Future Security Architecture in Asia:

Concert of Regimes and the Role of Sino-American Interactions

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Abstract: The current security architecture in Asia is facing serious challenges including more offensive alliances and less defensive collective security mechanisms, the co-existence of redundancy and deficit of security regimes, and the absence of effective management of Sino-American structural contradictions. Given the diversification and complexity of these security challenges, the priority on the Asian security agenda should be to pursue effective coordination among various security regimes, rather than try to build an integrated architecture. This article argues that a new security framework can be created from three levels of security regimes. On the first level, *forums* led by smaller Asian countries with participation from China and the U.S. can boost more dialogues and mutual trust. On the second level, *regional regimes* can deal with regional security issues by harmonizing regional powers with the collective security mechanism. On the third level, *Sino-American security regimes* can help manage the conflicts between two great powers. Ultimately, the concert of regimes depends on the benign and effective interactions between China and the United States.

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Today in Asia, there exist various bilateral and multilateral security mechanisms, whether formal or informal. According to Nick Bisley, "the final key development in Asia's strategic relations over the past decade and a half has been the striking proliferation of multilateral security mechanisms and processes."¹ Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to Asia by senior Western IR scholars studying international regimes and institutions.² Up till now, there is no single security regime with overarching scope over the Asian continent. In contrast, comprehensive or security regimes have already been created in other continents, such as the European Union (EU) and the Organization on Security and Co-operation (OSCE) in Europe, the Organization of American States (OAS) in America, and the African Union (AU) in Africa. In recent years, some mechanisms have been activated to include more Asian countries. For example, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) has enrolled 26 countries, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has even accepted more countries than ASEAN members. Meanwhile, Japan, South Korea, and most ASEAN countries still remain outside of CICA, and some members of the ARF such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia are not Asian countries. Another challenge for these two regimes might be their weak capabilities in safeguarding regional security. For example, the ARF is sometimes thought of as "a talk shop without any teeth."³ Given this reality, a reasonable inference seems to be that Asian countries should follow the examples or precedents in other continents of creating a unitary security or comprehensive regime for the Asian continent.

From this author's view, however, the most important and urgent goal on the Asian security agenda is to effectively coordinate among various

¹Nick Bisley, "China's Rise and the Making of East Asia's Security Architecture," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 21, No. 73 (January 2012), p. 21.

²Amitav Acharya, Richard Higgott, and John Ravenhill, "Made in America? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September–December 2007), p. 370.

³John Garofano, "Power, Institutions, and the ASEAN Regional Forum: A Security Community for Asia?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (May/June 2002), p. 502.

security regimes, rather than build a unitary institution or mechanism. This judgment is based on two obvious facts. One is the diversification of security challenges or problems. As Yang Cheng noted, due to the heterogeneity in culture and people, a continental security regime in Asia will remain out of reach in the near future.⁴ The other is the differences of security needs. Because of different security challenges among different regions, a group of regimes rather than a unitary mechanism might be more suitable for Asia. Of course, an integrated approach should be introduced when designing future Asian security architecture but a compromised solution might be the accommodation of various security regimes and effective coordination of the relations among them under the new security architecture. Since the Asian and global security architecture will certainly be reshaped due to the rise of China and other emerging powers, it is necessary to build a new architecture of Asian security in the near future through coordination of current security regimes.

The main objective of this article is to analyze the background of designing such a security architecture and potential approaches to achieve it. In the first place, the concepts and framework of a security architecture will be briefly introduced. Then, some problems in the old architecture will be pointed out and future goals will also be explored. Based on the existing problems, this author suggests that a coordinated rather than integrated security architecture is a realistic and advisable solution, and that Sino-American interactions would be vital to the establishment of the new security architecture.

Security Architecture: Concepts and Models

What is security architecture? In this article, it is considered as the organic arrangement of security relations among different regimes or powers, rather than regimes themselves. Furthermore, there are some differences between security architecture and other related concepts. Compared with security structure characterized by power distribution among actors, security architecture mainly deals with the distribution of regimes. However,

⁴Yang Cheng, "Yaxin Fenghui: Fanya Xiezu Goujian Yazhou Anquan Jizhi [CICA Summit: Pan-Asian Collaboration and Construction of Asian Security Regimes]," *China Social Sciences Today*, June 11, 2014, http://www.cssn.cn/sf/bwsf.jj/201406/t20140611_1205703.shtml.

security architecture is not a mix of some security regimes or processes but the effective coordination among regimes. In addition, security architecture is different from security system. Security architecture might be just a kind of material structure, while security system reflects not only the distribution of materialized power but certain security ideas such as power politics or collective security. In a word, security architecture in this article is defined as a system which mainly focuses on interaction and coordination among security regimes or powers on the material level.

According to the above definition, the structure of an Asian security architecture and its future are shaped by the following factors: the role of great powers, regime types, scope and effectiveness of regimes, and relations among great powers or regimes. To accurately evaluate the current security architecture in Asia, it is necessary to conduct a brief analysis on all these factors.

The Role of Great Powers

Great powers usually play the leading roles in security architecture, yet Asia is an exception. Although so many great powers are engaged in security affairs in Asia, they are not recognized as leaders within most of the Asian security regimes. The U.S. seems to be the only country assuming a leading role because of its traditional alliances with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan, among others. In fact, there has been a U.S.-dominated East Asian hierarchy.⁵ Undoubtedly, China is another key player. It is China that bridges the separated Northeast, Southeast, South, and Central Asia. As Evelyn Goh has noted, "China has increasingly become the central component of the regional order-building process, both because of its growing economic and military strengths and as a result of its rising political and institutional influence."⁶ Therefore, the consequent structural power competition

Unlike in other continents, great powers in Asia do not always play a leading role in the regional security architecture.

⁵Evelyn Goh, "Hierarchy and the Role of the United States in the East Asian Security Order," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (September 2008), p. 368.

⁶Goh, "Hierarchy and the Role of the United States in the East Asian Security Order," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, pp. 353–354.

between China and the U.S. has weakened and even denied each other incumbent or potential leader status in Asian security affairs. Because of the limited role of great powers, small countries or their blocs have been playing driving roles in regional regimes. For example, "While ASEAN may not be the leader of Asian regionalism, it certainly has been the hub."⁷ Kazakhstan, as the founder and promoter of CICA, is another outstanding example.

Regime Types

In Asia, there are some different security regimes with different characteristics. (1) *Bilateral alliances* are dominated by the United States. These regimes were constructed respectively in different regions, and characterized by a hub-and-spoke structure. (2) *Temporary mechanisms* aim at tackling flashpoint issues, such as the Six-Party Talks on the Korean nuclear issue and the P5+1 negotiation on the Iranian nuclear issue. They are terminated upon the completion of the talks or negotiation.⁸ (3) *Strategic partnership* is usually a comprehensive bilateral arrangement and the security cooperation is an integral part within the whole package. Over the last two decades, China has built different strategic partnerships with more than 20 Asian countries.⁹ (4) *Multilateral summits*, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the China-Japan-South Korea trilateral summit. (5) *Security forums*, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and CICA. Although all these regime types may contribute to the accumulation of strategic trust to some extent by transparent communication and the implementation of confidence-building measures (CBMs), it is not easy to reach substantial agreements.

Scope and Effectiveness of Regime

There is usually a negative correlation between these two dimensions because "an inclusive membership policy may further hinder the

⁷Acharya, Higgott, and Ravenhill, "Made in America? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, p. 372.

⁸Bisley, "China's Rise and the Making of East Asia's Security Architecture," *Journal of Contemporary China*, p. 23.

⁹Chen Xiaochen, "Xishuo Zhongguo Duiwai 'Huoban Guanxi' [On the Partnerships in China's Foreign Relations]," *China Business News*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.yicai.com/news/2014/11/4043776.html>.

organization's ability to deal with the difficult issues."¹⁰ When it comes to effectiveness, some situations emerge: (1) Regimes with the most effective capabilities are the bilateral alliances led by the United States. (2) The effectiveness of temporary security mechanisms depends on the extent of cooperation among relevant parties. For example, the shared interest on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is driving China and the U.S. together to induce North Korea's commitment to denuclearization of the Peninsula, while the underlying geopolitical considerations — the U.S. trying to make use of the Korean nuclear crisis to enhance its military presence and China still considering North Korea as a buffer zone — have made it less possible to guarantee that North Korea will fulfill its commitment and thus reach an agreement with other parties. (3) Although a strategic partnership usually involves two countries, it rarely develops any effective enforcement mechanism, because the major goal of this kind of partnership is not to form an alliance, but to cultivate mutual trust and lay certain foundations for further cooperation. (4) The efficacy of multilateral summits depends on the number of participating countries and the will of political leaders. Bilateral or multilateral summits are usually more likely to facilitate substantive agreement. (5) Security forums usually include most member countries and issues, thus they may be the weakest mechanism compared with other regimes.

Relations Among Regimes or Powers

Within the current architecture of Asian security, the key problem is the lack of effective and benign interactions among regimes, especially between China and the U.S.-led alliances. Although engagements among regimes are conducted on different levels, mutual trust and mechanisms of formal interaction are still sorely lacking. Due to the power competition between China and the U.S., this interaction deficit has become a prominent challenge and caused different side-effects in different sub-regions. In Northeast Asia, there has been a geopolitical gap between China and the

The key problem of the current Asian security architecture is the lack of effective coordination among various regimes.

¹⁰Garofano, "Power, Institutions, and the ASEAN Regional Forum: A Security Community for Asia?" *Asian Survey*, p. 520.

U.S.-led alliances. In Central Asia, the U.S. military cooperation with some countries and its military presence in Afghanistan seem to be incompatible with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) co-led by China and Russia. Although there has been some cooperation between China and the U.S. on the Afghanistan issue since the latter withdrew its combating forces, little progress has been made on other sub-regional issues in Asia given the absence of effective coordination between the two great powers.

Asian Security Architecture: Current Problems and Future Challenges

Some serious problems have been existent in the current Asian security architecture. Generally speaking, there are mainly four challenges in this architecture.

First, there are relatively more offensive alliances and fewer collective mechanisms of a defensive nature, which frequently leads to instability in Asia. Some may insist that forging alliances is an effective approach to safeguarding national security because of its enforcement mechanisms. However, we should not ignore the security dilemma between certain alliances and other countries. Even if an alliance can be beneficial to most of its members, it will eventually intensify the security competition and even trigger more conflicts between countries within and countries outside of the alliance in the long run, for it functions at the cost of the security of other countries. Therefore, when we analyze the causes of the strategic trust deficit between China and the U.S., the U.S.-led alliances should not be neglected. In short, the U.S.'s alliance system in Asia has been a trouble-maker rather than conflict-mediator, and has generated more problems than it has solved. Hence, more collective mechanisms should be constructed so that security challenges can be better managed.

Second, the mismatch between security regimes and challenges has caused both a redundancy and yet deficit of security regimes. More specifically, ineffective regimes are excessive whilst effective regimes are in shortage. On one hand, although most security mechanisms such as CICA, ARF, and ASEAN were constructed or reformed after the Cold War, they have not yet evolved into effective regimes with enough enforcing capabilities. On the other hand, there are fewer specific and effective mechanisms to deal with the new security challenges after the Cold War, such as

the South China Sea disputes, the Iranian nuclear issue and the Korean nuclear issue. Some consider the *ASEAN way* as a new model in managing security challenges, yet as Jörg Friedrichs noted, “the ‘ASEAN family’ of regional security institutions has a mixed record: it has proved very helpful in improving interstate trust, fairly helpful in managing peaceful change, somewhat helpful in enhancing regime stability, but virtually useless in resolving interstate conflict.”¹¹ As a result, there is a “critical absence of an effective cooperative security mechanism in the region that could help mitigate tensions and manage potential miscalculations or actual crises.”¹² The most powerful regime, the U.S.-led alliance system, remained basically unchanged since it was formed during the Cold War era. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the alliance system turned out to be an outdated legacy of the Cold War.

Third, due to weak coordination among main regimes, the structural power contradiction and even potential conflict between China and the U.S. has not been managed effectively. Though such contradiction has been diffusing into global arenas, its main contending area still lies in the Asia-Pacific. In this light, China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi suggested turning the Asia-Pacific into a “testing ground” for the new model of major-power relationship between China and the United States. When he delivered his speech in the U.S. in September 2013, he proposed that both China and the U.S. “need to prioritize cooperation on Asia-Pacific affairs and start the building of this new model of relationship from the Asia-Pacific region.”¹³ Thus, the highest priority in Sino-American

With growing Sino-U.S. power competition in Asia, the deficit of defensive collective mechanisms makes it hard to maintain regional stability.

¹¹Jörg Friedrichs, “East Asian Regional Security,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (July/August 2012), p. 754.

¹²Eva Pejsova, “East Asia’s Security Architecture — Track Two,” EUISS ISSUE Alert No. 18 (Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2014), p. 1, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_18_East_Asia_security.pdf.

¹³“Speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Brookings Institution,” Chinese Foreign Ministry website, September 21, 2013, http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-09/21/content_30086631.htm.

relations should be the prudent management of conflicts in order to achieve peaceful power transition in the Asia-Pacific. If there is no security arrangement to coordinate the Sino-American power contradiction, a new bipolar structure may eventually appear. The formidable challenge reflects the most important problem. There is no effective security coordination or mechanism between China and the U.S., which has undermined the security environment in Asia.

In summary, Asia is currently trapped in a fragile security landscape. According to Barry Buzan, Asia is similar to the balance-of-power Europe of the nineteenth century and still an exemplar of traditional regional security dynamics largely found in military-political mode. On one hand, some traditional concerns about power still dominate the security agendas of many regional powers. The use of military force, even an all-out war, is regarded as possible in many places. On the other hand, economic development has been taken as a priority not just for welfare objectives and maintaining military strength, but also for moving up the rank of military power.¹⁴ Other scholars have noted the contrast between troublesome security challenges and rapid economic development. According to Nick Bisley, "Asia has become not just the most economically dynamic region in world politics; it has also become the region that spends most on defense."¹⁵ Moreover, the security pressure has become a burden on economic development. For example, Zhang Yan believed that although the economic and trade relations between China and the ASEAN are still flourishing, the South China Sea disputes may bring direct impact on their relations.¹⁶ In addition, the negotiation of the Sino-Japan-South Korea FTA has been undermined by the deterioration of Sino-Japanese political and security relations. As the spokesman of the Chinese Minister of Commerce Shen Danyang frankly noted, "the stable political relations among all three

¹⁴Barry Buzan and Ole Waver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 93–95.

¹⁵Bisley, "China's Rise and the Making of East Asia's Security Architecture," *Journal of Contemporary China*, p. 20.

¹⁶Zhan Yan, "RCEP Beijing xia Zhongguo Dongmeng Jingmao Guanxi: Jiyu, Tiaozhan, Chulu [The Opportunities, Challenges, and Solutions of Sino-ASEAN Economic and Trade Relations under the RCEP Framework]," *Asia-Pacific Economic Review*, No. 5 (2013), p. 57.

countries are the cornerstone of successful negotiation because strong political dynamics are necessary in the process of negotiation.”¹⁷

Three Levels of Asian Security Regimes

In order to cope with the challenges mentioned above, the ideal way might be to construct a coordinated rather than unitary security regime. Due to the diversification of security challenges and needs among regions or countries, I will elaborate on the concrete circumstances. First, the security issues in different regions should be managed by regional regimes with different parties in relevance. Different history, culture and challenges have led to divergent approaches for the security issues to spread across the Asian continent. It is unimaginable that these problems can be settled by one single unitary regime. In fact, the suitable scope to manage most security issues might be sub-regional rather than of the whole continent of Asia. For example, the claiming parties on the South China Sea issue are China, Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia, and most Asian countries are not claiming parties with no interest in the dispute. Thus any “outsider” who gets involved will definitely further complicate the dispute. The same logic may apply to the Korean nuclear issue, Iranian nuclear issue and conflicts between Palestine and Israel. These security problems would be better managed by regimes that only include relevant parties rather than a continental security mechanism.

The best approach to enhancing Asian security is to construct a coordinated rather than a unitary security regime.

Second, security issues with different natures and performances should be managed by regimes of different types. In Asia, security challenges are really diversified. For example, one big security challenge for Sino-American

¹⁷“Shangwubub: Zhongrihan Wending Zhengzhi Guanxi shi Tuidong Zimaoqu Tanpan Baozhang [Ministry of Commerce: The Stable Political Relations Facilitates FTA Negotiation],” *Chinanews*, November 18, 2014, <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/11-18/6787890.shtml>.

relations is the inadequacy of strategic mutual trust; for the claiming countries in the South China Sea dispute, the key concern is territorial sovereignty; for the Korean nuclear issue, it is major contradiction between security concerns of the DPRK and other parties' concerns on potential nuclear proliferation. Thus, these security issues should be managed or handled by different regimes with different characteristics and mechanisms. It is unwise to count on the same regime to successfully deal with different challenges. For example, one regime may be helpful to enhance mutual trust yet incapable of dealing with specific security problems. For instance, "even if the ARF tackles more difficult issues, the process may be too slow to address these issues that could evolve into conflicts or, in the case of the Korean Peninsula, lasting peace is very likely to be without the involvement of the ARF."¹⁸ Thus, a unitary continental regime is less optimal to manage these different challenges simultaneously.

The last obstacle to building a unitary architecture is the competition of China and the United States. In a unitary regime covering the whole Asian continent, it is not easy to handle Sino-American interactions. These two giants may either share leadership, or transfer one's own part of leadership to the other in a specific region or issue. For example, the U.S. permits and even encourages China to play a leading role in the North Korean nuclear issue, and China has acknowledged the U.S. primacy in dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue. Why? Less influence here means more influence there. The leaders of both countries are very clear that it is impossible to monopolize agenda-setting on all issues or in each region, they are thus glad to make some concessions. The logic "explains why the Korean War, the first conflict of the emerging Cold War, did not push the United States into promoting an Asian version of NATO. Such an institution would have only diluted U.S. control."¹⁹ However, given that power competition still exists between China and the U.S., both countries are reluctant to give up or share leadership in Asia, especially for the United States. Moreover, even if the two giants agreed to share leadership, many Asian countries would be

¹⁸Garofano, "Power, Institutions, and the ASEAN Regional Forum: A Security Community for Asia?" *Asian Survey*, p. 520.

¹⁹Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Winter 2009/2010), pp. 193–194.

unwilling to accept it. Countries like Japan, India and other middle powers in Asia are also eager for chances to voice out their own concerns and proposals. For smaller countries such as ASEAN members, they would prefer competitive Sino-American relations so that they can have more room for maneuver, instead of simply accepting the shared dominance of the two great powers.

To generalize the aforementioned analysis, a security architecture including various regimes could be better aligned with the Asian security situation. Ron Huiskens once made a similar conclusion that the most robust security architecture is one that incorporates bilateral relationships, alliances, and multilateral institutions and processes with these elements being of equal weight and importance.²⁰ Of course, in the new architecture proposed here, the components will be somewhat different. There should be three levels of security regimes in order to deal with the diversification and complexity of Asian security challenges.

The first level is *forums* with a view to increasing dialogues and strengthening mutual trust among their members. Some current regimes, such as the ARF in East Asia and CICA in Central and South Asia, are playing this role. Big powers such as China and the U.S. are members of these forums, while the leadership of smaller countries will contribute to harmonize the power competition among big powers. For example, "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.²¹ The more interactions and exchanges in these forums, the better big powers know each other, and hence the more mutual trust can be developed. Furthermore, these forums will give smaller countries more leverage and initiatives. For example, "the ARF has indeed extended ASEAN diplomatic leverage to the wider region, though the evidence is

²⁰Ron Huiskens, "Introduction," in Ron Huiskens ed., *The Architecture of Security in the Asia-Pacific* (Canberra: ANU ePress, 2009), p. 7.

²¹Huiskens, "Introduction," in Huiskens ed., *The Architecture of Security in the Asia-Pacific*, p. 8.

not overwhelming."²² For a durable and equitable security architecture, the positive participation of smaller countries is indispensable.

Asian security architecture should consist of three levels of regimes: pan-regional forums, regional security regimes and Sino-U.S. cooperative mechanisms.

The second level is *regional regimes* which comprise most of the regional countries. The prominent characteristic of regional regimes is *regionality* and their main goal is to tackle regional security issues through the coordination of regional powers and even the collective security mechanism. To achieve that, the existing regional regimes, such as SCO in Central Asia and the Sino-Japan-South Korea summit in Northeast Asia, should be further strengthened or endowed with coercive capability in some cases. Furthermore, some new regional regimes may be created so as to fill in the gaps of security mechanisms.

For example, the claimants may explore certain security regimes in the South China Sea to manage the disputes and maintain regional stability. In some special cases, non-regional countries may be included into these regimes. Taking the role of the U.S. in the Korean nuclear issue as an example, it is unrealistic to construct a Northeast Asian regime like the Six-Party Talks without U.S. participation. Since the U.S. has a vague Asian identity, China may exert more influence in these regimes. Nevertheless, none of these regimes should be designed against any third party, and these regional regimes should seek to form a complementary or cooperative rather than competitive relationship with the U.S. and its security mechanisms.

The third level is *Sino-American security regimes* which are led by the two great powers and include all relevant Asian countries. These regimes mainly aim at managing those unspecified security challenges that China and the U.S. face, as well as potential conflicts between them. The U.S. and China may develop these mechanisms in different issues or regions. The regional regime based on the Six-Party Talks is a case in point. According to Robert Ayson, the Six-Party Talks are regarded as "a partially successful alternative to the dangerous two-horse race which could emerge between

²²Garofano, "Power, Institutions, and the ASEAN Regional Forum: A Security Community for Asia?" *Asian Survey*, p. 513.

blocs led by China and the United States.”²³ In this sense, future Six-Party Talks may be equipped with double identities: the regional regime identity and the identity of Sino-American security regimes. However, in most cases, the Sino-American regimes may be created on the basis of the U.S.-led alliances. The solution is that the two great powers show political will and trust to reach compromise in accommodating each other.

A system that includes regimes with different levels and characteristics will be adaptable to diversified security challenges. The clear functional division and consequently complementary cooperation among regimes of different levels will help to decrease regime redundancy and make up for deficits. Thus, the functional division is a prerequisite of concert of regimes because fewer overlapping functions among regimes could bring about less functional conflict. In this light, regional regimes should be major actors in the concert, for the key of the new architecture is the concert of regimes rather than powers. Asian countries should contribute their security efforts through regional regimes, with all kinds of forums serving as platforms for these regimes to communicate, negotiate and coordinate with each other. Needless to say, Sino-American interactions still play a decisive role in developing the Asian security architecture. Given that both countries will be members — even leaders — of most regimes, if no effective interaction appears between them, a successful concert of regimes would hardly come into reality.

Sino-American Interactions and Concert of Regimes

To shape more effective bilateral interactions, both China and the U.S. will have to manage the following challenges.

First, how will the U.S. and other countries accommodate China's rise? On one hand, China should recognize the security concerns from other countries, especially from its apprehensive neighbors. On the other hand, the U.S. and other East Asian countries should positively accommodate China's rise with an inclusive attitude and open mechanisms. Regrettably, the U.S. and some East Asian countries have emphasized too much on their security concerns while hesitating to accept and accommodate China's rise.

²³Robert Ayson, “The Six-Party Talks Process: Towards an Asian Concert?” in Huiskens ed., *The Architecture of Security in the Asia-Pacific*, p. 64.

Second, how will China evaluate the American role in the Asia-Pacific and interact with the regional security regimes led by the U.S.? The reality in the Asia-Pacific is that “a U.S. withdrawal from Asia is unlikely because of U.S. economic interests there, and because it would mean the end of U.S. superpower status.”²⁴ Moreover, “how long it will take the Asians to grow out of this dependence on the United States is hard to say. As in Europe, many find it comfortable (and cheap) and, despite some inflated rhetoric, few oppose it absolutely.”²⁵

**Strong and lasting
Asian security
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Third, how will third parties play a positive role between China and the U.S.? In Sino-American interactions, the behavior of third parties may be double-edged swords. From a positive perspective, the third parties could become bridges between China and the U.S. or act as “buffers” to manage their fierce competitions. Nonetheless, in the worst scenario, the third parties may catalyze more conflicts between China and the United States. One recent example is that the Philippines is trying to involve the U.S. in the

South China Sea disputes, which might push the two great powers into conflicts. Therefore, if the new Asian security architecture is to be achieved, the role of third parties should be properly managed.

Based on the challenges mentioned above, some possible scenarios and ensuing mechanisms in future interactions between China and the U.S. and their mechanisms should be further explored.

Construct an Indigenous Asian Security Architecture without U.S. Participation

In recent years, China has begun its positive participation in, and even initiated, some mechanisms such as the CICA and the SCO, leading to much suspicion from the U.S. and some other countries. An American report believes that “senior Chinese leaders in the past year have begun to challenge the U.S. position as the primary power in East Asia by promoting

²⁴Buzan and Ole, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, p. 178.

²⁵*Ibid.*

a new Asian security architecture led by Asian countries, with China in the leading role. Upon taking the chairmanship of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia for three years in May 2014, Beijing turned a low-profile multilateral venue into an opportunity to articulate its vision for this new security architecture."²⁶ If this allegation finally becomes a reality, the U.S.-led bilateral alliances would be dismissed and the only superpower would have to withdraw from other Asian security mechanisms. However, it is unimaginable for the U.S. to let this happen. What's more, there is no evidence that can support China's ambition and capability to do so. Although President Xi seems to be much more ambitious, it will still take time to transform China's foreign strategy from the traditional approach.

Maintain the U.S.-Led Bilateral Alliances Excluding China

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. has shifted its strategic focus to balance China through the use of its bilateral alliance system. Thus, even if the U.S. tried to develop more bilateral security relations with China, the U.S.-led bilateral alliances would be inaccessible to China. The U.S. even considered combining the bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea into a trilateral one, although the "differing security perceptions about China among the United States, Japan, and South Korea suggest the three countries are unlikely to achieve full trilateral security cooperation in the current security environment in the near- to mid-term."²⁷ With the increase of power and influence, China will certainly speak more loudly in regional security affairs. If the U.S. and its Asian security alliances cannot accommodate China's rise, China would have no choice but to construct its own security arrangement. More security conflicts are thus likely to emerge. If China has to construct its own security regimes, two scenarios will be possible:

The first is that there will be fierce competition, even confrontation, between China and the U.S. and their blocs. Since more countries are likely

²⁶2014 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (Washington, D.C.: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 2014), p. 415.

²⁷2014 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, p. 425.

to get involved, the confrontation between the two blocs may be more intense than that between the two powers. The second scenario is that there will be a co-existence between the two regimes, possibly with some limited and partial competition. Mr. Qi Huaigao once offered a similar suggestion that the multilateral cooperation system advocated by China and the bilateral alliances system dominated by the U.S. could co-exist by a mode of embedded and overlapped systems.²⁸ Nevertheless, the premise of achieving this scenario is that the two great powers develop some complementary relations or interests in the Asia-Pacific, where there are some less direct conflicts between the two powers. Moreover, the regimes advocated by China must be loose or informal security arrangements so that they would hardly be recognized as a threat by the U.S.-led bilateral alliances. However, the fact is that there are many overlapping, even conflicting, interests between China and the United States. Especially when talking about security issues and regional order, the structural power contradiction is still playing an influential role in the Sino-American relationship. In this sense, there could be more competition and less possibilities of co-existence.

In short, the mutual distrust between the two great powers on building the new security architecture will only create a negative and even disastrous outcome. The only solution is that both powers co-exist in the reformed security regimes which are likely to further develop on the basis of the U.S.-led alliance system. To fulfill that objective, China's willingness of participation as well as the open attitude of the U.S. will be indispensable. It is doubtless that China would not choose to be a passive newcomer. It will certainly require a reform plan in exchange of accepting the U.S.-led security regime. Thus, it is likely that both the U.S. and China could become co-leaders of the new Asian security order.

Unfortunately, neither the U.S. nor China has showed their will to accommodate each other on the basis of the U.S.-led alliance system. In this author's view, there are two causes behind this unwillingness. One is that neither power has fully realized the security implications of China's rise. The U.S. believes that the alliance system is still an effective tool to balance

²⁸Qi Huaigao, "Zhongmei Zhidu Junshi yu Dongya Liangzhong Tixi de Jianrong Gongcun [The Structural Balance between the U.S. and China and the Coexistence of Two East Asian System]," *Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, No. 6 (2011), pp. 56–74.

China, while China insists that this system has been out-of-date as a legacy of the Cold War. If this logic prevails, the great powers and their regimes will inevitably fall into conflict and it may be too late by then to accommodate each other in a common regime. The other cause is the absence of strategic trust. Whilst the U.S. worries that China's participation will totally subvert its bilateral alliance system, China's concern is that joining in the America's security regime will bring about unbearable and unknown constraints on its foreign policy.

Facing this dilemma, leaders of the two powers should realize that "to move from strategic distrust to strategic reassurance and build a new model of major power relations, the U.S. and China have to maintain a balance of power and oppose the attempt of any single power at domination in the region."²⁹ No single country can monopolize everything in the Asian continent, and almost all participating countries would have to give up something: the United States has to rethink the idea that it can maintain its supremacy in Asia, while China needs to abandon any idea that it will one day become Asia's sole leader.³⁰ Before reaching a final agreement, what both powers could and should do is try to interact and accommodate each other on some less sensitive or uncritical issues so that more mutual strategic trust can be cultivated and developed. During this process, some third parties may play a neutral and positive role. As mentioned above, they will become bridges between China and the U.S., thus alleviating their distrust caused by misunderstandings. However, those countries that have competitive relations with China or the U.S. would not be able to play such a role of neutral bridge. For example, it is difficult to imagine that Japan and India, as regional competitors of China, could play a mainly positive role in

Enhancing Sino-U.S.
strategic trust
through effective
management of their
competition is key to
building a concerted
Asian security
regime.

²⁹Zhao Suisheng, "A New Model of Big Power Relations? China-US Strategic Rivalry and Balance of Power in the Asia-Pacific," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24, No. 93 (May 2015), p. 391.

³⁰Ayson, "The Six-Party Talks Process: Towards an Asian Concert?" in Huisken ed., *The Architecture of Security in the Asia-Pacific*, pp. 63-64.

coordinating Sino-American relations. Instead, countries which keep good relations with not only China but also the U.S., such as South Korea, Thailand and Pakistan, are more suitable candidates to play a positive and neutral role between the two powers.

Conclusion

Asia is a sprawling continent with serious security problems. Although most East Asian countries have enjoyed prosperity and stability since the end of the Cold War, other sub-regions such as South Asia, West Asia and even Central Asia are inflicted by regional conflicts, terrorism and nuclear proliferation. Even in East Asia, the security environment has been in a fragile state because of the North Korean nuclear issue as well as territorial disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea. Due to the diversification of security challenges, the Asian security architecture has been weak and awkward. According to Ron Huiskens, "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."³¹ Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go before these goals are achieved in Asia.

To sum up, the Asian security architecture is suffering from a series of problems: more offensive alliances and less defensive collective security mechanisms, the co-existence of redundancy and deficit of security regimes and a lack of effective management of the Sino-American structural contradictions. To overcome these barriers and maintain peace and stability in Asia, one optimal solution is to effectively coordinate among various levels of security regimes on the basis of enhancing existing security regimes, rather than try to build a strong and unitary institution or mechanism. A big challenge ahead is how to shape Sino-American relations in the future,

³¹Huiskens, "Introduction," in Huiskens ed., *The Architecture of Security in the Asia-Pacific*, p. 7.

since the interactions between the two great powers are the key to building the new security architecture. This author argues that co-existence and shared leadership by China and the U.S. is the only feasible solution. In recent years, many Americans believe that China is pursuing a more assertive foreign policy.³² However weak the foundation such perception is based upon, it may push the U.S. to adopt tougher policies toward China and bring more risks of conflicts. With the increasing contention between China and the U.S. on the South China Sea issue, there are more and more discussions about the Sino-American conflicts under certain scenarios.³³ In this light, both powers should make strategic compromise and take more responsibility to cultivate benign interactions, which will lay a solid foundation for constructing the new security architecture in Asia.

³²2014 *Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, p. 435.

³³For example, see Robert Farley, "3 Ways China and the U.S. Could Go to War in the South China Sea," *National Interest*, June 6, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/3-ways-china-the-us-could-go-war-the-south-china-sea-13055>.