

issues remain 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.³³ Meanwhile, China is strongly opposed to establishing any institutionalized mechanisms for dealing with regional security issues for the reasons that countries 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.³⁴

Chinese positions on the multilateral approach to Asia-Pacific security have undergone noticeable changes.³⁵ China seems to have gradually moved toward acknowledging the utility of multilateralism, while still hesitant about adopting institutionalized mechanism right away. 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 focus 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, 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; pretext for interference in domestic affairs; power politics and hegemonism.³⁶

China's evolving positions on Asia-Pacific security can be characterized as what I call "conditional multilateralism."³⁷ Its essence is to present China as a supporter of the emerging regional security dialogue 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, influence its agenda, and have 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

³³ Sheldon Simon, "The Limits of Defense and Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* XXXIII:1 (February 1998), pp.62-75; Shaun Narine, "ASEAN and the Management of Regional Security," *Pacific Affairs* 71:2 (Summer 1998), pp.195-214.

³⁴ Tian Peiliang, "Dongbeiyu anquan taishi ji zouxiang [Northeast Asian Security Posture and Its Orientation]," *Heping yu Fazhan [Peace and Development]*, no.1 (March 1996), pp.1-3, 51.

³⁵ Rosemary Foot, "China in the ASEAN Regional Forum: Organizational Processes and Domestic Modes of Thought," *Asian Survey* XXXVIII:5 (May 1998), pp.425-440.

³⁶ Li Yunlong, "Yatai diqu de zonghe anquan hezuo [Comprehensive Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region]," *Xiandai guoji guanxi [Contemporary International Relations]*, no.5 (1996), pp.23-25.

³⁷ Jing-dong Yuan, *Conditional Multilateralism: Chinese Views on Order and Regional Security*. CANCAPS Papier No.9 (Toronto: The Canadian Consortium on Asia Pacific Security, March 1996)..