



# ANALYSIS

Volume 5, No. 5

## CHINESE VIEWS ON ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

*Susan L. Shirk*

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF ASIAN RESEARCH

© 1994 by The National Bureau of Asian Research.

ISSN 1052-164X

Printed in the United States of America.

The National Bureau of Asian Research, a nonprofit, nonpartisan institution, conducts advanced policy research on contemporary and future issues concerning East Asia, Russia, and U.S. relations with the Asia-Pacific region. NBR does not advocate policy positions, but rather is dedicated to providing expert information and analysis for effective and far-sighted policy decisions.

The *NBR Analysis*, which is published five times annually, offers timely reports on countries, events, and issues from recognized experts. The views expressed in these essays are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of other NBR research associates or institutions that support NBR.

This report may be reproduced for personal use. Otherwise, its articles may not be reproduced in full without the written permission of NBR. When information from this report is cited or quoted, please cite the author and The National Bureau of Asian Research.

Funding for this publication was provided by the Henry M. Jackson Foundation.

Publishing and production services by Laing Communications Inc., Redmond, Washington.

NBR is a tax-exempt, nonprofit corporation under I.R.C. Sec. 501(c)(3), qualified to receive tax-exempt contributions.

This is the twentieth *NBR Analysis*.

For further information about NBR, call or write:

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF ASIAN RESEARCH  
715 SAFECO Plaza  
Seattle, WA 98185  
(206) 632-7370  
Fax (206) 632-7487

## FOREWORD

In the last decade China has become the rising power of the Asia-Pacific region. With the fastest-growing economy in the world and a revamped military strategy and growing military budget, China has emerged from the Cold War with renewed power and influence.

How China chooses to exercise this power in the framework of Asia-Pacific regional security cooperation is addressed by Susan Shirk in this issue of *NBR Analysis*. Professor Shirk, who is director of the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation and professor in the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at the University of California, San Diego, argues that Chinese foreign policy-makers are slowly overcoming their traditional reluctance to engage in regional security cooperation.

Yet the obstacles to full Chinese engagement, Professor Shirk notes, are significant. China's perception that its Asia-Pacific neighbors view it as a traditional hegemon (thus Beijing's reluctance to take on an overt regional "leadership role"), its leadership's conservatism regarding the sharing of military information and "transparency," the bureaucracy's hierarchical foreign policy-making process and its preference for gradualism, uncertainty regarding leadership succession upon the death of Deng Xiaoping, and China's complex relations with Taiwan and North Korea all combine to make China cautious and conservative regarding regional security forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum. Yet Professor Shirk believes that with "great tact and patience," China's Asia-Pacific partners can encourage China's "increasingly favorable attitude toward regional cooperation on security matters."

This study was originally presented at the workshop, "Dynamic Change in Northeast Asia: Implications for the United States." The meeting was cosponsored by the Joint Military Intelligence College and *NBR*, and was held June 13-14, 1994, in Washington, DC. For those seeking a detailed analysis of China's military modernization, another paper from that conference may be of interest; see Michael D. Swaine, "The Modernization of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: Prospects and Implications for Northeast Asia," *NBR Analysis*, Vol. 5, No. 3, October 1994.

Richard Ellings  
Executive Director  
The National Bureau of Asian Research



# CHINESE VIEWS ON ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

*Susan L. Shirk*

China's international status has been transformed by its dramatic economic growth. China's economic potential, fettered for 30 years by the closed, centrally planned economic system, has been released. The success of China's market reforms has transformed it almost overnight into the world's eleventh-largest trading nation and, according to the International Monetary Fund, the second-largest economy. With the fastest growing economy in the world and a massive market of 1.2 billion people, China possesses a powerful attraction for investors from throughout the world, particularly Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao, and Southeast Asia. Economic inefficiencies and irrationalities remain, particularly in state-owned industry; and double-digit growth rates are partly caused by a bubble economy of speculation. Nevertheless, there is more substance than air in the Chinese economic miracle.

China's national power also has been augmented by the military modernization program that has been funded by rapid economic growth.<sup>1</sup> With new resources to spend, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is purchasing modern hardware in order to reverse years of stagnation and neglect. The Russians are eager to sell state-of-the-art fighter aircraft and other equipment to China at bargain prices. Having become a major trading nation and oil importer, China needs to protect its access to the sea-lanes of commerce from Asia to the Middle East. Although China's leaders insist that the military modernization program is purely defensive, they have been making acquisitions, such as midair refueling aircraft and amphibious assault equipment, that are normally associated with the projection of force.<sup>2</sup>

As an ascendant major power, China faces new opportunities and challenges to its foreign policy, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Although China's leaders are preoccupied with internal economic and political issues, they recognize that a successful modernization program depends on a peaceful external environment. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has faced no overt external threats; yet like other countries in the region, it confronts an uncertain future, particularly regarding the United States, Japan, Russia, North and South Korea, and the relations among them.

In the past, China's rulers preferred to manage relations with other major powers by relying on balance of power methods, not by organizing joint efforts. The communist leaders inherited the

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information on how China's military modernization efforts affect regional stability, see "The Modernization of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: Prospects and Implications for Northeast Asia," Michael D. Swaine, *NBR Analysis*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (October 1994), The National Bureau of Asian Research.

<sup>2</sup> One Chinese security specialist, when questioned about these acquisitions, explained that they might be necessary for the country to defend its claims in the Spratly, Paracel, and Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands, which are contested by its neighbors.

Susan L. Shirk is director of the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation and professor in the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her writings include *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China and Competitive Comrades: Career Incentives and Student Strategies in China*, as well as articles on Chinese foreign policy and economic reform.

tradition of preserving security by "pitting barbarian against barbarian." Today China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and Chinese leaders go along with many multilateral agreements and processes at the global level. But until recently they have not shown any enthusiasm for regional cooperation on military or political issues.<sup>3</sup> China continues to favor bilateralism over multilateralism in its regional relations. During the past several years it has improved its ties with Russia, India, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Indonesia by establishing bilateral dialogues and confidence-building measures with them.

What is new in China's regional policies, however, is a nascent and still tentative interest in cooperative approaches to managing the security and political relations among states. During a May 1994 visit to China I had discussions with approximately 20 senior officials and policy analysts on the subject of regional security cooperation. These discussions were instructive regarding how China's general policy toward regional cooperation has evolved in a more positive direction; why China now sees regional cooperation as in its interests; and what constraints exist on how fast or far China moves toward cooperation.

### **The Evolution of Chinese Policies Toward Regional Cooperation**

Regional cooperation on security issues is not something China's leaders have sought out. Since the late 1980s, however, China's leaders have been invited to numerous academic seminars, "track-two" dialogues,<sup>4</sup> and official meetings to discuss ways to build trust and cooperation among the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) took the lead in this effort. At the unofficial level, research institutes in the ASEAN countries began to meet at the Asia-Pacific Roundtable in 1987. At the official level, ASEAN has been holding broad political and security discussions with its "dialogue partners" at the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference (PMC) since 1978. The PMC mechanism was transformed into a regionwide forum called the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in which foreign ministers from 17 nations (plus the European Community) met for the first time in July 1994. In addition to the ASEAN initiatives, the United Nations has sponsored since 1990 a series of track-two meetings on arms control issues that has come to be known as the "Kathmandu process," after the site of its first meeting and the headquarters of the UN Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific. There also have sprouted up a multitude of private and track-two security dialogues, some focused on Northeast Asia, and others organized on a regionwide basis.<sup>5</sup> The nonofficial dialogues proliferated so rapidly that the Committee on Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) was established to improve coordination among the dialogues.

The momentum toward regional security cooperation picked up steam after President Clinton entered the White House in January 1993. Officials in the Reagan and Bush Administrations had clung to a U.S.-centered model of regional security based on bilateral ties and had treated skeptically proposals for collective security.<sup>6</sup> The Clinton Administration took a more positive attitude toward regional security cooperation. In his March 1993 confirmation hearings, Assistant Secretary

---

<sup>3</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, "China and Arms Control in the Asia-Pacific Region," in Frank C. Langdon and Douglas A. Ross (eds.), *Superpower Maritime Strategy in the Pacific*, London: Routledge, 1990, pp. 173-203.

<sup>4</sup> Attended by government officials participating in their private capacity, as well as private experts.

<sup>5</sup> The University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation's Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue includes only North and South Korea, Russia, China, Japan, and the United States. Other Northeast Asian dialogues include Canada and Mongolia; some have attempted to include Taiwan.

<sup>6</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon used the "balance wheel" metaphor (see, for example, *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 6, 1991, p. 6) and derided the notion of a regionwide security organization as "a solution in search of a problem" (speech at the University of California, San Diego, October 30, 1990, U.S. Department of State, Dispatch, November 5, 1990); Secretary of State James A. Baker III used the metaphor of spokes in a fan with the United States as the base of the fan in his "America in Asia: Emerging Architecture for a Pacific Community," (*Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1991/92, p. 4).

of State Winston Lord listed the creation of regional multilateral forums for security consultations as one of the core goals of U.S. Asia-Pacific policy. Admiral Charles R. Larson, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (who had been advocating security cooperation during the Bush Administration), promulgated a new strategy of “cooperative engagement,” which envisioned comprehensive, multinational security cooperation in the region.<sup>7</sup>

President Clinton dramatized the new U.S. attitude toward regional cooperation when he convened the first summit meeting of the region’s leaders at the November 1993 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in Seattle. What lay behind the American interest in regional security cooperation was the recognition that U.S. promises to keep its forces deployed in the region had lost their credibility because of domestic economic pressures and lukewarm public and congressional support. Sharing the responsibility for preserving regional stability was viewed as a less costly and thus more realistic and credible way for the United States to reassure Asian leaders that it will remain engaged in and committed to the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>8</sup>

China sent representatives to most of the unofficial and track-two discussions on regional security cooperation. According to the other participants, the Chinese representatives did more listening than talking. Their attitude was neither hostile nor enthusiastic, merely passive. One reason is it was difficult for Chinese participants to speak up until their party and government had laid down a clear policy line on the question.

A positive policy line began to emerge in a speech by Vice Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu in March 1992. Liu proposed “to establish gradually a bilateral, subregional, and regional multichannel and multilayered security dialogue mechanism so as to hold consultations on the issues concerned and to strengthen interchange and confidence.”<sup>9</sup> Signifying support for the regional dialogue process, China hosted a United Nations conference on regional security issues in Shanghai in 1992, at which Foreign Minister Qian Qichen made welcoming remarks. Although Qian’s comments were noncommittal regarding the government’s attitude toward regional security cooperation, another high-level Chinese participant, Qian Jiadong, the deputy secretary general of the State Council’s Center for International Studies, was more explicit in supporting it. Qian Jiadong 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, multichanneled, multitiered dialogues that were both bilateral and multilateral, intergovernmental and nongovernmental, were the most feasible answer for the region.<sup>10</sup>

During 1993, Chinese Foreign Ministry statements analyzed the world situation—the disappearance of bipolar competition and the move toward multipolarity—as creating an opportunity for the countries of the region to enhance cooperation and concentrate on economic development.<sup>11</sup> Foreign Ministry officials announced that China was studying proposals for regional security cooperation and was now “willing to explore, along with other countries in the region, a common regional security mechanism based on mutual confidence.”<sup>12</sup> Foreign Minister Qian said China would explore the potential of regional cooperation on security matters in the following manner: “We may start off with bilateral and regional security dialogues of various forms, at different levels and through various

---

<sup>7</sup> Headquarters, U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), “Cooperative Engagement,” July 1993.

<sup>8</sup> The USPACOM statement (ibid.) on cooperative engagement describes it as an “affordable, flexible, adaptive post-Cold War strategy . . . assuring our allies and friends that, together, we can achieve our common goals, protect our mutually shared interests, and build the future we agree to pursue.”

<sup>9</sup> “Disarmament and Security Are the Necessary Conditions for Peace and Security,” *People’s Daily*, March 24, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, “Disarmament and Security Issues in the Asia-Pacific Region,” *Disarmament Topical Papers*, No. 11, New York: United Nations, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> “Qian Qichen Gives Address,” *Xinhua*, April 21, 1993, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Daily Report: China*, April 22, 1993, pp. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> “Spokesman on U.S. Security Concept, Taiwan,” Beijing Central People’s Radio, April 22, 1993, *FBIS Daily Report: China*, April 23, 1993, p. 1.

channels in response to the diversity of our region. Through such dialogues and consultation, we may improve our communication and confidence in one another. China will actively participate in these dialogues and consultations.”<sup>13</sup>

In his March 1994 government work report, Premier Li Peng declared that China “supports the idea of conducting dialogues on matters of security and cooperation in Asia and the Pacific and has made contributions to that end.”<sup>14</sup> An even stronger endorsement of cooperative processes was signaled in May 1994 when the Center for International Studies of the State Council, in conjunction with the Foreign Affairs Ministry-affiliated Chinese People’s Institute for Foreign Affairs and People’s Liberation Army-affiliated China Institute of International Strategic Studies, organized China’s own international meeting on Asia-Pacific security issues in Beijing. At this high-profile meeting, Foreign Minister Qian promised for the first time that China would take an “active role” in the ASEAN Regional Forum, words that were interpreted in Beijing and Shanghai think tanks as indications of a substantially higher degree of enthusiasm for cooperation on China’s part.<sup>15</sup>

At the first meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Bangkok in July 1994, Foreign Minister Qian made a short speech expressing China’s support for the ARF as “a place of dialogue for Asia-Pacific nations to expand the common understanding of political and security issues and to promote trust.”<sup>16</sup>

### Why China Supports Regional Security Cooperation

Although China has a number of reasons for its more positive attitude toward regional security cooperation (including its interest in constraining Japan’s military role and in maintaining the U.S. military commitment to Asia), the main one is to reduce regional fears about what the Chinese term “the so-called China threat.”<sup>17</sup>

As a result of its rapidly growing economic and military power, China’s neighbors have come to see it as a potential threat. Policy elites in East and Southeast Asia talk about the vacuum that could be created if (because of the disappearance of the Soviet threat) the United States were to pull its approximately 100,000 forward-deployed forces out of the region. A few years ago, the most widely discussed scenario was that Japan would fill the vacuum and dominate the region by means of its economic and technological might. Now the focus of Asian anxieties is China, which historically has played a hegemonic role in the region. Asians take it for granted that China will want to resume this role once its wealth and self-confidence are restored.<sup>18</sup>

Chinese officials and diplomats spend much of their time these days trying to debunk the notion of the “China threat.” Their main argument, which is certainly true, is that their economy and their armed forces are still relatively underdeveloped. Large numbers of Chinese living in rural inland areas are still very poor. The military modernization program is portrayed as merely a catch-up effort to replace technologically backward equipment after years of neglect. Yet many of China’s neighbors are unconvinced by the official rhetoric and continue to worry about the China threat.

---

<sup>13</sup> “China Ready to Take Part in Asian Security Dialogues,” excerpts from speech by Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen at the Foreign Correspondents’ Association, Singapore, July 24, 1993, *Beijing Review*, August 9-15, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Li Peng, “Government Work Report,” delivered at the Second Session of the Eighth National People’s Congress, March 10, 1994, *FBIS Daily Report: China*, March 28, 1994, p. 47.

<sup>15</sup> “Qian Qichen Speaks at Asia-Pacific Security Symposium,” *Xinhua*, May 11, 1994, *FBIS Daily Report: China*, May 11, 1994, pp. 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> “Qian Qichen Addresses ASEAN Regional Forum,” *Xinhua*, July 25, 1994, *FBIS Daily Report: China*, July 25, 1994, p. 1. Also see “Article Previews ASEAN Regional Forum,” *Xinhua*, July 23, 1994, *FBIS Daily Report: China*, July 26, 1994, pp. 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion of Chinese attitudes toward regional security cooperation, see Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, “Multilateral Security in the Asia-Pacific Region and its Impact on Chinese Interests: Views from Beijing,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* (Singapore), June 1994, pp. 14-34.

<sup>18</sup> This assumption is shared by many Western analysts. For example, see Richard Betts, “Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States After the Cold War,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993-94), p. 61.



Such worry contributes to the arms build-ups which are under way in Northeast and Southeast Asia. These build-ups in turn threaten to trigger unintentional military conflicts.

China fears that this regional anxiety regarding its intentions might lead to a U.S.-Japan alliance targeted against Beijing. China's official stance on the U.S.-Japan security treaty is that while China opposes military bases beyond national borders on principle, in this specific case decisions should be left to Japan and the United States. The more forthright Chinese specialists say that although the U.S.-Japan alliance currently prevents the emergence of a resurgent Japan that might threaten China, there is much about the alliance that makes them uncomfortable. The alliance, after all, is a legacy of the Cold War, created to deter a Soviet threat. Now that the Soviet Union is no more and the primary rationale for the alliance has evaporated, they wonder whether the United States and Japan will seek a new common threat, namely China, as a way of sustaining the alliance. To head off such a negative possibility, these specialists believe, China should help develop a multilateral security structure that can constrain Japan by putting relations among the regional powers on a new basis.

Chinese policymakers recognize that Beijing "suffers from a serious credibility gap regarding its military aspirations and security relations with its Asian neighbors. The lack of transparency in China's political process almost assures that any official pronouncement from the Chinese government regarding its strategic intentions will be met with much skepticism in the international community."<sup>19</sup> By demonstrating a cooperative attitude toward regional dialogues, Chinese policymakers hope to enhance the credibility of their peaceful intentions.

### **Constraints on China's Involvement in Regional Security Cooperation**

Although China now takes a generally positive line toward regional cooperation on security matters, its style of participation in cooperative activities remains cautious. The bureaucratic politics of security and foreign policy-making, conducted in an atmosphere of impending leadership succession, reinforces Chinese caution toward regional multilateral processes. The Chinese foreign policy-making process is highly centralized and opaque. The country's preeminent leader always pays close attention to foreign policy and decides many issues himself. Overall coordination for foreign policy is provided by the Foreign Affairs Leading Group of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which is headed by Premier Li Peng and includes CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin and the party leaders heading the PLA, the security organs, and the International Liaison Department. CCP leaders decide the most important issues and delegate less important policy decisions and policy implementation to particular bureaucracies. Although differences in organizational interests, missions, and philosophies presumably create a pluralistic bureaucratic foreign policy process in China similar to those of other countries, we know very little about it.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is filled with cosmopolitan, well-educated diplomats, is, not surprisingly, supportive of regional cooperation on security issues. It was delegated the task of developing China's position on this issue and, after an extensive review of policies toward Asia-Pacific security issues during 1993-94, decided that it made sense for China to take a positive stance toward security cooperation. The Foreign Affairs Ministry's large Asia bureau was put in charge of regional security cooperation policies, with the additional involvement of the international organization bureau (which traditionally handles global disarmament matters) and the United States bureau. Asia bureau head Wang Yingfan, who had attended the first meeting of University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation's Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue and who directs the regional cooperation policy, was promoted to assistant foreign minister.

---

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd R. Vasey, "China's Growing Military Power and Implications for East Asia," *Pacific Forum*, Center for Security and International Studies, Honolulu, August 1993, p. 20.

Foreign Affairs Ministry officials and associated think-tank analysts advocate an active Chinese role in regional security processes. They argue that simply participating in discussions will not be sufficient to ease thoroughly regional anxieties about the China threat. They say China must go beyond talk to make concrete proposals for cooperative efforts to solve problems such as the territorial dispute between China and several Southeast Asian nations over the Spratly Islands. In addition, China must begin to make its military forces and doctrines more transparent, i.e., share information about national defense forces, policies, and plans.

When deciding China's specific actions in these regional forums—whether, for example, China will share information about its military forces or participate in joint exercises—the People's Liberation Army must be consulted. Within the CCP's Foreign Affairs Leading Group, which is a key foreign policy-making forum, the norm of consensus gives the military a veto. Other analysts have found evidence that the financial and bureaucratic interests of military organizations have blocked Ministry of Foreign Affairs' diplomatic initiatives on issues like the South China Sea and arms exports.<sup>20</sup> Military arms control experts participating at the May 1994 Beijing meeting (cosponsored by a military think tank) were among the most outspoken of the Chinese participants in proposing specific confidence-building measures such as joint military exercises for peacekeeping and sea rescues and exchanges of military leaders, but their positive views may not be shared by mainstream PLA leaders.<sup>21</sup> In other countries, including the United States, military officers are generally the most skeptical of confidence-building measures because they are the most aware of the short-term security risks involved.

Another drag on the P.R.C.'s active engagement in regional cooperation is the current uncertainty about the leadership succession after Deng Xiaoping's death. Both foreign affairs and defense officials prefer to lie low until they find out what the post-Deng foreign policy line will be.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Preference for Gradualism and Informality***

China joins all the other East Asian countries in rejecting what it views as an overly institutionalized European model of regional security cooperation. A region-wide formal security institution like Europe's CSCE would not be appropriate to Asia, the Chinese argue, where nations are more diverse in political, economic, and social conditions and cultural traditions, and where people prefer informal relations to formal institutions. Far better would be a set of overlapping informal dialogues at the bilateral, subregional, and regionwide levels.

Over the past several years of dialogue activity, however, a split has begun to emerge between the Canadians, Australians, Americans, Japanese, and South Koreans, who want to begin to introduce more substance and structure into the dialogues, and the Chinese and Southeast Asians, who do not. At the May 1994 senior officials' meeting to prepare for the ASEAN Regional Forum, Chinese and ASEAN representatives opposed the notion of establishing working groups on particular issues. Since the body operates by consensus, working groups were not discussed at the 1994 meeting, although the idea will be introduced again in 1995. A South Korean proposal to establish an official consultative forum in Northeast Asia is also unlikely to obtain Chinese support.

The Chinese share the ASEAN view that dialogue is valuable in and of itself and that, as Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad has said, there is no substitute for the "tedious

---

<sup>20</sup> John W. Lewis, Hua Di, and Xue Litai, "Beijing's Defense Establishment," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Spring 1991), pp. 87-109; John W. Garver, "China's Push Through the South China Sea: The Interaction of Bureaucratic and National Interests," *The China Quarterly*, No. 132 (December 1992), pp. 999-1028.

<sup>21</sup> Li Qinggong, "About Security Mechanisms in the Asian and Pacific Region," paper presented to the symposium on "Post-Cold War Security Situation in the Asia-Pacific and its Prospects," Beijing, May 11-13, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> A rumor was heard at the May 1994 Beijing meeting that Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, a Politburo member, was in political trouble for his outspoken support of Asia-Pacific security cooperation.

business of getting to know one another.” Underlying this reluctance to move beyond informal dialogue to substantive problem-solving and information-sharing is a Chinese optimism that because the countries in the region give priority to economic development and are becoming economically interdependent, friendly discussions are what is most needed to preserve the existing peace and stability.

China’s reluctance to make discussions more concrete and substantive, however, is also based on a worry that its neighbors might use regional organizations against it. Beijing rejects the notion of having its foreign or domestic policies scrutinized, criticized, or even sanctioned by other East Asian countries. Reflecting this anxiety, China announced at the outset of the senior officials’ meeting to plan the ASEAN Regional Forum that it would not allow the territorial dispute over the Spratly Islands to be discussed by the ARF. At the July 1994 ARF meeting, China succeeded not only in keeping the Spratly issue off the agenda, but also in gaining the support of Malaysia and the Philippines to head off a proposal by Indonesia to infuse more government involvement into the informal workshops discussing the Spratly question.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Resistance to Transparency***

Transparency is widely viewed as a valuable method for building trust and preventing security dilemmas among states. The premise is that when a neighbor voluntarily makes himself more vulnerable to you by telling you about his defenses, he does not view you as a threat and is therefore not a threat to you.

Yet Chinese military and civilian foreign policy-makers express little official support for transparency, even in principle. They argue that China, as a closed society, would give more new information than it received if transparency were introduced. The United States and Japan already make public their current and projected forces. The Chinese political system puts a premium on secrecy. Even in nonmilitary policies, Chinese citizens have little information about what their government is doing. (Indeed some Chinese reformers welcome foreign pressure on Beijing to provide transparency in defense matters as a wedge for opening up the political system more generally.)

The reluctance of Chinese defense officials to reveal information about their national defense also stems from their own sense of weakness. China gains deterrence value from the ambiguity surrounding the size and quality of its defense capabilities. Chinese officials believe that transparency, by announcing how meager and technologically backward Chinese military equipment is, will make China more vulnerable to attack.

At the United Nations, Chinese representatives have argued for introducing transparency only in specific bilateral or trilateral contexts, but not universally. They have agreed to general principles of openness on military matters and in the arms registry of the United Nations, but this was largely because no other country was opposed and formal votes were not taken. (China has also reported to the arms registry.) China does not want to be isolated in the United Nations or any other large international body.

In regional settings, however, China is likely to drag its heels against the introduction of transparency requirements. It has still not published a defense White Paper, although one was reported to be in preparation earlier in 1993.

In the case of China, it may be that the normal sequence of confidence-building measures, i.e., first dialogue, then transparency, and then joint military exercises and other cooperative activities, will not be followed. China may be ready to move ahead with joint activities before it is prepared to share specific information about its national defense. A 1993 Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry pro-

---

<sup>23</sup> Nayan Chanda, “Divide and Rule,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 11, 1994, p. 18.

posal to Japan that the two countries undertake joint training for peacekeeping activities suggests that China may feel more comfortable with this active form of cooperation than with transparency.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Reluctance to Assume Leadership***

The reticence of Chinese participants in regional security forums stems in part from the Chinese government's reluctance to lead region-building processes. Chinese officials believe that because their country is viewed as the traditional hegemon in the region, any initiatives emanating from Beijing will be construed as an attempt to reclaim dominance.<sup>25</sup> Policymakers are also constrained by the old Maoist rhetoric against hegemonism, which lends a negative connotation to the concept of leadership.<sup>26</sup> Deng Xiaoping's foreign policy prescriptions, which are followed just as religiously as Mao's were, also have been interpreted as recommending against China's playing an international leadership role.<sup>27</sup> At the recent Beijing meeting on regional security cooperation, Chinese participants reacted defensively to foreign suggestions that a constructive regional leadership role for China might be welcomed by its neighbors. "Oh, no, don't worry, we would never act like a leader," they insisted. The notion that leadership could have a positive meaning was completely alien. Moreover, China's insistent denial that it could become a threat inhibits any regional leadership on its part.

As other governments increasingly invest in the process of building regional security cooperation, Chinese passivity could come to be resented as free riding on the collective effort. This friction could further estrange China from its neighbors and cause the collective effort to collapse.

Two other secondary issues have complicated Chinese participation in regional security processes.

### ***The Taiwan Problem***

In recent years, Beijing has banned mainland Chinese from participating in any international security discussions, even academic ones, that include people from Taiwan or have the Taiwan issue on the agenda. Beijing insists that the Taiwan issue is a national issue that must be solved by the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait; it is not an issue for international deliberations. From Beijing's perspective, even informal international discussions of security issues with people from Taiwan in the room would amount to a tacit recognition of Taiwan as a separate political entity. Taiwan's participation in regional economic bodies like APEC is acceptable, but its participation in regional security discussions is not.

China's insistence on excluding Taiwan from regional security dialogues creates serious problems for dialogue organizers. For several years the leaders of CSCAP have sought a compromise acceptable to Beijing. Beijing has rejected the idea of having academics from Taiwan participate as individuals and accepts them only as observers. Similarly, Taiwan is excluded from the ASEAN Regional Forum.

By keeping the Taiwan question hidden from regional scrutiny, China defeats its own purpose of reassuring its neighbors about its peaceful intentions. When treated like a dark secret, the Taiwan

<sup>24</sup> "Japan, China to Discuss Military Linkup," *Nikkei Weekly*, June 7, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> For different historical reasons, Japan and the United States also worry about creating a backlash by assuming a leadership role.

<sup>26</sup> One recent article by an authoritative Chinese government policy specialist attributed negative motives to an American desire to "play a 'leading role' in the Asia-Pacific" and Japanese "ambition to play a 'central role' in the region" (quotes in the original). Qian Jiadong, "Security Trends in the Asia-Pacific Region," in "Disarmament and Security Issues in the Asia-Pacific Region," *Disarmament Topical Papers*, No. 11, New York: United Nations, 1992, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> After the fall of the Soviet Union, a 24-character guide as to how China should react internationally to the event was widely believed to have been given by Deng Xiaoping although it has never been formally attributed to him: "Observe with soberness, stand firmly, meet the attack calmly, don't show off, overcome our own weak points, and never assume leadership." Although this statement was intended as a guideline for China's role in the international communist movement, it has been generalized to all aspects of Chinese foreign policy.

issue raises suspicions about the possibility of military conflict across the Taiwan Strait. Open discussion in regional forums between representatives from both sides of the Taiwan Strait could enhance confidence in the peaceful resolution of the situation.

### ***The North Korea Problem***

In their efforts to induce North Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions, China, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Russia have begun to evolve a concert-like form of security cooperation for Northeast Asia. Diplomats from these five states have undertaken extensive consultations with one another, mainly on bilateral bases, before negotiating with Pyongyang or introducing measures at the United Nations. So far, they have moved ahead only when they have achieved consensus because China has both a formal veto in the UN Security Council and an effective veto over the implementation of sanctions.

Although China has cooperated in the quiet diplomacy undertaken to get North Korea to comply with the requirements of the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors, Beijing is understandably reluctant to ally itself publicly with any collective effort that might be viewed by Pyongyang as hostile. Beijing has a genuine interest in ridding the Korean Peninsula of nuclear weapons, but it prefers the survival of a communist regime in the North to unification under the Seoul government. When Beijing established diplomatic relations with South Korea without insisting on cross recognition by Washington of North Korea, Pyongyang accused it of abandonment. Therefore Chinese foreign policy-makers feel they cannot again be seen as siding with the United States and South Korea against the North on the nuclear issue.

This concern about not being viewed as hostile toward North Korea affects Chinese participation in regional security dialogues, especially those focused on Northeast Asia. The North Koreans were among the original six countries participating in the Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation's Northeast Asian Cooperation Dialogue when it was founded in May 1993. When the North Koreans failed to attend the October 1993 and May 1994 meetings of the dialogue because of the crisis atmosphere surrounding the nuclear issue, the Chinese continued to attend but with a certain degree of awkwardness. China would certainly be unwilling to establish an official security forum for Northeast Asia, as suggested by the South Koreans, unless the North Koreans were included.

## **Conclusion**

China's involvement is crucial to the success of efforts to build a regional order in the Asia-Pacific. Inducing cooperative behavior from China by bringing to bear the collective opinion of its neighbors in regional forums is widely considered a major objective of creating such forums. For this reason, China's increasingly favorable attitude toward regional cooperation on security matters is a very significant and positive development. The cautious attitude of China toward the pace and format of the region-building effort is hardly surprising in view of the novelty of the enterprise and the historical baggage the Chinese bring to it. The difficulty of building a bureaucratic consensus among civilian and military foreign policy officials in favor of sharing military information or proposing concrete confidence-building measures reinforces China's preference for gradualism and informality. It will take great tact and patience to keep China on board while moving ahead in cooperative endeavors.