

Chapter 1

Introduction

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The papers in this monograph were prepared for a workshop organised by the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC) in partnership with the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS), and held in Beijing in March 2007. The workshop and, indeed, the establishment of the partnership with the CFISS was made possible by an ARC Linkage Grant (with the Department of Defence as the 'Industry Partner') awarded to the SDSC in 2005. The ARC grant has made it possible for the SDSC to network more systematically with other centres of learning in the Asia-Pacific focused on the strategic ramifications of China's rise. It has enabled the Centre to offer additional courses on China in its Masters program and, more generally, to boost the Centre's interest and capacity to conduct research on issues related to China. The Centre is indebted to both the ARC and the Department of Defence for this support.

The workshop was attended, on the Australian side, by all three 'Chief Investigators' for the ARC-funded project, namely Ron Huisken, Robert Ayson, and Brendan Taylor. As this was the inaugural collaboration with the CFISS, Yu Ping, the then Administrator of the Masters program and a Chinese citizen, participated as our liaison officer, adding valuable ballast to the Australian team. For its part, the CFISS assembled its director and deputy director of research, Zhang Tuosheng and Lu Dehong respectively, together with four other scholars from centres in Beijing and Shanghai: Pan Guang, Yuan Peng, Zhai Kun and Zhu Feng. Most of the Chinese papers were written in Chinese and translated into English. We elected, as far as possible, to preserve the flavour of these translations and limited our editing to the correction of any obvious sources of confusion or misinterpretation. It is appropriate to make clear at this point that the workshop participants are responsible only for the content of their papers. Responsibility for these introductory observations rests solely with the editor.

The theme for the workshop, suggested by the SDSC, was *Developing East Asia's Security Architecture*. The broad intent was to get behind the Chinese view that the extant architecture, dominated of course by America's several bilateral alliance relationships, reflects a Cold War mentality that should now give way to thinking better suited to the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary world. China's official alternative is encapsulated in the slogans for a revival of multipolarity and the democratisation of international relations,

and in its New Security Concept which urges adherence to principles like mutual benefit and mutual respect. We wondered whether China's academic community might be toying with ideas that could operationalise this general dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, the workshop papers only came at this issue tangentially. Dissatisfaction with the status quo was strongly confirmed but, beyond an unmistakable preference to see a gradual diminution in US prominence, no concepts for an alternative regional architecture were hinted at. Both the papers and the discussions at the workshop, apart from proving to be a rich source of insights on specific issues, also confirmed that China has stepped away from any direct challenge to existing arrangements in favour of indirect and longer-term stratagems. Readers will be able to judge for themselves the degree of progress that China has made, but this observer's assessment would be in the ballpark of 'strong progress'.

One of the more interesting outcomes from the workshop actually came before it got underway. In March 2007, Australia had just signed the declaration with Japan on cooperation in the security field and our Chinese hosts were eager to hear what we had to say about it. Our attempts at an explanation—that it was a declaration not a treaty, that all of the activities envisaged were at the 'soft end' of the security spectrum, and that it was an incremental step in a relationship that had matured slowly but steadily over several decades—seemed to fall short of the mark. The light-hearted observation was made that China had clearly misread Australia in that the move toward Japan indicated that Australia had already decided which camp it preferred. This comment not only confirmed that Japan remains something of a raw nerve for China, but also that at least some Chinese scholars are already thinking instinctively in terms of rival 'camps' in East Asia, with China at the head of one of them. It also raised the question (but no opportunity presented itself to explore the answer) of why the specialist community in China (or parts of it) had come to the conclusion that Australia could be categorised as wavering between the 'alternative camps' in East Asia. Further discussion reverted to more familiar expressions of understanding for Australia's closeness to the United States (and, by extension, Japan), but included the speculation that Beijing might well seek to get closer to Australia to dilute any effort to forge an anti-China coalition.

The first theme tackled at the workshop was an evaluation of existing multilateral processes, particularly those associated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In chapter 2 Brendan Taylor presents a crisp assessment of how regard for multilateral processes started hesitantly from a low base in the aftermath of the Cold War and then literally blossomed from the late 1990s, arguably to the point of oversupply. Taylor also tackles the tricky question of effectiveness, concluding that, against yardsticks such as networking,

socialisation and confidence-building, the processes in East Asia deserve strong marks. At the same time, none of these processes have displayed much potential to deliver prompt, practical outcomes in crises and emergencies in the region like East Timor in 1999, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 or the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. These considerations feed into Taylor's judgement that in order to be part of a viable architecture for regional security, multilateral processes need to become more responsive to great power politics.

This sentiment dovetails rather nicely with Zhai Kun's creative endeavour to account for the most conspicuous dimension of multilateralism in East Asia, namely the dominance of ASEAN rather than one or more of the major powers. In chapter 3 Zhai contends that ASEAN's success is linked to redefining such notions as power and security to its advantage, and to its recognition that its ability to continue to shape the manner in which the great powers engage Southeast Asia is strongly linked to the deepening of ASEAN cohesion so that this grouping continues to be the standard-setter in the region on this front. The general idea is that ASEAN leadership of these processes must continue to look to all the major powers as better than the more costly and riskier approach of direct competition among them. Zhai further contends that China's decision to give unequivocal backing to ASEAN's aspirations to play this role has provided both essential strategic support and encouraged the other great powers to play the game ASEAN's way. This is an intriguing thesis. China has certainly achieved a significant status within ASEAN in a remarkably short space of time, despite the earlier dominance of Japan and, to some extent, at one remove, of the United States. Equally, however, if the brawl over the shape and role of the East Asia Summit (EAS) is any guide, great power competition is suspended only to the extent that it suits those powers.

In chapter 4, also covering East Asia's current multilateral processes, Pan Guang addresses the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which emerged in 1996 but took its present shape in 2001. Pan records the remarkable development of this China-initiated multilateral forum, including the plausible claim to have outflanked the United States despite the latter's dramatic intrusion into central Asia from October 2001 to prosecute the war against terrorism. In contrast to its caution in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) during the 1990s, China has fast-tracked the development of the SCO, both in terms of the organisation's mandate and in giving the body concrete institutional form. The SCO's mandate has grown beyond its original purpose of defining and stabilising China's borders with Russia and the adjacent republics of the former Soviet Union, branching out into collaboration on counter-terrorism and seeking to be influential in shaping the development and distribution of the region's energy resources. Pan points out that stabilising some 15 000 km of land borders in Asia constitutes a major contribution of regional security. Similarly, he argues that

the SCO's counter-terrorism campaign is of strategic significance for the whole of Asia, not least because the terrorist groups in Southeast Asia (which are potentially capable of disrupting energy supplies throughout the Indonesian archipelago) have close ties with the groups in central and south Asia. Although pre-eminently a security body, Pan Guang points out that the SCO's success on this front will also require a conscious effort to ensure an adequate degree of balanced economic development amongst all the participants.

In discussions on this paper, it was acknowledged that there seemed to be, at best, limited compatibility between Chinese and US interests in central Asia. Chinese participants repeatedly highlighted China's vulnerability to instability in Afghanistan and expressed genuine concern that the combined efforts of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in that country appeared to be inadequate. There was no suggestion, however, that China might, or should, consider a substantive military contribution to this campaign (although it was acknowledged that the United States has pressed for such a commitment on more than one occasion).

The two presentations on the Six-Party Talks process produced an enlightening discussion. China's protestations early in these negotiations—that its access and influence in North Korea had limits—tended to be regarded as 'cover' for a degree of common ground between Beijing and Pyongyang. This apparent consensus extended to how the nuclear crisis should be resolved, particularly as regards the timeframe, and how strongly the regime in Pyongyang should resist pressures on it to begin to change the nature of its governance of North Korea. The workshop discussions provided a timely reminder that if Japan and the United States have been North Korea's principal enemies over the past 60 years, for the preceding 2000 years or longer that position had belonged to China. It was pointed out that the close China-North Korea relationship of earlier times—rather famously likened to 'lips and teeth'—was borne of an era when China felt threatened and was seeking additional means, not least buffer states between itself and US forces, to bolster its security. Now it is North Korea that feels threatened and insecure, not least, perhaps, because both the Soviet Union/Russia and China distanced themselves from Pyongyang in the early 1990s.

In chapter 5, Zhu Feng provides a frank and fascinating assessment of the dynamics of the Beijing-Pyongyang relationship in recent years, and of Beijing's eventual conclusion that it may have seriously misread Pyongyang's motives and intentions. Zhu concludes that, following the missile tests of July 2006 and the nuclear test of October 2006, Beijing may well have concluded that it had little choice but to make clear to Pyongyang that it too regarded all options as being on the table if it reneged on its repeated assurances that it sought arrangements which would allow it to roll back its nuclear weapons program.

In chapter 6, Robert Ayson takes an entirely different approach with his opening observation that the Six-Party Talks process is unlikely to result in the complete elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. For Ayson, failure on this front does not mean that the Six-Party Talks process is without merit. To the contrary, he argues that there is a dimension to these talks that could more than offset a failure to fully achieve their declared purpose. For Ayson, the Six-Party Talks provide the one forum in which the region's three great powers—the United States, China and Japan—are being required to adapt and reconcile their approaches to an urgent regional security issue; that is, to develop the habits, instincts, and techniques of functioning as a 'concert of powers'. This positions the Six-Party Talks as the most promising countervailing force to those other tendencies at work in the region that point to the more dangerous option of rival blocs.

In the discussion in chapters 5 and 6, it is suggested that South Korea and North Korea are pursuing similar strategies for the longer term—more balanced relationships with their powerful neighbours, protectors and protagonists. For South Korea, this means enhancing its exposure to China and accepting some greater distance from the United States; while, for North Korea, it means measured engagement with the United States and Japan so as to lessen its exposure to China. This is a plausible line of argument and casts new light on the twists and turns of the Six-Party Talks. It is further supported by intense speculation within the think-tank community in Beijing (that the author encountered in October 2007) to the effect that the United States and North Korea had come to an understanding that has yet to be shared with the other Six-Party players. This speculation centres on a meeting in Berlin in May 2007 involving (then) US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill and the chief North Korean negotiator to the Six-Party Talks.

These additional facets on the Six-Party Talks suggest that the longer-term endeavour to build a robustly stable security environment in Northeast Asia will be a challenging but fascinating exercise, and that expectations that South Korea and North Korea, whether separately or re-united, must inevitably slip wholesale into China's sphere of influence might be misplaced. Chinese participants in the workshop confirmed other indications that Beijing is favourably disposed to seeing the Six-Party Talks process transition into a standing security mechanism for the region. Since the United States is also of this view, the outlook for such a development must be deemed to be quite positive provided, of course, that the Six-Party Talks process can achieve the disablement of North Korea's nuclear weapons program in a manner that builds confidence in North Korea's intentions.

One of the themes strongly re-affirmed at the workshop was that China, alongside acknowledging that the United States was vastly and comprehensively more powerful, appears to be entirely comfortable with the notion of being a 'peer competitor'. It seems to be regarded as almost axiomatic (and, it must said, not without justification) that China will, in due course, become the second player in America's league in terms of a pronounced margin of superiority over all other states in economic weight, political clout, and military power. This self-image, as effectively the sole challenger to the present unipolar structure of the international system, naturally inclines some Chinese analysts to view the United States as by far the most formidable challenge to the full flourishing of China's potential. This also suggests, however, that China-US relations, for all the tranquility of recent years, are prone to be characterised by deep and powerful competitive instincts, and have a strong inherent potential to become strategically unstable.

In chapter 7, Ron Huisken provides an essentially familiar 'Western' account of US interests in and aspirations for East Asia, but is a good deal more cautious on the potential for the United States and China to achieve some form of strategic accommodation over the near to medium term than Lu Dehong expresses in chapter 8. Huisken's analysis supports a view expressed in workshop discussions that even if Washington gradually concedes that it must compromise on its status as the unambiguous foremost power globally, in Europe or in the Middle East, it will be most resistant to relinquishing its status in Asia. This view has inherent plausibility insofar as the synergies that in the past attached to pre-eminence in Europe and the Middle East will be more strongly attached to East Asia in the future simply because 'the most important bilateral relationship in the world in this century' (to borrow Hillary Clinton's words) is that between the United States and China.

In chapter 8, Lu Dehong, a retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) officer, presents his understanding (based on a careful study of critical and mostly left-of-centre American literature) of the complex and somewhat dysfunctional manner in which the United States goes about the business of protecting and advancing its interests. Lu contrasts this with the clarity and simplicity of pronouncements from China's leaders regarding security and defence policy. He concludes with an eloquent plea for an early and comprehensive program of strategic engagement between China and the United States in the conviction that this can expose the essential compatibility of their interests and aspirations.

In chapter 9, Yuan Peng seeks to back up the proposition that the prevailing stability in US-China relations is tactical rather than strategic. In doing so, he detects a degree of focus and coherence, and of danger, in US dealings with China that few Western analysts would relate to, but which dramatises a

distinctive feature of international relations: just how differently a common set of events and developments can be perceived by various players.

The workshop took place just as Tokyo and Beijing made a serious effort to break and melt the ice that had encrusted China-Japan relations since the mid-1990s. Accordingly, the concluding presentation at the workshop was Zhang Tuosheng's account of why and how this effort was engineered and his assessment of the outlook for this central relationship. In chapter 10 Zhang points out that this core relationship deteriorated over the years up to 2006—to the point where it caused serious damage to the strategic interests of both sides, including the unbalancing of the US–China–Japan triangle. He contends that the more conspicuous sources of tension—the history issue, Taiwan, and the territorial disputes in the East China Sea—played out against the background of a deeper concern: the end of the Cold War exposed the unsettling reality of two major powers in East Asia. Zhang's qualified optimism about the quite comprehensive revival of political engagement since (then) Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Beijing in October 2006, including China's acceptance in a joint communiqué in April 2007 of a bigger Japanese role in international affairs, was tested in the discussions that followed his presentation. This discussion only confirmed the veracity of Zhang's concluding observation that, absent a genuine reconciliation between China and Japan, any architecture of security in East Asia will look worryingly inadequate.

A familiar approach to assessing the reliability of a region's 'security architecture' is to weigh the strength of potential challenges to security and stability against the authority of the institutions, mechanisms and processes available to develop instincts to accommodate national preferences to the collective interests of regional states, to resolve instances of conflicting aspirations, and to deter any inclinations to use national power to intimidate or coerce others into line in a manner that falls outside accepted norms of diplomatic interaction between states. This architecture is typically seen as composed of three elements: bilateral relationships, alliances, and multilateral institutions and processes. Commonsense (and scientific principles) allows the inference that the most robust architectural form is one that incorporates all three elements and where all the elements are of equal weight and importance. Of course, scientific principles are rather difficult to replicate in any structure involving people. And there is a school of thought that, in this example, two elements are in fact better than three, because the third, alliances, is by its very nature 'us versus them' institutions and inherently incompatible with the inculcation of comprehensive, collective and common security mindsets. Equally, it is not very difficult to develop a compelling argument that alliances are an indispensable 'contradiction' on the road to the adoption of genuine and reliable collective or collegiate approaches to security.

In East Asia at the end of the Cold War, such a security tripod could be detected, but its legs were conspicuously uneven in that the multilateral leg was all but invisible. Over the past 15 years, all three legs of the tripod have experienced considerable change. The mosaic of bilateral relationships has generally become thicker and stronger, with the China-Japan relationship being the most conspicuous exception. Alliance relationships have also been dynamic, becoming arguably more distant in the case of the US-South Korea relationship and closer and more comprehensive in the case of the US-Japan relationship. But the arena of most conspicuous change has been the development of multilateral processes. From essentially none, we now have ASEAN Plus Ten, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the ARF, the SCO, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), and the EAS, with expectations that the Six-Party Talks will spawn a new, standing mechanism. But the question, of course, is whether all these acronyms add up to a tripod leg of equal strength; that is, that it makes a contribution to regional security that is commensurate with the other two. I would venture the view that this is not the case; that there is, in fact, a nagging sense that States in the region have danced around the issue of building a multilateral process based on an acceptance that all the major powers now embedded in the region have a full role to play in shaping its future.

The prominent role that ASEAN has played on the multilateral front is, in part, a reflection of the continuing ambivalence among the major powers on who should be accepted as a key sculptor of the region's security architecture and on the character of the institution in which this artistic function should be performed. ASEAN's claim to leadership of the process rests on the assurance that it will be a 'safe driver, proceeding at a pace comfortable to all'. Among other things, this means gauging major power interests and not testing the limits of their tolerance. If ASEAN misjudges, or if an initiative runs outside expected parameters, the major powers will normally make clear that a policy correction is in order. Something of this kind appears to have occurred, with the EAS holding its first session with India, Australia and New Zealand as founding members and Russia all but promised early admission. China was prepared to shed its benevolent image and require ASEAN to belittle this new body by stressing that the real engine-room for community-building in East Asia would remain the narrower APT forum. The ASEAN processes have by no means been ineffective, but they are an indirect and therefore slow-acting way forward. In the meantime, a significant and possibly growing amount of major power energy is being channelled into multilateral processes that exclude perceived rivals and which are directly or indirectly competitive with existing processes set up by these rivals.

We cannot expect in East Asia over the foreseeable future to see the sort of pooling of sovereignty that has occurred in Europe. We must anticipate that, for the foreseeable future, the requirement will be for the sensible management

and containment of competitive instincts. The establishment of a multilateral security body in East Asia that includes all the key players, and which the major powers invest with the authority to tackle the shaping of the regional security order, remains a critical piece of unfinished business.