

China, and the Soviet Union);<sup>27</sup> the quadrangular-power relationships (China, Japan, Russia, and the US), and the five-force interactions (the four powers plus ASEAN).

China's emphasis on major power relations is based on the principle of multipolarization in which itself 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 non-confrontation, consultation, and consensus, and simply most countries' desire for peace and stability.<sup>28</sup> 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 mechanism for managing potential conflicts. Regarding emerging security-building initiatives, Beijing has been rather cautious in either endorsing or criticizing them, for obvious reasons. For instance, ASEAN's role since the end of the Cold War has become increasingly important in regional affairs. It seeks to establish its pivotal role in Southeast Asia as a balancer between major powers. Very pro-active, ASEAN seeks the driver's seat, hoping to prevent big powers from taking over the agenda setting authority.<sup>29</sup> Chinese analysts have viewed the ARF with mixed ambivalence. For some, the purpose of the ARF in essence is to retain the influence the United States in the region and to cast some restraining net over the region's major powers.<sup>30</sup> For others, there is the concern that regional multilateral security arrangements would be dominated the United States and become appendix to existing military alliances.<sup>31</sup>

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. 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 US and China. In this regard, ARF represents ASEAN's ability to engage major powers, which is crucial for regional security.<sup>32</sup> However, its ability to manage regional security

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<sup>27</sup> Xu, "Changing Chinese Security Perceptions," pp.12-13.

<sup>28</sup> Sa Benwang, "Maixiang ershiyi shiji de yatai anquan xingshi [Asia-Pacific Security toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century]," *Heping yu fazhan* [Peace and Development], no.58 (December 1996), p.3.

<sup>29</sup> Shi Yongming, "Lengzhanhou dongmong diweide zengqiang jiqi yingxiang [ASEAN's Rising Position and the Its Influence in the Post-Cold War Era]" *Guoji wenti yanjiu* [International Studies], no.1 (1997), pp.29-33.

<sup>30</sup> Wu Xinbuo, "Dongya hezuo anquan de xianzhuang yu qianjing [The Current Status of East-Asian Cooperative Security and Its Prospect]," *Heping yu Fazhan* [Peace and Development], no.4 (December 1995), pp.8-11.

<sup>31</sup> You Ji, "China's position on collective security," *Trends*, 22-23 February 1997, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Vatikiotis, "Uncharted Waters," *FEER*, 5 August 1993, pp.10-11.