence in a future unified Korea and therefore reserve its place in Northeast Asia. Japan basically follows the United States; its negotiations with North Korea have been slow with not many results. It wants to stabilize the Korean peninsula for its own security interest. For the time being, the existence of two Koreas probably best serves Japan's interest. Russia clearly wants to increase its influence, having realized its mistake in the early 1990s of too prompt recognition of the South and the desertion of the North.¹²³

The interactions among the four major powers and their relationships with the two Koreas both reflect and reinforce their conceptions of national interests and hence the pursuit of particular policies. Of the various pairs of bilateral relationships, only a few can be regarded as

friendly, with the rest being either mixed (i.e., both conflictual and cooperative) or constrained.¹²⁴ With regard to the Korea issue, while none of the major powers sees any benefit in overt military conflicts on the peninsula, their interests in other areas do not necessarily coincide. If anything, there may be a strong element of competition and rivalry among Washington, Beijing, Moscow, and Tokyo regarding such key issues as Korean unification, arms control and confidence-building, and the maintenance of peace and stability on the peninsula.¹²⁵

Tokyo's security outlook and interests are also changing in the post-Cold War era. Already an economic superpower, Japan now seeks to play a more active and assertive role in global and regional affairs. Japan's immediate security concerns are the uncertainty in North Korea and that country's missile programs, which pose a direct threat. The longer-term challenges are the management of the U.S.-Japanese security alliance and peaceful coexistence (or competition) with a rising China.¹²⁶

Russia's security interest in East Asia is to regain its lost influence in the region. However, the designing and implementing of an effective policy is rendered difficult due to domestic political and economic situations and competing (and more urgent) security issues elsewhere, for instance NATO's eastward expansion and Chechnya. It has yet to conclude a peace treaty with Japan, stalled largely because of the unresolved territorial issue. Moscow also needs to rebuild its credibility and restore its contact with Pyongyang. Neither proves to be easy task. For some time to come, Russia's influence in the region will remain negligible.¹²⁷

However, by any account, the United States and China are the key external powers likely to play relatively a greater role in affecting the development of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. To a certain extent, the divergent interests of the United States and China and their conflicts have rendered cooperation regarding the Korean

question hostage to the ups and downs of the fragile bilateral relationship.¹²⁸ The Korea issue serves as a bargaining chip for Beijing in dealing with Washington; conversely, the United States, needing China's cooperation on the Korean issue, may try to prevent the bilateral relationship from deteriorating into one of hostility.¹²⁹ Within such a context, the recent U.S.-China summits may portend some good sign of cooperation to come regarding the Korean issue.

U.S. commitment to Korean security has been based on three pillars: the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty, Combined Forces, and the annual Security Consultative process. The end of the Cold War notwithstanding, Washington has not been lulled into illusion and indeed regards North Korea in its current weakness and decline as a greater threat to South Korea and U.S. interests in the region than at any time since the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. This is especially the case when taking into consideration such factors as North Korea's massively forward deployed troops with well-trained special operation units, a growing arsenal of short- and medium-range missiles, the covert nuclear weapons programs, chemical and biological weapons, and an offensive military doctrine. There is greater concern than ever that any accident, incidence, or miscalculation in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) may escalate out of control, or be taken as an excuse by the North to launch a rapid offensive into the South. The continued deployment of U.S. forces in the ROK therefore demonstrates a firm commitment and serves as a deterrent against potential North Korean aggression. And Washington envisions a continued, robust U.S.-ROK security relationship for stability on the peninsula and in the region even if North Korean threats were to diminish.¹³⁰

For the United States, its fundamental interests center on the prevention of the rise of any single hegemonic power in Asia-Pacific, access to the region's expanding markets, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and the promotion of democratization.¹³¹ These interests

call for continued U.S. commitment to the region's security, the presence of forward-deployed troops, and the consolidation of U.S.-Japanese and U.S.-ROK security alliances.¹³² As much as it continues to maintain a high vigilance, Washington has also made noticeable changes in its policy toward North Korea since the signing of the Agreed Framework in October 1994. That the United States wants to enhance its position in the Korean issue is well-recognized by Chinese analysts. The Framework is seen as the United States attempting to promote nonproliferation policy, enhance the sense of security for its allies, Japan and South Korea; strengthen the bilateral alliance; and consolidate and enhance its position in the region.¹³³

There have been expanded contacts between Washington and Pyongyang. This policy shift from coercive diplomacy to conditional engagement reflects Washington's interest in maintaining stability on the peninsula, securing Pyongyang's cooperation in implementing the terms of the Agreed Framework, and inducing gradual changes in the North Korean regime. The U.S. approach can be characterized as one of emphasizing carrots and sticks, and mixing military, diplomatic, and arms control measures to deal with the Korean issue. While there is continued emphasis that the U.S. role in the peninsular arms control process should be one supporting South Korean positions, there are also suggestions that Washington use non-traditional levers such as sanctions relief, in addition to food aid, to entice North Korea to conventional arms control.¹³⁴

The new U.S. approaches, seen by some as too accommodating, have already strained the Washington-Seoul alliance. A recent instance has been the difference over the issue of seeking a North Korean apology for its September 1996 submarine intrusion into the South. While Washington was looking beyond the incident to ensuring its overall policy objectives, including the implementation of the Geneva Accord, Seoul wanted a direct apology and tried to link food aid and light water nuclear reactors to the North's acceptance of inter-Korean dialogue.¹³⁵ With North

Korea now having issued a statement of “deep regret” over the recent submarine incident, the Clinton administration has granted permission to export food to the North. The apology may indeed serve this purpose: to get badly needed food aid. And there may be more: in return for the U.S. promise to open up a trade office in the North.¹³⁶

Of the four major powers, China is viewed as the only one still retaining some, although gradually diminishing, influence over North Korea. This influence derives in part from Pyongyang’s reliance on Beijing for moral if not material support and Beijing’s need to sustain one of the few remaining socialist countries since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. From a security perspective, Beijing continues to regard stability on the peninsula as of crucial importance to its own national interest. There are, of course, broader national interests to be served through an effective management of the Korean issue. China increasingly looks to South Korea for expanded trade, investment, and technology transfers. This requires a subtle balancing act that both addresses South Korea’s security concerns (e.g., North Korea’s nuclear weapons program) without unduly alienating North Korea. Yet a third consideration is that Beijing increasingly recognizes the utility of using the Korean issue to advance its fundamental national interests across the board, including its dealing with the United States. These multi-, and indeed competing, interests to a large extent explain the equivocal nature of Beijing’s Korea policy that sometimes appears highly contradictory.¹³⁷

Sino-North Korean trade has been declining over the past decade in absolute terms, made more difficult by Chinese demands for hard currency to settle accounts and growing trade between China and South Korea. But because of the almost total disappearance of Soviet/Russian assistance and diminishing volumes of trade, by default China has occupied a greater position in North Korea’s trade equation, representing close to one-third of Pyongyang’s total foreign trade.¹³⁸ For instance, in 1993,

China was the supplier of 72 percent of all of North Korea's food imports, 75 percent of its oil and 88 percent of coke needed for steel production.¹³⁹

Even though North Korea has become highly dependent on China as a major supplier of key foodstuffs and other commodities like oil, Beijing itself regards its leverage over Pyongyang as limited and is reluctant to dispense with it. Instead, quiet diplomatic efforts were recommended since Beijing values stability more than anything else. Sanctions, on the other hand, may force North Korea into irrational actions, may be effective in resolving the nuclear issue, and may have the rallying under the flag effect. However, there may be other explanations. One of them is the fact that China probably does not want to see North Korea collapse as a result of sanctions. After all, Pyongyang is one of the few remaining communist regimes in the world. Another is that Beijing did not want to be placed in a position that it would have to choose between Pyongyang and the rest of the world should the sanctions be imposed.¹⁴⁰

However, other players assume that China has some credible influence over North Korea. China is argued to be in a unique position in which it channels to both Pyongyang and Seoul.¹⁴¹ It has been suggested that China is manipulating the situation to gain a favorable position in dealing with others; by at once declaring that it was opposed to nuclear development on the Korean peninsula and against the imposition of sanctions, Beijing was actually encouraging Pyongyang to adopt a hard-line position.¹⁴²

China has actively promoted its crucially important role in settling the Korean issue, including the nuclear crisis; in the process it has sought to neutralize the role of both Russia and Japan, leaving itself and the United States as the only important external players. The best situation would be one in that a unified Korea would rely on China with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula.¹⁴³ Beijing also provides the venue for the DPRK-ROK talks. China is reputed to have normal relations with the two

Koreas and the United States, thus occupying a unique position.¹⁴⁴

As a signatory state to the 1953 Armistice Treaty, China agreed to participate in the four-party talks on establishing a peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula and pledged to play a cooperative and constructive role in the process.¹⁴⁵ China chaired the second round of four-party talks. Assistant Foreign Minister Chen Jian, noting that the talks had moved from procedural discussion to substantive discussion, pointed out that, due to different situations, each side had different priorities and therefore difficulties were expected. Chen emphasized that each side should adopt a responsible attitude toward the Korean people, Asian and global peace and stability, and move the talks forward. Fairness, balance, and flexibility should be the attitude in discussing various issues.¹⁴⁶

The official Chinese positions aside, there are questions about the consistency of policy implementation. One particular example is China's attitude toward the 1953 Armistice Agreement.¹⁴⁷ On the one hand, China maintains that the existing armistice regime remains valid and functional. During his official visit to Seoul in November 1995, Chinese President Jiang Zemin disclosed Beijing's disagreement with Pyongyang on the status of the Armistice Agreement. On the other hand, however, China has withdrawn its representative from the MAC at the insistence of North Korea and has suggested that the parties concerned look into the possibility of finding new mechanisms to replace the current armistice regime.

There are also questions about China's knowledge about, and leverage with, North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles programs. The assumption here is that China may exercise considerable influence over the activities of the North Koreans now that Beijing is Pyongyang's only ally of weight. While this may be true although the extent can be far less significant than presumed, the reverse is also probable. In other words, "the position of North Korea will

affect the way China reacts and the role Beijing will play in the process.”¹⁴⁸ Pyongyang is not necessarily always in an inferior position dealing with Beijing. It can, for example, play the “Taiwan” and “Russia” cards. The recent Taiwan-DPRK deal in nuclear waste storage is a case in point. Pyongyang conceivably can also take advantage of the Sino-Russian competition for exercising influence in North Korea.¹⁴⁹

Finally, as already discussed above, China may see the *status quo* on the peninsula as being to its own benefit. If anything, Beijing may not want to see a unified Korea, especially one with a strong military (and probably nuclear-armed), highly nationalist, and allied with the United States and Japan. Beijing has interest in continuing to play a central role in a divided Korea and seeing its close relationship with North Korea a valuable asset that gives Beijing some leverage in dealing with Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul. China also needs a “buffer” for its own security. In this sense, China’s advocacy for peace and stability on the peninsula can be interpreted as the maintenance of *status quo*.¹⁵⁰ In any event, unification “could sharply increase insecurity in the region,” in particular given the fact that unification will have to take place in an uncertain security environment without full-fledged multilateral institutions. Other implications may include potential territorial disputes and an economic competitor in a unified Korea.¹⁵¹ A further consideration would be whether a unified Korea would remain an ally of the United States and allow continued American military presence that would negatively affect China’s security.¹⁵²

China’s ability to influence North Korea has declined over the years but not totally disappeared. As the only major remaining supplier of resources and ideological bedfellow, Beijing’s North Korea policy must be seen as being affected by a number of factors. To begin with, China certainly does not want to see the collapse of the Pyongyang regime, so some kind of support, material as well as moral, will be rendered. China’s provision of food aid is a clear example.¹⁵³

Secondly, China wants to use its existing influence to push for developments favorable to its own interests; likewise, it will try to block situations that are harmful to its security. Thirdly, China may seek to use both its influence and the perception of its possessing such influence for broader policy considerations: to be seen as a major power in deciding regional issues, and to exert *quid pro quo* from the United States on issues important to China. These considerations determine Beijing's policy toward North Korea, in particular if not exclusively on the nuclear issue. This being the case, then it is relatively understandable that China all along would oppose the imposition of sanctions or any other measures that would either greatly weaken the Pyongyang regime or push it to the corner such that irrational action may be taken.¹⁵⁴

Implications for U.S. Policy.

Chinese security policy has important implications for the United States, not the least of which directly concerns the Department of Defense in the formulation and execution of its East Asian strategy. Despite the recent efforts at improving bilateral relations as represented by Jiang Zemin's visit to the United States in November 1997 and President Clinton's visit to China in June 1998, there exist within Chinese academic and policy circles strong views that the management of bilateral relations will likely remain the toughest challenge for Beijing.¹⁵⁵ The same is also true within the U.S. policy and academic circles.¹⁵⁶ Chinese scholars have identified a number of characteristics that define post-Cold War Sino-U.S. relations.¹⁵⁷ First, with the end of the Cold War, China's weight in the previous strategic triangle has changed; conflicting views and interests previously concealed or relegated to second-place importance are now assuming greater salience. Second, Sino-U.S. relations may shift from a global outlook to a Asian-Pacific focus. Third, ideologies will pit China and the United States against each other.¹⁵⁸ Fourth, there is increasing economic interdependence

between the two, with the United States having at its disposal greater leverage because of China's greater reliance on the United States concerning market access, technology transfers, and investment. But the extent to which Washington can apply such a leverage to achieve other political and diplomatic objectives is constrained by the consideration that China will grow more important for the U.S. economy and the short-term abuse of economic power may result in long-term economic losses which are crucial to U.S. economic security. Finally, despite the changing international politico-strategic environment, the management of bilateral conflicts remains important for the United States as China is crucial in a number of areas (such as the role of the U.N., nuclear nonproliferation, arms control and disarmament, Korea, and Asia-Pacific stability) and Beijing's cooperation is not a forgone conclusion.¹⁵⁹

U.S. strategy in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific aims to maintain its alliances through forward basing of troops (to minimize the impacts of the "tyranny of distance"¹⁶⁰); to prevent the rise of any power in the region that can challenge and even pose a threat to U.S. interests; and to continue to promote and support market economy and democratization.¹⁶¹ Specifically, this strategy has three components of military relevance:

peacetime engagement, which includes a forward presence; crisis response, which builds on forward-stationed forces, the "boots-on-the ground"; and if necessary, fighting and winning any conflict that might develop.¹⁶²

While the United States endorses and encourages the building of multilateral security mechanisms in the region, it continues to regard its military presence as a crucial element of stability until such a cooperative security system is established. The focuses of U.S. security concerns range from the Korean peninsula, the China-Taiwan disputes, and to the potential flashpoints in the South China Sea.¹⁶³ Within this context, the United States has viewed China as posing a potential challenge over the next 20 years.¹⁶⁴ On a

wide spectrum the United States and China have different interests, which are further complicated by a perception gap largely a result of different historical and cultural experiences, as well as strategic orientations. The managing of this relationship will remain the challenge to leaders in both Washington and Beijing for years to come.¹⁶⁵ There are a number of potential points of conflict between China and the United States that could lead to military confrontation if mismanaged. These include the U.S.-Japan military alliance and the future of Asia-Pacific security mechanisms; the Taiwan issue and the U.S. role; and theater missile defense (TMD) in the region.

U.S.-Japan Military Alliance. The continued presence of U.S. military forces in the region and, in particular, a resilient U.S.-Japan security alliance are viewed by Beijing as more of a threat to Chinese interests than as a blessing in that they serve to keep Tokyo from seeking remilitarization.¹⁶⁶ One is the contention over the future regional security mechanism, pitting military alliances against multilateral security arrangements such as the ARF. One post-Cold War U.S. strategy has been the enhancement of bilateral military alliances, in particular the elevation of the U.S.-Japan alliance from the defense of Japan to one that more actively involves Japan in maintaining regional security. China regards the updating of the U.S.-Japan security alliance as having serious implications for its own security, in at least three ways. First, Beijing sees this as part of the U.S. strategy of containing China. After all, the U.S.-Japan alliance was established during the Cold War years and with clearly defined enemy and missions: the Soviet Union and the defense of Japanese territories. Now the target clearly is China. As a result, U.S. efforts in strengthening military alliances are interpreted in Beijing as a hedge against China. Second, Beijing is extremely worried about the consequences of a more actively involved Japan: Tokyo can be set on a path to remilitarization. Japan already maintains the second largest defense budget in the world and has a reasonably sized (given its peace

constitution) and one of the best-equipped militaries in the region. In addition, Japan's industrial and technological wherewithal will provide it with ready resources should it decide to become a military great power at short notice. Third, China is concerned with the possible intervention of the U.S.-Japan alliance in its unification plan. Tokyo's ambiguity regarding its defense perimeter based not on geography but on events only raises Beijing's anxiety.

In obvious countermeasures, Beijing has in recent years actively advocated the notion of "security cooperation," emphasizing the importance of multilateral security dialogues and consultation, in an apparent effort to push for an alternative to the current security structure in the region that remains largely reliant on military alliances and forward military deployments at both the official (e.g., ARF) and Track II (e.g., CSCAP) levels.¹⁶⁷

Taiwan and U.S.-China Relations. A second potent point of conflict concerns Taiwan. U.S. forces in Asia-Pacific are increasingly seen as a major obstacle to China's political/diplomatic objectives in the region, in particular its drive for national unification. The two aircraft carrier battle groups that the United States dispatched to the region during Chinese military exercises in March 1996 in the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait shocked Chinese military planners and were deeply resented as an uncalled for provocation and gross interference in Chinese internal affairs. Indeed, the United States is seen as standing in the way in Beijing's unification efforts, and the PLA is putting new emphasis on strategies and weaponry to counter U.S. naval forces in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁶⁸ Some of the war-games were conducted with the U.S. Navy as the enemy.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, Washington's Taiwan policy is of most serious security concern for Beijing. China has viewed with increasing alarm and indignation the U.S. deviation in recent years from the "One China" principle set forth in the three Sino-U.S. joint communiqués. The sale of 150 F-16s,

the issuance of a visa to Lee Teng-hui, and the attempt to upgrade U.S.-Taiwan relations constitute the most serious violations of the principle and are responsible for the downturn of bilateral relations. This shift of policy is attributed to U.S. domestic pressures, both political and commercial, and Taiwan's active "pragmatic diplomacy" and intense lobbying in U.S. federal and state legislatures. The Chinese have interpreted the change in U.S. Taiwan policy as aiming at "obstruct[ing] Chinese reunification, reinforce[ing] its bargaining chips in containing China, and treat[ing] Taiwan as a prototype for the peaceful evolution of China."¹⁷⁰ At the same time, U.S. policy of providing arms sales to Taiwan to maintain the balance across the Strait while encouraging dialogues continues to irritate Beijing and is therefore considered a major obstacle in bilateral relations. In this context, Clinton's publicly pronounced "three nos" during his recent visit to China to some extent suppress but not eliminate the issue in bilateral relations.¹⁷¹ While Washington continues to regard the cross-Strait problem as a political one and hence encourages resolutions accordingly, the potential for military conflict puts the United States in a delicate position: there remains a high risk that future conflicts can entangle the U.S. military, enhancing a direct military confrontation between the United States and China.¹⁷²

Theater Missile Defense (TMD) in East Asia. A third potential point of conflict concerns regional arms control and nonproliferation issues, in particular in the context of the contentious theater missile defense (TMD) in East Asia.¹⁷³ China has already voiced strong objection to the research, development and deployment of regional (TMD) systems.¹⁷⁴ Beijing's concerns can be seen in at least five areas. First, the Chinese see TMD as yet another deliberate step that the United States has taken to strengthen the U.S.-Japanese military alliance, arguing that the deployment of TMD in Northeast Asia would enhance the alliance's offensive as well as defensive capabilities. For China, the pretext of using a North Korean missile launch to

justify TMD deployment is hardly credible, given Pyongyang's current situation. Second, China contends that TMD research and development encourage and provide a pretext for Japanese remilitarization. Beijing's suspicion of a post-Cold War assertive Japan is reinforced by Tokyo's reluctance to be forthcoming on its historical records; its ambiguity regarding its defense perimeter (e.g., "situational vs. geographical"); its potent and potential military capabilities; and its potential involvement in the Taiwan.

Third, a regional TMD system, in particular if it is to include Taiwan under its coverage, likely will give a false sense of security to the independence elements on the island and impede China's reunification task. At the same time, incorporating Taiwan into the TMD system would represent a gross violation of China's territorial integrity, a blatant act of interference in China's domestic affairs, and a *de facto* reinstatement of the 1954 U.S.-Taiwan Defense Pact.

Fourth, the development of TMD, in parallel to a National Missile Defense (NMD) system, represents a violation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile System (ABM) Treaty, derails global (read U.S.-Russian) nuclear disarmament, and moves the arms race into outer space. In the regional context, the Chinese assert that TMD will lead to an arms race (the shield and sword dynamic). The message is clear: should TMD go ahead, this may force China to reconsider some of its arms control commitments, for example, to the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Beijing probably will need more missiles if TMD deployment is seen as inevitable, and the development of miniature nuclear warheads and multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV) missiles, which require testing and lab simulation, may not be possible for China. In addition, there is the need to keep the option to have sufficient weapons grade fissile materials for nuclear weapons modernization. Yet another response would be a resumption of missile

technology transfers to South Asia and the Middle East, as a retaliatory measure.¹⁷⁵

And finally, TMD threatens China's limited deterrence capability. Due to its proximity to China, TMD deployment in Japan could well pose a threat to China's strategic retaliatory capability. The Chinese point out that highly advanced TMD systems, such as theater high altitude area defense (THAAD), can intercept missiles in outer space and cover a wider area, and therefore they are able to neutralize China's limited strategic nuclear capability.

* * *

Given the high stakes involved in managing post-Cold War U.S.-China relations, a policy of engaging China without compromising fundamental U.S. interests in the region is called for. Such a policy must be based on a sound assessment of the regional realities, realistic and obtainable objectives, available resources, and specific policy options.¹⁷⁶ A key strategy would be to find ways to integrate a rising China into the international and regional security and economic frameworks so as to avoid the instability that often accompanies the arrival of a rising power.¹⁷⁷ While it is highly critical that the bilateral relationship must be managed at the political level, military-to-military contacts also constitute an important component of any U.S. China strategy for a number of reasons. To begin with, history has suggested that the rise of new powers tends to be highly destabilizing to the international system, with war often the consequences of irreconcilable interests between the status quo and rising powers. Needless to say, in all these instances, the militaries have been the key instrument of power politics, at least until recently. We have now again come to a critical historical juncture where the United States for the time being enjoys the unipolar moment but with China poised to become a major contender and challenger. Secondly, Sino-U.S. military relations over the past two decades have been subjected to drastic changes in

domestic politics and in the international geostrategic environment, leading to situations of high uncertainty and grave danger (e.g., the Kitty Hawk incident in 1995 and the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-96), with the distinct possibility of direct military confrontation. On the other hand, a functioning bilateral military relationship, with growing transparency and better understanding of each other's strategic outlooks and military doctrines, may help toward developing effective mechanisms for managing disputes. Military counter-ballistic missiles (CBMs) are highly desirable, even (and perhaps particularly) between potential adversaries.

Thirdly, given the important role the PLA plays in Chinese national security policymaking,¹⁷⁸ the extent to which U.S.-Chinese military relations can have a positive impact, and under what conditions, makes a fascinating and policy-relevant case study in its own right. Finally, a more cooperative bilateral military relationship could make a potential contribution to regional stability. It would encourage the PLA in peacekeeping, and search and rescue activities, hence both satisfying the Chinese military's desire to be seen as a major player in regional geopolitics and channeling the formidable and modernizing Chinese military to a stabilizing rather than disrupting role. This will not be easy, especially at a time when the U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the Cox Report on alleged Chinese espionage have already inflicted casualties on bilateral relations, including military exchanges;¹⁷⁹ but the precedent for building such a relationship exists.

Indeed, the last 5 years have witnessed a revitalization of Sino-U.S. military relations characterized by exchanges of high-level visits at the defense ministerial and service chief level, regular contacts at the functional level between the two countries' national defense universities and military academies, port visits, and limited joint exercises in search and rescue operations. At the same time, the two militaries have also engaged each other in exchanging views on doctrines, security perceptions, and defense

conversion. These are significant developments, especially given the unstable nature of overall bilateral relations over the same period, highlighted by tension over the Taiwan issue and the continuing differences over issues such as trade, human rights, weapons proliferation, and strategic interests regarding regional and global security arrangements in the post-Cold War era. The lessons learned could be of significant value, especially at a time when bilateral relations again sink to an all-time low in what Colonel Susan Puska has described as the boom-bust cycle.¹⁸⁰

How to maintain a policy continuity in a context of drastic changes must be the toughest challenge ahead for U.S. policymakers, including the military leadership. The earlier period of initiating bilateral military relations was clearly justified in meeting U.S. strategic objectives of competing with the Soviet Union. With the end of the Cold War and in particular the demise of the Soviet empire, the focus of U.S. strategic priorities has shifted to regional stability and the development of greater ability for intervention to maintain U.S. primacy. Within this context, China's importance to the United States remains: it is a growing power; it holds U.N. Security Council membership; and it has increasing influence in Asia-Pacific. Consequently, continued exchanges between the two militaries, the world's strongest and the world's largest, would serve post-Cold War U.S. interests of transparency, confidence building, and hence the avoidance of potential conflict.¹⁸¹ By actively engaging the Chinese military, the United States hopes to have a better understanding of the PLA military doctrines and security perspective; at the same time, greater transparency will also avoid misunderstanding, especially in the context of a potential conflict across the Taiwan Strait and the enhanced U.S.-Japanese security alliance. The basic premise behind U.S. comprehensive engagement with the PRC is that such a strategy will facilitate an orderly entry of China, an acknowledged regional and potential global power, into international and regional affairs and allow the world to

avoid the conflicts that accompanied the rise of Germany and Japan. Also recognized is the important role of the military in Chinese politics and foreign policy, which justify engaging the PLA.

The Chinese rationale may be different. To begin with, Beijing regards the Sino-U.S. military relationship as an important component of overall bilateral relations, hence enhanced military contacts should reflect improved bilateral relations and vice versa. Secondly, there are important psychological factors in that the PLA wants to be seen as a peer with the U.S. military, the strongest in the world. Port visits, for instance, can have good demonstration effects where the PLA Navy can be showcased to the American public as well as to the domestic audience. Yet another reason may be to gain a better understanding of U.S. military thinking, particularly in the area of the Revolution in Military Affairs, and to explore the possibility of greater cooperation involving, hopefully, the transfers of military technology, although under the current circumstances the last would be most difficult to achieve. But Beijing fully recognizes the uncertain nature of the Sino-U.S. relationship and is suspicious of Washington's true strategic intentions regarding the U.S.-Japan military alliance, Washington's meddling in China's domestic affairs (Taiwan) and its obstruction in China's entry into the World Trade Organization, and pressures on China to change its arms transfer policy.

Conclusion.

How do we assess Chinese perspectives on and approaches to multilateralism? One can examine this aspect along two different dimensions. One is the presence of China in the various multilateral processes/institutions. The other is the acceptance of multilateralism as a norm of dealing with regional security issues. On the surface, China has been a rather consistent, if only passive, participant in various multilateral forums as practiced in the Asia-Pacific

context: (1) ad hoc cooperation on specific disputes and conflict resolution (e.g. Cambodian peace process, the South China Sea workshop); (2) "sub-regional" cooperation (ASEAN); (3) formal governmental efforts at the regional level (ARF); (4) track-two programs (CSCAP); and (5) U.N.-sponsored and multilateral institutions and processes having a bearing on regional security issues.¹⁸² On the other hand, Beijing has demonstrated a clearly variegated approach toward multilateralism; in other words, there are different "scripts" or versions of Chinese multilateralism in different environments (e.g., U.N. as opposed regional forums), and for different issues (e.g., economic as opposed to security). Conditional multilateralism represents but one version of what may be a whole repertoire of Chinese strategies of presenting its foreign policy.

To say that China has consistently held dubious, if not hostile, attitudes toward multilateral institutions and regime-generated rules may be simplistic and even misleading. What is clear, though, is that China's approach to multilateralism betrays a degree of variegatedness and selectiveness. While Chinese policy declarations have tended to be all things to all, Chinese behaviors in various international organizations have demonstrated a gradual movement toward accepting the norms and principles of existing regimes rather than challenging them head on. Samuel Kim's studies of Chinese behaviors in international organizations show that the degree of Chinese acceptance of and compliance with norms, principles, and rules may be a function of the extent to which the so-called "global learning," which induces "global thinking," is actually taking place. Positive learning can be facilitated through positive participatory experiences. However, there is a strong utilitarian element in the Chinese acceptance of the rules, norms, and principles. To the extent that existing international order facilitates China's goals of modernization (e.g., aid, and investment and technology transfer from the capitalist world), there is no need to challenge it. The learning process is important in that both domestic and

international variables interact in shaping the leadership's cognitive maps of what China's interests, role, and policy should be.¹⁸³

China's fundamental attitudes toward multilateral security cooperation may be better understood as a consistent reflection of its holistic approach to the larger issues of national interests and the best means to promote them. Beijing's earlier suspicion and concern over regional multilateral enterprises have all but been removed, thanks to ASEAN's role in the process. China's endorsement, on the other hand, may be a courtesy to its neighbors but more as a realization that refusal to participate incurs costs image-wise. But China is more interested in a concert of powers managing regional security issues. This falls in line with its recently adopted policy of maintaining stable great-power relations as fundamental to realizing other policy objectives, including stability and a better chance of handling the Taiwan issue. In this regard, multilateralism, if it has any value, would remain less important than the balance of powers and the bilateral mode of managing interstate relations. Given the complexity in the Asia-Pacific region, one may find it hard to simply dismiss Chinese approaches as self-serving, which can be summarized as containing the following key elements: stable major-power relations; nonconfrontational; nonalignment against third party; dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes; noninterference of domestic affairs; equal consultation; mutual security as opposed to security through military alliance; and economic security and prosperity.¹⁸⁴

Military diplomacy and cooperation range from alliance relationships to minimum confidence-building measures the purpose of which is to avoid the risk of war. The current Sino-U.S. military relationship is somewhere in between. It is neither an alliance relationship nor a direct adversarial one. There are important differences in security outlooks and military strategies between the two countries. The United States sees its continued military presence and

active engagement in regional security through bilateral defense alliance as crucial to regional stability. It relies on quick reaction and the ability to intervene as an important post-Cold War strategic requirement. The Chinese, on the other hand, want to regain regional prominence and freedom in dealing with what they regard either as domestic or purely bilateral issues. China's recent change of attitude toward multilateral security structures and an emphasis on security cooperation partnerships run directly opposed to U.S. reliance on bilateral security alliance and forward military deployments. Taking a cue from the Gulf War, the PLA is actively modernizing its military forces to serve as an indispensable instrument of diplomacy. At the same time, the two do not see eye-to-eye with regard to such issues of transparency and regional security frameworks. Given that China and the United States have different strategic objectives, interests, and priorities, and given the past uneven development of the bilateral military relationship, what lessons can be learned and what conditions are necessary to enhance cooperation in areas of common interests and minimize and manage policy differences and avoid potential conflicts?

The Sino-U.S. military relationship has undergone over two decades of uneven development. There have been periods and areas of better cooperation and ones of suspicion and confrontation. This monograph suggests that for a more stable bilateral military relationship to develop, longer-term strategies must be formulated that emphasize engagement, exchange, and better understanding of each other's interests, priorities, and policy options. Particularly important may be greater contacts between the two militaries at the officer corps level where both sides are of increasingly similar makeup in terms of education and selection criteria and share the ideals of professionalism. Such a relationship cannot be left untended to be swayed by the vicissitude of bilateral relations during a crucial period of transition in international politics and adjustments for

both. It must be constantly nurtured. That remains, perhaps, one of the greatest challenges ahead.

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