

Building a Community of Common Security: China's Approach to Its Neighborhood

Ling Shengli

Support from China's neighborhood (land and maritime areas adjacent to China) is important for China's stated goal of peaceful development. In this regard, neighborhood diplomacy is a top priority in China's diplomatic arrangements. In October 2013, at the first Conference on the Diplomatic Work with Neighboring Countries, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that awareness of "a community of shared future" should take root in neighboring countries. This statement marks the first mention by a Chinese leader of "neighborhood diplomacy."

At the abovementioned conference in 2013, Xi set out China's new neighbor-centric foreign policy, also known as China's "neighborhood diplomacy." In his speech, Xi echoed Hu Jintao's rhetoric, saying that Chinese diplomats should "let the awareness of community of common destiny take root in neighboring countries."¹

In March 2015, in his report on the government's work, Premier Li Keqiang emphasized the importance of comprehensively promoting neighborhood diplomacy and building a community of shared future with China's neighborhood. All this shows that the Chinese government attaches a great importance to neighborhood diplomacy, and that building of a community of a shared future with China's neighborhood has become an important goal in China's neighborhood diplomacy. However, a community

Ling Shengli is Associate Professor at the Institute of International Relations, China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU).

1 Jacob Mardell, "The 'Community of Common Destiny' in Xi Jinping's New Era," *The Diplomat*, October 25, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/the-community-of-common-destiny-in-xi-jinpings-new-era>.

of a shared future with China's neighborhood is a long-term goal which encompasses three phases: a community of common interests, a community of common security, and finally a community of shared future. Among them, the building of a community of common security is an extremely important, yet difficult step. In order to better promote the building of a community of common security with China's neighborhood, China has put forward the new Asian security concept, and is also seeking to build a new security structure for the entire Asia-Pacific region. These measures will undoubtedly serve to promote the building of a community of common security with China's neighborhood in the region. In discussing the issues related to the concept of a community of common security with China's neighborhood, the current analysis aims to generate more attention toward and spur subsequent research on this issue.

Necessity for a Community of Common Security

At present, multi-polarization and economic globalization are gaining momentum across the globe. A pattern of common interests in which all countries have a bit of each other's has taken shape.²

With a keen appreciation of the current trend of world development, Chinese leadership has put forward the concept of a community of shared future, which has been used as a conceptual framework at various regional, bilateral, and neighborhood diplomatic levels. The community of a shared future for mankind has become the core of Xi Jinping's diplomatic theories and practice.³ It is an important diplomatic concept in the era, one that demonstrates the increased demand for China to forge a renewed relationship with the world.⁴

2 Yu Hongjun, "Foster the Awareness of Community of Shared Future for Mankind, and Promote Positive Interaction between China and the Rest of the World," *Contemporary World*, No.12, 2013, p.12.

3 Ruan Zongze, "Community of Shared Future for Mankind: China's 'Global Dream'," *International Studies*, No. 1, 2016, p.10.

4 Wang Yi, "2015: A Year of Flying Colors for Pursuing Major-Country Diplomacy with Distinctive Chinese," December 12, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-12/12/c_128523606.htm.

The proposal of a community of shared future between China and its neighborhood clarifies the long-term goal of China's neighborhood diplomacy. However, the key question lies in how such a community will be realized. During his visit to Southeast Asia, Xi Jinping made a four-point proposal in this regard:

First, we should work together to uphold peace and stability in Asia and foster a sound environment that enables us to achieve development and prosperity.

Second, we should form synergy between our respective development strategies to lend more momentum to growth in our respective countries.

Third, we should actively pursue security cooperation. Together, we can achieve open, inclusive and win-win cooperation among neighbors that is based on mutual respect and mutual trust, and achieved by expanding common ground and narrowing differences.

*Fourth, we should strengthen the close bonds among our peoples and ensure long-term harmony and cooperation among the Asian countries.*⁵

This four-point proposal concerns peace, development, security and people-to-people bonds. The first and the third point, in fact, mainly refer to security cooperation, which illustrates the great importance attached to the concept. China's neighborhood is geographically situated within Asia, hence the importance given to security cooperation by the concept of an Asian community of shared future overlaps China's neighborhood policy. At the Boao Forum for Asia 2014, Premier Li Keqiang pointed out that the community of a shared future should focus on security cooperation, and actively discussed the establishment of a framework for regional security cooperation in Asia.⁶

5 "Xi Jinping visited Vietnam and Singapore: Community of Shared Future Starts with the Neighborhood," November 10, 2015, <http://fj.people.com.cn/n/2015/1110/c181466-27058231.html>.

6 "Li Keqiang Elaborates the Three Major Elements of the Asia Community: Interest, Destiny and Responsibility," April 10, 2014, <http://money.163.com/14/0410/11/9PFFMJIP002551CJ.html>.

The following year, during the Boao Forum for Asia 2015, Xi Jinping emphasized that building a community of a shared future requires common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. For the President Xi, the Cold War mentality should truly be discarded and new security concepts be nurtured to explore a path for Asia that ensures a jointly built, shared and win-win security framework.⁷ Consequently, security cooperation has become an important dimension in building of a community of a shared future between China and its neighborhood. In other words, building of a community of common security amongst China and the nations in its neighborhood is a key phase in achieving a community of a shared future.

In the light of its overwhelming size and multiple neighbors, in terms of neighborhood security, China needs not only the support of its neighborhood for peaceful development, but similarly its neighborhood to function as a pivot area for security policies during the country's shift from regional to global power. At present, China maintains generally good relations with its neighboring countries. However, the security situation in the neighborhood is complex, containing both Cold War legacies and hot-spot issues, traditional and non-traditional security problems, security dilemmas caused by struggles between major regional powers, as well as asymmetric struggles between big and small countries. In addition, issues such as territorial disputes, maritime rights and interests disputes, as well as the continued intervention from outside powers, form the backdrop of China's highly unstable neighborhood. Whether solutions can be found to some of the security issues concerning China, and whether China's neighborhood can achieve peace and stability, largely depends upon the completion of a community of common security, expected to generate, *inter alia*, a community of a shared future.

Some scholars, such as Liu Zongyi, believe that building the Asian community of a shared future should be achieved by reuniting common

7 "Keynote Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2015," March 29, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-03/29/c_127632707.htm.

interests, security and culture.⁸

The community of a shared future is multilateral by definition. As far as the building process is concerned, the community of common economy and common security become essential in generating a full-fledged community of shared future, appealing to political, economic, security, social and cultural implications, *inter alia*.⁹

Despite the differing views on which connotations might be contained within the community of shared future, most Chinese scholars have realized that the building of a community of common security is vital in achieving a community of shared future.

In summary, the building of a community of shared future is a grand project that needs unremitting efforts. In order to realize such a community between China and its neighborhood, these efforts must include a proper development of the phases of a community of common interests, and the community of common security. To be specific, to forge a community of common interests in which all countries are stakeholders, efforts should be made to deepen cooperation in all areas and strengthen shared interests. In achieving such a community of common security between China and its neighborhood, efforts should be made to constantly enhance strategic communication and seek responsibility sharing, so that all countries can partake in the overcoming of adversity and the sharing of prosperity. A community of a shared future requires to continuously promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges and strengthen collective identity, so that all countries aim for convergence. Hence, building a community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood becomes of crucial importance. Such a process concerns whether the building of the community of a shared future can answer the practical questions that invariably arise when faced with the division of economy and security, and has a major bearing on

8 Liu Zongyi, "Community of Shared Future for Asia: Connotations and Ways to Build," *International Studies*, No.4, 2015, pp.48-51.

9 Zhou Fangyin, "Community of Shared Future: An Important Element of the National Security Concept," *People's Tribune*, No.6, 2014, p. 33.

the development of sustainable relations between China and its neighbors. Therefore, building a community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood is a clear and necessary goal.

In order to promote a community of shared future between China and its neighborhood, a series of measures have been taken by China, including strengthening China-ASEAN cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Generally speaking, at present, China is making significant efforts to promote the building of a community of common interests along its neighborhood, with a view towards enhancing mutual benefit and common prosperity. The most critical issue for China, however, is the building of a community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood, aiming at abandoning the use of force to achieve common security, both in value and practice.

Challenges Facing a Community of Common Security

The increasingly complicated security situation around China has a lot to do with competition, in terms of power, concept and mechanism. Competition, in its various forms, has presented major challenges in building of a community of common security between China and its neighborhood.

Competition for power

The United States (US), Japan, India, and Russia are the four major powers influencing the security situation around China. As the gap in strength between China and the US narrows, the US strategy has featured more prevention and containment. US have strengthened its existing alliance system, continuously expanded its security partnerships, and increased its participation in the multilateral security system in the region. This has made the US even more influential in the Asia-Pacific region, which directly concerns China's security interests. Japan is another important country that affects China's security in the Asia-Pacific region. The differences between China and Japan are related to historical issues, island disputes, and regional dominance. In

recent years, adding to the complexity of the security situation in East Asia is the fact that Japan has stepped up its participation in regional security based initiatives. It has not only strengthened the US-Japan alliance, but also enhanced its security contacts with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰ These factors indicate that Japan's influence on China's overall security interests can by no means be underestimated. India is an important neighbor to the southwest of China. The country has shifted from the "Look East" strategy to the "Act East" strategy, and has continuously strengthened its relations with ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, Australia and other Asia-Pacific countries.

Although India's long-term security isolationism has made it cautious in its security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries,¹¹ it is an indisputable fact that it will continue to factor heavily in China's security interests. Russia shares China's second longest border, after Mongolia. This fact makes Russia an important player in China's security interests. Stable relations between China and Russia are an important foundation for the security of China's neighboring areas. In addition, the European Union aims for a role in Asia's security through soft power, yet in the field of traditional security, its effects are inconsequential at best.¹²

With the Asia-Pacific region playing an increasingly important role in global strategy, the interaction among major powers in China's neighborhood has continued to deepen, accelerating both cooperation and competition. On one hand, there has been a ratcheting up of strategic cooperation between China and Russia, the US and India, and the US and Japan. On the other hand, as time progresses, competitive confrontations between the US-Russia, China-US and China-Japan are becoming more aggravated.¹³ All this has inevitably exacerbated the complexity of China's security interests, and has

10 Yuichi Hosoya, "Japan's New Security Legislation: What Does This Mean to East Asian Security?" *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol.37, No.5/6, 2015, pp.296–302.

11 C. Raja Mohan, "An Uncertain Trumpet? India's Role in Southeast Asian Security," *India Review*, Vol.12, No.3, 2013, pp.134–150.

12 Axel Berkofsky, "The European Union (EU) in Asian Security: Actor with a Punch or Distant Bystander?" *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol.21, No.2, 2014, pp.61–85.

13 Zhang Jie, ed., *China's Regional Security Environment Review 2017: Great Power Relations and Regional Order*, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2017, p.1.

significantly affected both the development and implementation of China's neighborhood security cooperation mechanism.

Competition of mechanisms

Despite a Chinese neighborhood security mechanism having been achieved, it can be argued that such a construction continues to be relatively loose. Competition among various security mechanisms has made the situation very "fragmented." As a result, the level of efficiency required for the carrying out of effective governance has not been attained.¹⁴

In general, there are five types of security mechanisms that are currently installed within the Asia-Pacific region, including alliances, security forums, special mechanisms for security hotspot issues, inter-regional security cooperation mechanisms and security dialogue mechanisms.¹⁵ The security mechanisms in the neighborhood areas of China could be divided into three types, based on regional forces: first, the US-led alliance mechanism; second, the ASEAN-led collective security mechanism; and lastly, the multilateral security mechanism featuring China's participation and coordination. The above forces aside, other multilateral security mechanisms are present within the region. They tend to feature a relatively loose, but extensive membership, communicating effectively in general, yet with limited effectiveness in terms of security governance.¹⁶

The US-led alliance system has a long history in the Asia-Pacific, and is currently the most institutionalized and effective regional security mechanism in the region. However, the system is highly targeted and exclusive, and has split up the security cooperation in the region. Therefore, it is not conducive to the building of a community of common security between China and its neighborhood. However, any security cooperation

14 T. J. Pempel, "Soft Balancing, Hedging, and Institutional Darwinism: The Economic-Security Nexus and East Asian Regionalism," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol.10, No.2, 2010, pp.209-238.

15 Liu Zhenmin, "Work Together to Improve Regional Security Architecture and Address Common Challenges," *International Studies*, No.6, 2016, pp.1-4.

16 Li Kaisheng, "Mechanism Coordination and Future Asian Security Framework," *International Outlook*, No.4, 2015, pp.4-5.

mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region that fails to properly accommodate, absorb and integrate the US Asia-Pacific Alliance system, will greatly reduce its own effectiveness.

ASEAN has created, with its unique “ASEAN way,” a collective security mechanism featuring the platform of ASEAN itself. Such a low-institutionalized and ineffective form of security cooperation has provided a sustained platform for consultation on regional security cooperation. In particular, within the context of intensified strategic competition between China and US, and other major powers, ASEAN, as the “third force” in the Asia-Pacific security structure, has become an increasingly important resource for securing China’s security interests in the region. However, as a result of the intensified competition among major powers, the ASEAN-led security mechanism has suffered a loss in terms of cohesion and neutrality, which in turn affected its once “central position” within the overall security structure of the Asia-Pacific.¹⁷ ASEAN does not seek to dominate regional security cooperation, but rather focuses on occupying a significant position in this regard.¹⁸

China has only recently become a contributor to neighboring regional security mechanisms. As China’s strength rises, so does its capacity and willingness to provide public security goods to the region. The neighborhood security cooperation mechanisms which include China advocate for multilateral consultation and coordination among major powers. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) represents a successful example in terms of neighborhood security cooperation. In order to prompt the resolution of some intractable security problems in the neighborhood, China has played an active and coordinating role in both the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue, as well as the China-Laos-Myanmar-Thailand joint patrol on the Mekong River.¹⁹

17 Ren Yuanzhe, “Restructuring of Asia-Pacific Security and the Role of ASEAN,” *Journal of University of International Security Studies*, No.2, 2016, p.33.

18 Zhang Yunling, *Between Dream and Reality: My Research and Reflection on East Asian Cooperation*, China Social Sciences Press, 2015, pp.67-70.

19 Liu Zhenmin, “The Symphony of Destiny in China and Asia,” *The People’s Daily*, December 31, 2015.

In addition, there are also multiple sub-regional and informal security cooperation mechanisms which add to the already diverse field of multi-level and multi-model security cooperation mechanisms that surround China. However, amongst these mechanisms, an effective level of synergy has not been reached. Worse still, some security mechanisms have a closed membership or are competitive with each other. Presently, there remains a mismatch between security mechanisms and security issues, which has complicated China's regional security interests, as well as undermined the overall effectiveness of security governance in the region.²⁰

Competition of concepts

The concept of security is particularly important for the building of security mechanisms.²¹ At present, there are numerous disagreements on which security concepts are appropriate when dealing with China's neighborhood. However, they can be roughly divided into three groups.

First, the alliance and non-alliance security concepts. The alliance approach is very targeted and exclusive, which has significantly increased its disadvantages and incompatibilities.²² However, the concept of non-alliance security accounts for the fact that alliance security has split regional cooperation, advocating for security cooperation through non-alliance. Important mechanisms for non-alliance security cooperation include security partnerships and the coordination among major powers. The Asia-Pacific Alliance of US (APA) is inexorably linked to the security environment of China's neighborhood areas, especially within the Asia-Pacific region. Going beyond the targeted and exclusive nature of the APA, a more inclusive form of security cooperation holds the key to deepening regional security cooperation in China's neighborhood.

Second, common security and development security. The realization

20 Li Kaisheng, *Mechanism Coordination and Future Asian Security Framework*, pp.7-10.

21 Liu Zhenmin, "Work Together to Improve Regional Security Architecture and Address Common Challenges," *International Studies*, No.6, 2016, pp.1-4.

22 Ling Shengli, "After the Alliance: Discussion on the New Forms of International Security Cooperation in the Post-Cold War Era," *Forum of World Economics & Politics*, No. 1, 2017, pp.1-3.

of a community of common security within China's neighborhood requires that all countries recognize the concept of "common security" and carry out cooperative efforts to ensure it. Consensus on the formation of common security is dependent on a specific country's strategic culture and stage of development. In general, a country's security strategy is largely determined by its respective stage of development and the core tasks it faces. Yet, even among developing countries, their respective security concepts are greatly influenced by differences in development.²³ The security needs of countries within China's neighborhood, mostly developing countries at significantly varied stages of development, are extremely diverse in nature. This renders it difficult to reconcile their disparate common security demands. They can only see eye to eye with each other on core security needs, such as military security, whereas consensus can hardly be reached on the issue of extensive overall security needs, much less an agreed upon framework for common security. For example, security cooperation between China and South-East Asia has been greatly affected by the lack of awareness of common security.²⁴ In order to overcome the divergence of security concepts caused by differing levels of development and reduce the restrictions on security cooperation resulting from disagreements on security concepts, countries should better coordinate their efforts to bridge the gap between common security and development security.

Third, cooperation-based security and coordination-based security. Cooperation-based security requires that all countries should participate on an equal footing. In other words, the premise of cooperation-based security provides no significant difference between big and small states. However, in coordination-based security, the more powerful states play a leading role, while smaller states are subordinate. Cooperation-based security emphasizes that countries achieve security through cooperation. However, cooperation

23 Zhong Feiteng, "Developmental Security: A Grand Strategy for China," *Foreign Affairs Review*, No.6, 2013, p.16.

24 Liu Shengxiang and Zhang Nan, "The Overall National Security Concept and the Multilateral Security Mechanism between China and Southeast Asia," pp.37-38.



Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and leaders of nine other ASEAN countries stand for a photo at the 20th ASEAN-China Summit in Manila, the Philippines, on November 13, 2017.

does not happen automatically. Instead, there are problems such as transaction costs. Presently, most of the cooperation-based security around China can be described as loosely organized low-level security cooperation. This is mainly because big power competition has led to the fragmentation of security cooperation mechanisms. Therefore, the coordination of major powers in the neighborhood is necessary for the realization of security cooperation. Without cogent coordination among the major powers, there will be no impetus for improved cooperation within China's neighborhood. This being said, without the active participation of medium and small countries, it is unlikely that a community of common security will be achieved between China and its neighborhood. Therefore, it is essential that the conflicts between cooperation-based security and coordination-based security are resolved.

Based on the aforementioned analysis of competition in the three areas of power, security institutions, and security concepts, it is evident that all three

influence each other and significantly impact China's neighborhood security environment. In order to mitigate competition in these three fields and promote security cooperation in the region, the concerned countries should properly handle challenges arising from differences in concepts, restrictions of institutions, and competition amongst major powers.

Building a Community of Common Security between China and Its Neighborhood

There are two important dimensions that lie within the purview of the primary endeavor of building a community of common security between China and its neighborhood. The primary task of a community of common security in China's neighborhood concerns the main content and equates to the difficult job of creating the community itself. The underlying goal of the community of common security between China and its neighborhood is to make member states abandon the option of war. The overarching goal is to achieve greater consensus with regard to common security among member states in traditional and non-traditional security fields. The community of common security should be built up progressively by China and its neighborhood, from consensus in value to concerted actions, and then to coordination of mechanisms.

Reaching consensus on security concepts

Restrictions on security cooperation around China are largely due to respective differences in understanding the concept of security. China can continue to make efforts in promoting the "new security concept" and the "new Asian security concept" amongst its neighbors. The former represents the paths of security cooperation, while the latter reflects an understanding of the nature of security. At the Conference on the Diplomatic Work on Neighboring Countries in 2013, President Xi Jinping stressed that the need for security cooperation is a common feature for both China and its neighbors. In the view of the Chinese President, it is important to adhere

to the new security concept of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation, as well as promote the ideas of comprehensive, common and cooperative security.²⁵ The White Paper on China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation released in early 2017 advocates the new Asian security concept as including common, integrated, cooperative and sustainable security.²⁶ While having their own respective focuses, the two concepts can be combined to guide the building of a community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood.

Strengthening synergy in security cooperation

Cooperation on security is extremely important in neighborhood areas, as many regional security mechanisms have been established. Countries may have hitherto established forms of security cooperation, having done so without the use of formal cooperative mechanisms. Such an informal practice of security cooperation can be an important catalyst for the forming of security institutions. In the absence of security cooperation mechanisms, synergy in security cooperation can be realized through tacit understanding, appeals, and perceptions. Absent the unified coordination and guidance provided by more rigid security mechanisms, cooperation stems mainly from the initiative of the parties concerned. However, to better realize the policy effect, they utilize effective means of mutual communication and collaboration, creating an enhanced convergence of security practices. Currently, many security mechanisms in China's neighborhood areas belong to this category. For example, China, Russia, and the Central Asian countries started with strengthening synergy in border security to subsequently expand cooperation and enhance mutual trust, transforming the "Shanghai Five" into the more effective SCO. In its efforts to facilitate the resolution of the US War in Afghanistan, China maintained consultations with US and Pakistan

25 "Xi Jinping Made an Important Speech at the Conference on Diplomatic Work on Neighboring Countries," *People's Daily*, October 26, 2013, p.3.

26 State Council Information Office, *China's Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation (White Paper)*, January 2017.

over related security issues, which eventually led to the formation of a loose quadrilateral mechanism for Afghanistan cooperation. During the process of security cooperation with ASEAN, at the dusk of the Cold War, the settlement of the Cambodian issue has been achieved. The settlement, which paved the way for the formation of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), was

The community of common security should be built up progressively by China and its neighborhood, from consensus in value to concerted actions, and then to coordination of mechanisms.

an important outcome of strengthened coordination in security cooperation between major powers and ASEAN countries. As for the settlement of the North Korean nuclear issue, the initial plan was to work together through security cooperation in Northeast Asia in order to establish a security cooperation mechanism in the region. In brief, compared with

economic cooperation institutions, countries exhibit more caution in their approach towards the building of and participation in security cooperation institutions. This explains why, as a process, the establishment of security cooperation institutions often needs to ensure that initial security cooperation practices are properly coordinated and subsequently followed by a slow transformation into a less binding and loose security institution. Having been based on the accumulation of mutual trust in terms of security, such a process will catalyze the eventual effectiveness of security cooperation. Accordingly, even though some security institutions are blamed for empty talks, they can play a role in forming a network of relationships and establishing a reciprocal mechanism.²⁷ These low-effect security institutions are in fact a direct result of the strengthened synergy in security cooperation practices among countries. Given the complicated security situation in China's neighborhood, the formation of a new security cooperation mechanism and a more binding security institution is by no means an easy task. Yet, such a process does not rule out the possibility of future security cooperation among countries.

27 Wei Ling, "Relationships, Network, and Cooperation Practice: On How to Produce Effect," *World Economics and Politics*, No.10, 2016, pp.39-58.

Conducive to the effective coordination of major-powers and regional security cooperation mechanisms, in the absence of guiding security institutions, China and its neighboring countries can enhance security synergy by carrying out various, loose, yet effective, forms of security cooperation.

Promoting coordination of security mechanisms

There is no shortage of security mechanisms in China's neighborhood. The SCO is deemed as a model security cooperation mechanism among China and its neighboring countries. To some extent, the SCO has achieved success as a security community in the region.²⁸ Although the Six-Party Talks failed to promote the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, the fault lies not in the mechanism of the Six-Party Talks. China and ASEAN are implementing the Declaration of Conduct among Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and have reached consensus on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC). The joint patrol on the Mekong River is in its initial stage, but has gained momentum. China and ASEAN have similarly cooperated in non-traditional security issues such as cyber security, terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational crimes.²⁹ Apart from these sub-regional security cooperation mechanisms, bilateral security cooperation mechanisms between China and neighboring powers are growing progressively. China and US have held several rounds of Strategic Security Dialogue and agreed to host a Diplomatic Security Dialogue. China and Russia have a long history of security cooperation. The two countries have increased bilateral military exercises and improved security cooperation mechanisms. Sub-regional security mechanisms, such as the ARE, benefit of similarly good foundations. In general, many protracted neighborhood security issues are not the outcome of insufficient or ineffective security mechanisms, but are the result of other factors, such as the deficit of trust among countries. Some scholars have

28 Kuralai I. Baizakova, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Role in Countering Threats and Challenges to Central Asian Regional Security," *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol.51, No.1, 2013, pp.59-79.

29 Chen Bangyu and Wei Hong, "Building China-ASEAN Community of Common Destiny under Perspective of Neighborhood Diplomacy," *Social Scientist*, No. 4, 2016, p.43.

identified a surplus of security mechanisms in China's neighborhood which has led to mutual restraint.³⁰ The crux of the matter is the coordination among multi-level, multi-domain and multi-modal security mechanisms. Multiple security mechanisms in China's neighborhood have overlapping functions and, due to the variation of dominating forces, competition has emerged among security mechanisms with similar functions.³¹ To advance the building of a community of common security between China and its neighborhood and to reduce the possible negative impacts brought about by mechanism competition, a proper coordination among these mechanisms is required. During the initial phase, the coordination among these mechanisms will be boosted by coordination among major powers. Coordination among China, US and Japan is deemed as the crux of future security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.³² The coordination of the security mechanisms in China's neighborhood falls largely on the five major powers: China, US, Japan, India and Russia. However, as mechanism coordination requires the consensus of the member states, the opinions of small and medium-sized member states must be accounted for as well. For instance, the SCO member states had various views on the proposed expansion of the SCO, including decisions on new members. Consequently, some potential countries failed to join the SCO given the opposition of certain small member states.³³

Advancing establishment of non-traditional security mechanisms

The implementation of traditional and non-traditional security mechanisms varies in difficulty, according to the level of security cooperation. It hence becomes strenuous to advance such mechanisms in parallel within

30 Xu Jin, "East Asia Multilateral Security Mechanism: Issue and Concept," *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, No.4, 2011, pp.92-106; Li Kaisheng, *Mechanism Coordination and Future Asian Security Framework*, pp.1-14.

31 Beth Greener, "East Asian Security Architecture: Where to from Here?" *New Zealand International Review*, Vol.34, No.1, 2009, pp.13-17.

32 Evelyn Goh, "How Japan Matters in the Evolving East Asian Security Order," *International Affairs*, Vol.87, No.4, 2011, pp.887-902; Alan Dupont, "An Asian Security Standoff," *The National Interest*, May/June 2012, pp.55-62.

33 Roger N. McDermott, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Impact on Central Asian Security: A View from Kazakhstan," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 59, No. 4, 2012, pp.56-65.

China's neighborhood. While advancing traditional security cooperation in China's neighborhood is challenging at present, there are some open and cooperative mechanisms in place for non-traditional security cooperation in such fields as natural disaster response, public health, outer space security, combating piracy and cross-border crimes.³⁴ Taking advantage of the existing mechanisms, while furthering the establishment of inclusive mechanisms on non-traditional security cooperation, is not only beneficial to the improvement of the neighboring security environment, but similarly conducive to promoting traditional security cooperation amongst neighboring countries. In terms of the positive effects of non-traditional security spilling over into other areas of cooperation, academic divergences exist. Some scholars support the idea that non-traditional security cooperation can spur traditional security cooperation and that non-traditional security cooperation leads to identity changes and an increased awareness of common threats. Non-traditional security cooperation is also expected to facilitate the creation of ideal conditions for building a security community.³⁵ On the other hand, other scholars insist that the emergence of non-state threats such as financial crises and terrorism provide an opportunity for increased security cooperation in East Asia, yet such cooperation is insufficient to articulate an East Asian Security Community.³⁶ It therefore becomes advisable to advance both the traditional and non-traditional security cooperation. The increase in the scope of security cooperation is expected to generate consensus and promote mutual trust,

To advance the building of a community of common security and to reduce the possible negative impacts brought about by mechanism competition, coordination among multi-level, multi-domain and multi-modal security mechanisms is required.

34 Rachel Baird, "Transnational Security Issues in the Asian Maritime Environment: Responding to Maritime Piracy," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.66, No.5, 2012, pp.501-513.

35 Yu Xiaofeng and Wang Mengting, "Nontraditional Security Community: A New Exploration into International Security Governance," *International Security Studies*, No.1, 2017, p.4.

36 Li Kaisheng and Yan Lin, "Possibility Analyses of Building East Asia Security Community," *International Forum*, No.2, 2009, p.7.

while ultimately shaping a security community.

In brief, a community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood will be built after conceptual consensus is achieved, with continued cooperation, especially in-depth institution-based cooperation. The formation of a community of common security between China and its neighborhood should ideally meet several conditions, First, a deepening integration of interests in the neighborhood, to the degree that the use or threat of force will become unbearable and non-use of force will become a popular concept of neighborhood security. Second, a consensus among countries on the concept of common security. By advocating mutual cooperation in non-traditional security fields and mutual understanding in traditional security fields, the concept of common security will serve as an important conceptual foundation of the security community. Third, promoting the integration of sub-regional security mechanisms, reducing the internal frictions between mechanisms, making full use of and perfecting the existing security mechanisms, constitutes the institutional foundation for the building of a community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood. Fourth, promoting the evolution from “coordination among major powers” to “coordination of mechanisms.” Although the coordination of powers is a major facet of a community of common security, a lasting and stable security community in China’s neighborhood is more dependent on the coordination of security mechanisms.

Dual Coordination: China’s Strategic Choice

China plays an important security role in its neighborhood.³⁷ Success in security cooperation and the building of a security community in its neighborhood requires China’s deft maneuvering of a neighborhood security strategy. An important goal of such a strategy should be the cultivation of a security community in its neighborhood. So far, certain queries remain with

37 Sun Zhe, “Building a Security Community in Asia-Pacific Region: Can China Contribute,” pp.279–287.

regard to the shaping process of China's neighborhood security strategy. The first query relates to whether a unified neighborhood security strategy, i.e. one that includes the entire neighborhood of China, is even feasible. The second is a question of process, specifically, the process of synergizing neighborhood security strategy with various security mechanisms in the neighborhood. The third question pertains to how neighborhood security strategy will resolve the impacts of strategic rivalries among major powers. Finally, the fourth uncertainty surrounds the role played by China in the neighborhood security strategy. Taking into consideration the above queries, the guidelines for drawing China's neighborhood security strategy will include the following items: (1) China's neighborhood security strategy will draw upon China's multi-layer national interests; (2) a comprehensive and unified neighborhood security strategy, i.e. one that takes into account all neighboring countries, is unnecessary, however China needs to conduct an extensive overall planning of the neighborhood security strategy. (3) The implementation of a neighborhood security strategy should be based upon the existing neighborhood security mechanisms that have proven effective in propelling the coordination and integration of regional security mechanisms. (4) China's neighborhood security strategy does not seek confrontation with other major powers, it rather relies on a foundation of strategic stability among major powers and is motivated by cooperation among them. (5) The essential approach of China's neighborhood security strategy is multi-leveled and multi-directional. Such levels include bilateral, sub-regional, regional, trans-regional and global cooperation, while directions refer to the bilateral and multilateral dimensions. The advancement of cooperation at these levels is at the core of China's neighborhood security strategy.

To be specific, China's neighborhood security strategy should be planned with an eye towards overall strategic environment, strategic objectives, strategic interests and strategic tools. First, when assessing the strategic environment of the neighborhood, focus should be placed on the strategic orientation of major powers, the attitude of China's neighboring countries, hot-spot issues, emergent events, and security mechanisms as well as their development trends.

Second, a progressive approach is needed to achieve strategic objectives. The appropriate selection of strategic objectives for China's neighborhood security policy requires a multi-dimensional grasp of the time, level and issues within a given area. Third, the strategic interests should be divided into three levels: core, important, and ordinary; moreover, these interests should be protected in accordance with their levels. Lastly, strategic tools should be plentiful and diverse, and adopted in conjunction with political, military, economic and social means, rather than singular means.

Therefore, the building a community of security in China's neighborhood is closely related to the orchestration of China's neighborhood security strategy. Coordination is deemed to be a viable approach to security in the neighborhood as well as in the Asia-Pacific region, where three kinds of coordination can be identified: Asian coordination, mechanism coordination and coordination among great powers. At this juncture, China should adopt a "dual coordination" strategy in its efforts to build a China-led community of security with its neighborhood, i.e., coordination among great powers and mechanism coordination that go hand in hand. The "great-power" relations deal more with the coordination of power, while mechanism coordination is a largely institutional coordination. The coordination among great powers is expected to be achieved by the adjustment of interests among great powers, while mechanism coordination requires the adjustment of functions within various security mechanisms. For the foreseeable future, great-power relations will remain the major mitigating factor for security coordination in China's neighborhood. Coordination among great powers is important for the resolution of security issues and advancing the coordination of security mechanisms. Coordination among great powers includes two facets: one, resolving the security issue directly through coordination between the great powers; two, promoting cooperation between the various, loosely organized and often competing, multilateral security mechanisms that are led by the great powers. Mechanism coordination can similarly be declined on two grounds: first, settling specific security issues through various bilateral or multilateral security mechanisms; second, realizing the coordination, unification, and

integration of various security mechanisms to accelerate the building of the neighborhood security framework and bring into play the converging effect of security mechanisms. This higher-level mechanism coordination would no longer be the coordination of various loose security mechanisms, but the holistic coordination of a sweeping and comprehensive mechanism.

Invariably, mechanism coordination will effectively replace coordination among great powers. However, the effects of coordination among great powers should not always be placed upon coordination among mechanisms. Conversely, coordination among mechanisms is expected to facilitate coordination among major powers. The ultimate goal of dual coordination is to replace coordination among great powers with mechanism coordination, generating mechanism-dominance rather than power-dominance in neighborhood security cooperation. Such a status-quo will result in the promotion and development of a community of common security between China and its neighborhood.

Accelerating the building of a China-led community of common security requires that China adopts the “dual coordination” approach, consisting of coordination among great powers and mechanism coordination. This flexible approach would also allow China to deal with specific security issues in accordance with its national interests, while similarly paying attention to the concerns of existing security mechanisms.

First, for security issues that do not involve great powers, coordination among great powers or mechanism coordination will be adopted according to the will of the parties concerned. For example, regarding the internal security issues of small and medium-sized countries or their corresponding security issues, China can strengthen its constructive influence over neighborhood security issues through a coordination of efforts.

Second, traditional security issues between two or more great powers,

China should adopt a “dual coordination” strategy in its efforts to build a China-led community of security with its neighborhood, i.e., coordination among great powers and mechanism coordination that go hand in hand.

such as the DPRK nuclear issue or the issue of Afghanistan, coordination among great powers can play a leading role in shaping the coordinated response of major powers. Since the positions major powers take on these security issues have a significant influence on their resolution, great powers are encouraged to play an active role in safeguarding regional peace and stability.

Third, as for security issues that do not involve great powers, coordination among great powers or mechanism coordination will be adopted according to the will of the parties concerned. For example, China should step up its constructive influence on the security issues of its neighborhood, specifically on security issues within or between small and medium-sized neighboring countries.

Fourth, in terms of non-traditional security issues, coordination will be based on currently utilized security institutions within the issue area. If all parties pursue similar interests and there are certain security institutions that are weak or display elements of non-neutrality, it would be proper to adopt a mechanism coordination approach to deal with issues like public health, space governance, and the fight against piracy. If the interests of all parties are overwhelmingly different, there will be great difficulty in collective action. In this case, it would be appropriate to adopt coordination among great powers to spur the gradual development of mechanism coordination.

Fifth, furthering the efficacy of mechanisms like the ARF and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia (CICA), which have a great number of member states, is recommended. Currently, the two loose regional multilateral mechanisms cover almost all of China's neighboring countries. If their efficacy is raised, they can play a larger role in regional security mechanism coordination.

Lastly, it is necessary to promote the integration and eventual unification of the various regional security mechanisms. Once certain security mechanisms have been accepted by the great powers involved, coordination among great powers will gradually shift to mechanism coordination. The relationship between China and the US alliance in the Asia Pacific, which is currently under a "China-US+" trilateral or multilateral mechanism, can also

be gradually shifted from coordination among great powers to mechanism coordination. For China, Russia and the Central Asian countries, the SCO is playing a growing role in mechanism coordination on security issues. In the future, China's relations with India and Japan is expected to require further bilateral security coordination. Such an enhanced coordination would spur multilateral security, jointly shoulder the regional security responsibility as great powers, and contribute to the realization of a community of common security in China's neighborhood.

Conclusion

China's neighborhood is a strategic geographic area that stands at the forefront of China's peaceful rise. It is also a proving ground for China's strategies and policies, such as China's peaceful development, Belt and Road Initiative, the building of the community of common destiny, etc. The community of common security between China and the nations in its neighborhood functions as an integral link to the community of common destiny. China's neighborhood security is complex and competitive, in terms of power, institutions, and concepts. Gradual advances in conceptual consensus, concerted actions, and institutional coordination, are requisite to building a community of common security between China and its neighborhood. China, as the architect of the community of common security, is playing a crucial role in the overall planning of its neighborhood security strategy. Such a strategy should play a pivotal role in designing a community of common security between China and its neighborhood. The "dual coordination" strategy for China's neighborhood security is a response to both the current neighborhood security situation and future development trends. However, the implementation of this strategy, restrained by factors such as great-power competition, requires further exploration. 🧩