

6-26-2015

Emerging China-led Regionalism and Soft Balancing

Alica Kizekova

Bond University

Laura Anca Parepa

University of Tsukuba

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/eassc_publications



Part of the [International Relations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Alica Kizekova and Laura Anca Parepa. "Emerging China-led Regionalism and Soft Balancing" East Asia Security Symposium and Conference 东亚安全座谈谈论会. Beijing, Jun. 2015.

http://epublications.bond.edu.au/eassc_publications/69

Emerging China-led Regionalism and Soft Balancing

中国主导的地区主义与软平衡逐渐成型

Alica Kizekova and Laura-Anca Parepa
[Bond University](#) and [University of Tsukuba](#)

[East Asia Security Centre](#)
[东亚安全中心](#)

Peer-reviewed Conference Paper
2015 East Asia Security Symposium and Conference
同行互评会议论文
2015 东亚安全座谈谈论会
http://epublications.bond.edu.au/eassc_publications/

Published Version August 2016

For information about this paper or the East Asia Security Centre's Peer-reviewed publishing site
please contact the Editor-in-Chief [Jonathan H. Ping](#)

想要了解关于论文、或东亚安全座谈讨论会同行互评出版地址的信息，平易

Emerging China-led Regionalism and Soft Balancing

Abstract: The People's Republic of China has consolidated its status within a complex network of multilateral organizations since the end of the Cold War. Progressively, it has established multiple frameworks with the aim to provide some alternatives to the existing structures. Questions arise as to whether Beijing is going to use this China-led structure to soft balance the Russian Federation in Central Asia or the United States of America in the Asia Pacific, on its quest to secure its core interests (hexin liyi). A comparative method of China's pro-active agenda setting within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia is employed in the paper to evaluate China's engagements. This paper concludes that China's international ambitions will gradually increase the challenge to the established regional architecture. In the foreseeable future, Beijing will further cultivate closer ties with Russia, as they both coordinate their actions; however their future ties are most likely to be increasingly competitive.

Key Words: China, Regionalism, Soft Balance, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia

中国主导的地区主义与软平衡逐渐成型

摘要：自冷战结束以来，中国已经巩固了其在一系列多边组织中的地位。中国循序渐进的建立了若干多边组织框架，意图替代现有的结构。目前的疑问是，中国在维护自身核心利益的同时，是否会利用自己主导的组织在中亚地区与俄罗斯——以及在亚太地区与美国——寻求一种软平衡？以中国在上合组织以及亚洲相互协作与信任措施会议中扮演的积极角色为例，本文采用比较法分析了中国参与的程度。本文的结论是，中国崛起的雄心将对现存区域结构形成挑战。在可以预见的将来，北京将加强与俄罗斯的关系，互相协调行动；不过未来中俄之间的竞争也将日益激烈。

关键词：中国，地区主义，软平衡，上海合作组织，亚洲相互协作与信任措施会议

EMERGING CHINA-LED REGIONALISM AND SOFT BALANCING

Moving Towards New Regional Arrangements?

This paper seeks to assess the People's Republic of China's (PRC or China)' use of regional organizations in the context of China-led regionalism in Asia. The position made here is that China has gradually increased its interest in multilateralism and engaged in various ASEAN-led frameworks to demonstrate a certain degree of cooperativeness,¹ however, it has also contributed to creating new frameworks for dialogue to demonstrate its pro-active stance on agenda setting. For now, the engagements within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) complement policies of Moscow, yet over time, we might witness some level of soft balancing vis-à-vis Russia in relation to economic policies as China progresses in its goal of connecting Asia, Europe and Africa under the umbrella of the 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR) vision and Russia expands its activities within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).²

Ultimately, a greater challenge arises for the United States of America (US) and the existing regional architecture in the Asia Pacific. China is rather successfully reshaping the economic architecture with the help of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Silk Road Fund. Although the US's role as a regional stabilizer is still welcomed by other countries, and various states opt for restatements of enhanced defence agreements (Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, India), in the long-term, China's strategy of using the organizations and the pro-Asia economic trends will constrain the operability of dominant players in the region and they will need to find ways to co-exist and collaborate with China in this emerging China-led 'alternative' institution-building.³

¹ China's engagement was crucial during the era of post-Cold War uncertainties in Southeast Asia. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations Institutes for Strategic and International Studies and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific were established to enable regional confidence-building through informal track-two mechanisms. These mechanisms supported activities surrounding China's entry into the newly created track-one framework – the ASEAN Regional Forum. While ASEAN's soft balancing strategy worked in facilitating China's gradual adherence to shared regional norms and agreements on codes of conduct, it has had its limitations in light of China's unwillingness to compromise its national interests in the South China Sea. This particular interaction has been assessed in Alica Kizekova, 'Multitrack Diplomatic Approaches to Border and Territorial Disputes in Southeast Asia and Soft Balancing,' in *Unresolved Border, Land and Maritime Disputes in Southeast Asia*, eds. Alfred Gerstl and Maria Strasakova (Leiden: Brill, Forthcoming 2016).

² The Chinese leadership calls for strengthening of the role of multilateral cooperative mechanisms in its 'Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21-st Century Maritime Silk Road,' issued by the National Development and Reform Commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, with State Council authorization, in March 2015, <http://www.chinaembassy.cz/cze/xwdt/t1250405.htm> (accessed June 26, 2015). In the EU, Hungary became the first EU country to officially commit to participating in the Chinese initiative. See: 'Hungary Becomes First EU Country to Participate in China's 'One Belt One Road' Initiative, EIAI, June 9, 2015, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/07/us-china-hungary-idUSKBN0ON01W20150607> (accessed June 22, 2015).

³ For discussion about China's challenge to Pax Americana see Eric Weiner, 'China's challenge to Pax Americana,' *PacNet*, no. 25, April 16, 2015, <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-25-chinas-challenge-pax-americana> (accessed June 22, 2015).

At the moment, China already has unprecedented opportunities to voice its narrative to participants at various fora. Initiatives under the slogan ‘Asia for Asians’ or ‘community of common destiny’ (mingyun gongtongti)⁴ will gradually boost China’s leadership. It should be noted that China’s pro-active approach to regionalism in the Asia Pacific could be viewed more as a ‘frustration’, rather than an ambition for leadership, in light of the global community’s inability to reform the financial and security systems to better represent the voices of emerging powers.⁵

While the SCO has played a significant role in the development of Chinese multilateralism and may be regarded as a relatively successful test for Chinese diplomacy, CICA - a Kazakhstan’s initiative⁶ - is an emerging format, to which China has paid an increased attention only recently.⁷ In CICA, China has followed a two-staged approach, from being a ‘rule-taker’ to an influential ‘rule-maker’.⁸ Some significant regional players, such as the US or Japan, are not members of these organizations, however, based on the statements of the Chinese scholars and academics, this is not intentional since the Chinese initiatives are ‘open to all’. Furthermore, they reject the argument that the OBOR initiative would stand against the US rebalancing to the Asia Pacific or the Russian project of Eurasian Economic Union.⁹

This paper adopts T.V. Paul’s definition of the concept of soft balancing when ‘tacit balancing’ takes place, short of formal alliances. States converge in their understanding of threats, either regarding a threatening state or a rising power. They use a limited arms build-up, ad hoc

⁴ President Xi Jinping promoted the idea of building a new future for Asia at CICA Summit in Shanghai, May 21, 2014 and Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan (March 2015). See the full text of his speeches at: ‘New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation,’ CICA, Shanghai, at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml and ‘Towards a Community of Common Destiny and a New Future for Asia,’ the Boao Forum, Boao, at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-03/29/c_134106145.htm

⁵ A worthy reflection on the subject of China’s initiatives in relation to regional institutions in the Asia Pacific comes from Amitav Acharya, ‘Introduction: ‘Alternative’ Regional Institutions in Asia? A Cautionary Note,’ Policy Forum of the Georgetown Journal of Asian Affairs (Spring/Summer 2015), https://asianstudies.georgetown.edu/sites/asianstudies/files/GJAA%202.1%20Acharya,%20Amitav_0.pdf (accessed July 5, 2015).

⁶ Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbaev is attributed with the idea of convening the CICA. He put the initiative forward at the 47th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on October 5, 1992. See more at ‘CICA’, Embassy of the Republic Kazakhstan, <http://www.kazakhembus.com/content/cica#sthash.v607rNaJ.dpuf> (accessed August 9, 2016).

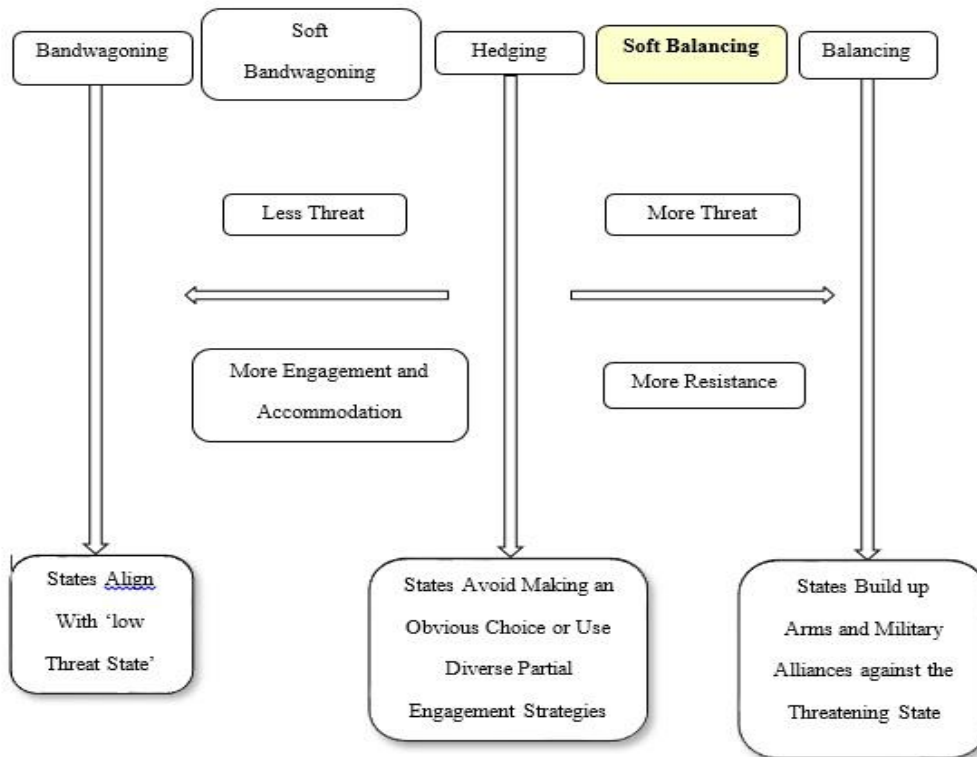
⁷ China’s President Xi Jinping described CICA as ‘the’ platform for China to ‘gain, maintain and strengthen its position in Asia’. ‘China’s Xi Calls for Asia Security Framework at Summit,’ Bloomberg Business, May 21, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-05-21/china-s-xi-calls-for-asia-security-framework-at-summit> (accessed July 5, 2015).

⁸ Richard Weitz, ‘Beijing Expands its Multinational Toolkit at CICA Summit,’ *China Brief* 14, issue 15, July 31, 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42692&cHash=e741793745f90ba42e06c9f4f9e1e886#.VXr6As_tHw (accessed June 22, 2015).

⁹ For an insightful assessment of the Chinese ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative, supported by Chinese sources, see François Godement and Agatha Kratz (eds), ‘One Belt, One Road’: China’s Great Leap Outward, China Analysis, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 10, 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/one_belt_one_road_chinas_great_leap_outward3055 (accessed June 26, 2015).

cooperative exercises or collaboration in regional and international institutions.¹⁰ States using this strategy have a set of soft balancing tools at their disposal. In order to disadvantage a threatening or a rising power, the soft balancer (or a soft-balancing coalition) refuses to grant permissions (extend lease) to the superior state's forces, undermines plans by issuing policies within international (regional) organizations, strengthens economic blocs and coordinates the resistance to policies of the dominant or threatening state.¹¹

Soft Balancing in the Context of Main Alignment Strategies



Source: Alica Kizekova, *Soft Balancing in the Indo-Asia-Pacific: from ASEAN to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, Routledge, Forthcoming 2017.

Soft balancing in the Asia Pacific has primarily been seen in cases of states or organizations trying to counter the 'China factor'. A so-called 'symbolic soft balancing' has been attributed to the triangular collaboration among the US, Australia and Japan – the Trilateral Security Dialogue, which vehemently opposed the accusation of responding to the growing military power of the PRC.¹² Several former Australian officials tried to promote the 'non-threat-centric' nature of this triangular security politics by boosting their defense collaboration with China,¹³ however, the

¹⁰T. V. Paul, 'Introduction,' *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, eds. in T.V. Paul, J.J. Wirtz, and M. Fortmann, M (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 4.

¹¹Robert A. Pape, 'Soft Balancing: How the World will respond to US Preventive War on Iraq,' Oak Park Coalition for Truth and Justice, January 20, 2003.

¹² William T. Tow, 'Asia's Competitive 'Strategic Geometries': The Australian Perspective,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no.1 (2008), 37.

¹³'Downer: Security pact does not target China,' *People's Daily Online*, April 6, 2007.

subsequent installment of the US marines in Darwin, Australian and the trilateral military exercises¹⁴ seemed like clear signs of soft balancing. For now, the Chinese leadership might not view these military exercises as threatening China's sovereignty or security interests, however, the sentiment might change should there be more tensions between the US and China in relation to overflights or sailings near the disputed territories in the South or East China seas.¹⁵

In order to assess whether certain organizations have the ability to act as 'soft balancers' or can be used for soft balancing by individual states, one needs to review institutional frameworks and internal decision-making. In our research, we reviewed the SCO and CICA to see if there were any instances when they would act as emerging communities. We used three indicators, which relate to shared principles, norms and identity. Since the SCO is a more established organization, we use it as a major point of reference. It also is the first serious regional organization where China has played the role of a founding member and has had ample opportunities to shape the agenda.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Regime Preservation and Non-interference

In the case of the SCO's shared principles, the SCO Charter stipulates the acceptance of territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, and territorial integrity of member states. The second important indicator deals with the sense of mutual identity where the member states identify with their partners rather than just the security of their respective countries and national interests. Finally, the case of internalized norms and behavior suggests that member states hold certain expectations of one another based on shared norms. Within the SCO, the Shanghai Spirit has played a prominent role by promoting mutual benefit and trust, respect for diversity, desire for common development and consensus-based decision-making.¹⁶

The argument presented here is that the SCO was not established as an anti-US/anti-Western or anti-NATO organization, however, it has been used as an indirect mechanism of reducing the long-term US regional influence through the application of the Shanghai Spirit, regional norms elevating the concept of non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for the state's sovereignty. Its promotion as a 'counternorm' undermines the Western-style democracy.¹⁷ It is a

¹⁴ In July 2015, Japan joined the US-Australia joint military exercise Talisman Sabre for the first time. 'Exercise Talisman Sabre 2015: 30 nations watch as US, Australia and Japan hold war games in the Northern Territory,' *news.com.au*, July 11, 2015. <http://www.news.com.au/national/exercise-talisman-sabre-2015-30-nations-watch-as-us-australia-and-japan-hold-war-games-in-the-northern-territory/story-fncynjr2-1227438182934> (accessed August 25, 2015).

¹⁵ Matt Siegel, 'Japan to join U.S, Australia war games amid growing China tensions,' *Reuters*, May 26, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/26/us-australia-usa-japan-idUSKBN0OA1GE20150526#2zEDqkrq0wRuIC8p.97> (accessed June 25, 2015); 'China: 'Strong discontent' and 'resolute opposition' over the U.S. warship patrol,' *CCTV.com*, October 27, 2015, <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/10/27/VIDE1445937364325990.shtml> (accessed October 28, 2015).

¹⁶ This analysis draws on Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett's 'A framework for the study of security communities,' in *Security Communities*, eds. Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Thomas Ambrosio, 'Catching the 'Shanghai Spirit': How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 60 (October 2008): 1321–44; David Lewis, 'Who's Socialising Whom? Regional Organisations and Contested Norms in Central Asia,' *Europe-Asia Studies* 64 (September 2012): 1219–37; Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in*

reinforcement of the regime security of all member states. With gradual maturing of the SCO, the organization has come to be viewed as a parallel alternative to the US dominated system, although some argue that it is a ‘fading star’ and lacks tangible projects.¹⁸

Drawing from the set of soft balancing tools, China and the other SCO member states managed to soft balance the US in the instance of ‘territorial denial’, when they supported Uzbekistan’s request for the US to vacate the airbase at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in 2005. The Uzbek government responded to criticisms and calls from the US and the European Union for investigation of the 2005 violence during an antigovernment demonstration in Andijan, which was suppressed by the government.¹⁹ Beijing publically supported President Islam Karimov through the SCO by releasing the Astana Declaration in which, in more general terms, the member states suggested that the stationing of the antiterrorist coalition should be temporary and a final timeline for their use should be set.²⁰

Subsequently, China participated in ‘normative’ soft balancing, which has taken place through ‘observer missions’ while overseeing the election processes in the SCO member states. During the 2009 Kyrgyz or the 2015 Uzbek presidential elections, the monitoring mission from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) declared that the election results ‘failed to meet key OSCE commitments for democratic elections,’ in contrast, the SCO’s findings argued that the election had been ‘honest’ and transparent.²¹ Setting up monitoring mechanisms, which provide such contrasting reports, challenges the legitimacy of the existing frameworks. It further reinforces the norms of the Shanghai Spirit, namely the non-interference in domestic affairs.

While the previous examples demonstrated that China aligned with the rest of the SCO member states and willingly used the organization to soft balance the external players, there have been some cases when Beijing faced a major dilemma and did not rush into publically backing other member state’s actions. This was clear during the 2008 Russian intervention in the Russia-

Central Asia (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 6, 113-114.

¹⁸ ‘SCO becomes an alternative to West in Asia,’ *InfoSCO*, June 3, 2011, <http://infoshos.ru/en/?idn=8310> (accessed June 24, 2015); Richard Weitz, ‘The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Fading Star?’ *ASAN Forum*, August 11, 2014,

<http://www.theasanforum.org/the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-a-fading-star/> (accessed May 25, 2015), Sergei Luzyanin and Sergei Mikheyev, ‘The SCO’s Importance in the Russian-Chinese Geopolitical Partnership,’ *Valdai Discussion Club*, April 24, 2015, <http://valdaiclub.com/asia/77000.html> (accessed June 24, 2015).

¹⁹ ‘US asked to leave Uzbek air base,’ *BBC News*, July 30, 2015, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4731411.stm> (accessed June 18, 2015).

²⁰ ‘Declaration of Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,’ Astana, July 5, 2005, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-06/12/content_6020345.htm (accessed July 5, 2015).

²¹ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ‘Kyrgyzstan’, Presidential Election, July 23, 2009, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kyrgyzstan/39923?download=true> and ‘Uzbekistan’, Presidential Election, March 29, 2015, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/141941> (accessed July 5, 2015); Bernmet Imanalieva, ‘The Role of the Institution of International Observation in Implementing International Election Standards in the Kyrgyz Republic,’ *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 15, Issue 1, 2014. Similarly positive outcomes came from the observer missions of the Commonwealth of Independent States or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. See ‘Elections 2015: Strong Sense of Responsibility for the Future of Homeland,’ *Uzbekistan Today*, April 3, 2015.

Georgia war, the subsequent non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the more recently Russia's annexation of Crimea and of involvement in eastern Ukraine.²²

Whilst there is some shared understanding of why Moscow would opt for more vocal and direct opposition to NATO's expansion to the East, Beijing would not want to be seen as endorsing the establishment of states based on ethnicity, use of force, or backing intervention in the domestic affairs of another state. In the Ukraine case, the country holds for China a valuable strategic value, since it is a certain gateway to Europe and thus invaluable for the OBOR. Thus the economic partnership between Ukraine and China is based on mutual benefit, Ukraine wants to reduce its dependence on the Russian economy and China sees Ukraine as a gateway to Europe. This connection is however 'conditional' to the fact that Kiev does not expect Beijing's public condemnation of Russia's involvement in Ukraine.²³

The impact of the Ukrainian crisis for Russia has been a stronger shift towards the non-Western world and Asia with the intention of building a multipolar world.²⁴ This also affected Sino-Russian ties and brought further pledges of a close coordination in foreign policy areas and signing of economic agreements, including a \$400 billion contract to export gas to China. It is to be seen what kind of dependence the latest gas deal creates between Moscow and Beijing and it already has been pointed out that a costly pipeline network had to be built first and both Russia and China needed to show some willingness to compromise.²⁵

CICA – The Emerging Soft-balancing Mechanism

CICA was established with the intention to become an effective organization that would promote confidence building measures, security cooperation and regional integration. Yet, in the end, the process of institutionalization has been relatively slow compared to the SCO.²⁶ Of the three indicators that define a security community, only shared principles have been stated since the beginning of the organization. These are incorporated in the 'Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations between the CICA Member-States,' adopted in Almaty in September 1999.²⁷ Thus, eventually, the CICA member-states agreed that the respect for sovereignty and

²² Yu Bin, 'Guns and Games of August: Tales of Two Strategic Partners,' *Comparative Connections*, CSIS (October 2008), http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0803qchina_russia.pdf (accessed June 18, 2015).

²³ Emiko Terazano, 'Ukraine set to become top corn exporter to China in first half,' *Financial Times*, July 6, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/989c82ba-20cc-11e5-ab0f-6bb9974f25d0.html#axzz3qXAae610> (accessed July 8, 2015); Duan Xiaolin, 'Why the West is wrong about Beijing and Kiev,' *EastAsiaForum*, September 27, 2015, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/09/22/why-the-west-is-wrong-about-beijing-and-kiev/> (accessed September 30, 2015); Colum Lynch, 'At the U.N., Beijing Begins to Shift Away From Putin,' *Foreign Policy*, October 21, 2015.

²⁴ Alexander Lukin, 'Consolidation of the Non-Western World During the Ukrainian Crisis: Russia and China, SCO and BRICS,' *International Affairs* 2, 2015, http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/IA_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.%202%202015.pdf (accessed September 20, 2015).

²⁵ Edward C. Chow, 'Russia-China Gas Deal and Red Deal,' *CSIS*, May 11, 2015, <http://csis.org/publication/russia-china-gas-deal-and-redeal> (accessed June 22, 2015).

²⁶ For a comparative research of China's approach toward CICA and SCO, see Laura-Anca Parepa, 'The SCO and CICA – Multilateral Security Frameworks in Asia' in *Quarterly Bulletin of Third World Studies* (Forthcoming 2017).

²⁷ The full text of the declaration can be found at the official CICA Secretariat website at http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=439&lang=1&parent_id=12 (accessed August 9, 2016)

territorial integrity, non-use of force and non-intervention in the internal affairs were principles that would be shared.

However, the slow institutionalization, the large and diverse membership of CICA have, to some extent, hampered the rapid development of the other two indicators: shared norms and identity. Mutual trust and consensus have emerged as ingrained norms among member-states only after the creation of small working groups for the implementation of confidence building measures in a specific area and the adoption of the Cooperative Approach (2007).²⁸ Since China took on the CICA Chairmanship in 2014, the organization has entered a new stage that might contribute to its institutional maturation towards becoming a community with a predictable behavior and a fully crystallized identity.

While China's participation in the SCO proved the country's ability to overcome potential conflicting interests with other member states and Beijing participated in using the organization as a soft-balancing mechanism in order to reduce the US influence in the region, the Chinese involvement in CICA has followed a different path. Although China has been a member of CICA since the beginning, its behavior within the organization can be divided into two stages: 'reluctance' and 'engagement'. Only during the second stage, has China started to see CICA as a potential soft-balancing platform that can be used to limit the US influence in the region.

The initial Chinese reluctance to play a more active role in CICA's agenda setting can be explained by the perception of potential overlaps between SCO and CICA, which, for a while, seemed to promote cooperation in similar fields.²⁹ Following the continuous enlargement of CICA, which to date is the largest forum on multidimensional security in Asia,³⁰ China has increasingly recognized the importance of such an organization³¹ as an appropriate mechanism for policy coordination between diverse countries that could be bound together by shared principles, norms and identity.

²⁸ The full text of the 'Cooperative Approach for the implementation of the CICA CBMs' can be found at the official website of CICA Secretariat, access via http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=119&lang=1&parent_id=12 (accessed August 9, 2016)

²⁹ Regarding the Chinese reluctance toward CICA, before 2010 China had not been actively involved in the coordination of any Confidence Building Measures Group and its financial contribution to the CICA Secretariat was relatively low compared to other members: 120.000 USD between 2006 – 2010. Kazakhstan's voluntary contribution represents more than 75% of the total budget of CICA Secretariat. For financial contribution, see: http://www.s-cica.kz/page.php?page_id=141&lang=1&parent_id=133 (accessed August 9, 2016); 'Совещание по взаимодействию и мерам доверия в Азии (Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia)', Trade Mission of the Russian Federation in Turkey, <http://turk.ved.gov.ru/news/?action=show&id=1710&prefix=> (accessed August 9, 2016); 'Statement by H.E. Mr. Yerzhan Kazykhanov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the 4th CICA Ministerial Meeting,' Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan accredited to Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, http://www.kazakhstan.org.sg/content/intro.php?act=news&c_id=1613 (accessed August 9, 2016).

³⁰ The number of CICA members evolved from 16 in 1992 to 22 in 2010 and to 26 in 2015.

³¹ For the importance of CICA for China, see the speeches by Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Vice Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping: http://www.cica-china.org/eng/yxxw_1/t1307146.htm and http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1164862.shtml (accessed August 9, 2016).

Therefore, in 2010³² China proposed along with Russia a ‘Joint Initiative on Strengthening Security in the Asia-Pacific Region,’ a document underlining the necessity for an ‘open, transparent and equal’ new security architecture based on principles of non-interference in internal affairs and respect for ‘sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity’ and on ‘the spirit of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and interaction’ – principles that are declared in the founding documents of CICA and shared by member-states of the organization.³³

The dynamism that characterized the Chinese engagement in CICA has been increasing since the beginning of the Xi Jinping Presidency and especially since the Chinese chairmanship of CICA. Building on the previous joint initiative, President Xi proposed an improved concept of ‘common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security’ based on ‘peace, development and win-win cooperation,’ in which development and security were interwoven.³⁴ The Chinese proposal, which can be considered as an example of ‘major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics,’³⁵ does neither imply the establishment of formal alliance nor offers any security guarantee, but it relies on the importance of development as a means to foster security and the relevance of security as a means to foster development,³⁶ which represents a common denominator for all states.

Thus, the Chinese agenda in CICA focuses on mutual benefit and confidence building by addressing common challenges (such as economic development and regional stability) and perceived threats (such as terrorism and transnational crime), as well as by pushing for economic integration (through OBOR).³⁷ In short, China is promoting a long-term regional strategy which can be easily accepted by the CICA’s member-states regardless of their political system.³⁸

³² The year 2010 was identified by some scholars as the year of a certain change in Chinese foreign policy behavior. For more, see Tim Summers, ‘Changes in China’s Foreign Policy Match Shifting Global Scene,’ *Chatham House*, June 17, 2014, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/14701> (accessed July 26, 2015).

³³ ‘Declaration on the Principles guiding Relations between the CICA Member-States,’ September 14, 1999; Almaty and ‘Almaty Act,’ June 4, 2002, Almaty, http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=439&lang=1&parent_id=12 (accessed August 9, 2016); ‘Joint Russian-Chinese Initiative on Strengthening Security in the Asia-Pacific Region,’ Ankara, http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=24&lang=1 (accessed June 20, 2015).

³⁴ ‘New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation,’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, May 21, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml (accessed June 20, 2015).

³⁵ Foreign Minister Wang Yi has described the ‘major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics’ as being based on a win-win cooperation. See ‘Hallmark of major-country diplomacy is win-win cooperation,’ *Xinhua*, March 8, 2015, http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/03/08/content_281475067757214.htm (accessed June 20, 2015).

³⁶ For the link between security and development, see Paul Collier et.al. ‘Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil Wars and Development Policy’ (Washington D.C.: World Bank and Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁷ During the CICA nongovernmental forum held in Beijing on May 26, 2015, the former state leaders, diplomats and experts debated the impact of security issues on the OBOR initiative and carefully addressed security challenges. Zhang Lulu, ‘Security issues vital to ‘Belt and Road’ initiative,’ *China.org.cn*, May 27, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2015-05/27/content_35672136.htm (accessed July 10, 2015).

³⁸ China is pushing for a process of institutionalization of CICA by proposing to set up a mechanism of consultations in defense field, a security response center for major emergencies, a coordinating structure to supervise the implementation of confidence-building measures in five dimensions: economic, ecological, humanitarian, military-political, and fight against new challenges. ‘New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security

The new Asian security concept excludes the involvement of non-Asian powers, such as the US and Australia, in the process of solving regional issues and it can be understood as a reaction to the 'rebalance strategy' of the US. Washington has attempted to transform its traditional 'hub and spoke' alliance system into a 'network' system that increases the security roles of its allies (especially, Japan and Australia).³⁹ By underlining regional specificity, the Chinese initiative questions the relevance and applicability of a Western style solution in the Asian context. US officials have acknowledged China's dissatisfaction with the US strategy and existing institutions.⁴⁰ Highlighting the concordance between the Asian character of CICA and agenda setting put forward by Asian countries, China is taking the lead by promoting an exclusive approach- 'Asia for Asians'⁴¹- that seeks to change the already established tendency among Asian countries to pursue their economic cooperation with China and their security cooperation with the US.

As the Shanghai Spirit proved to be a successful tool for bringing together the SCO member states, the new Asian security concept is an appeal to all Asian elites within CICA to identify with common values and common grounds for cooperation. Consequently, China has attempted to construct a Pan-Asian identity that can play an essential role in enhancing CICA's cohesion and increase the sense of mutual identity among members of this organization. This could represent a crucial stepping stone in the evolution of CICA to becoming a security community in the future.

Conclusion

The evolving OBOR strategy has placed the Eurasian area at the center of discussions in relation to China's current foreign policy. Thus far, this initiative appears to be complementary to the goals of Central Asian states, and in some aspects also with those of Russia. There has been widespread acknowledgement that the BRICS, the EEU and the SCO are all important

Cooperation,' Shanghai, May 21, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml (accessed June 20, 2015).

³⁹ For a discussion on changes of the US security system, see Laura-Anca Parepa 'Implications of the U.S. Rebalance Strategy for the Security Architecture in the Asia-Pacific,' in *Building the Diverse Community. Beyond Regionalism in East Asia*, ed. D. Mierzejewski, G. Bywalec, Contemporary Asian Studies Series, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2016, p. 139–157.

⁴⁰ A Reuters editorial quoted a US official saying 'We noted President Xi's statement at the CICA conference about Asia for Asians, the growing criticism of U.S. alliances and the Asian infrastructure bank;' 'It is raising serious questions about whether the U.S. vision and the Chinese vision are fully compatible.' in Ben Blanchard et.al., 'With one eye on Washington, China plots its own Asia 'pivot'', *Reuters*, July 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/03/us-china-diplomacy-idUSKBN0F82GX20140703> (accessed July 15, 2015).

⁴¹ In a speech at the MOFA Lanting Forum, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Cheng Guoping mentioned that 'CICA is a primary vehicle initiated by an Asian country and whose agenda is set by Asian countries. It represents Asia's voice on major international and regional issues and enables Asian countries to keep Asian affairs in their own hands and promote their common security.' See more at: 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs Holds the 9th Lanting Forum,' *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*, May 8, 2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1154814.shtml (accessed July 21, 2015) and Li Shaoxian, 'CICA in Its Third Decade: Background and Prospects,' *China & US Focus*, May 20, 2014, <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/cica-in-its-third-decade-background-and-prospects/> (accessed July 22, 2015).

mechanisms of cooperation, underpinned by President Xi's calls to facilitate cooperation among these organizations during his speech in Ufa in July 2015.⁴² It is to be seen whether China is going to use the SCO to soft balance Russia's interests in the region in order to fulfil the stated ambitious vision. Additionally, one has to consider the upcoming enlargement of the SCO through the inclusion of India and Pakistan. With these changes, the SCO's organizational identity and the efficiency of decision-making might be challenged and even complicated in the future.⁴³

In relation to the Chinese narrative within CICA, some Asian elites might find it attractive, especially those countries less friendly with the US. However, such an exclusive approach might not be completely appealing to other countries; mainly those involved in territorial disputes with China, such as Philippines or Vietnam, as well as close US allies (e.g. Israel, UAE). At this moment, despite its significant potential as a security mechanism, CICA is still far from being a cohesive security community. Its evolution into a full-grown body will need joint efforts and a consensus of all members.

While China has signaled quite clearly its intention to use CICA as a potential tool to soft balance the US, the large membership, political diversity and potential divergent interests of CICA member states⁴⁴ make it difficult to reach a consensus on crucial issues. Moreover, the successes of China's actions depend on its ability to obtain support from other states. In such a context, it is vital to observe whether Russia⁴⁵ is going to view further development of CICA as beneficial, thus complementary, or an obstacle to the Eurasian Economic Union. This perception can have a significant impact on the development of CICA into a comprehensive security community, as well as on China's ability to pursue her goals.

⁴² See 'Xi urges BRICS, SCO, EEU to cooperate for people's welfare,' *Xinhuanet*, July 10, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-07/10/c_134398467.htm (accessed on July 20, 2015); Li Kun, 'Xi Jinping's speech in Ufa deserves greater recognition,' *CCTV.com*, July 9, 2015, <http://english.cntv.cn/2015/07/09/ARTI1436431319561782.shtml> (accessed July 20, 2015).

⁴³ See Alexander Lukin's 'Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Looking for a New Role,' *Russia in Global Affairs*, July 10, 2015, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/valday/Shanghai-Cooperation-Organization-Looking-for-a-New-Role-17576> (accessed on July 20, 2015).

⁴⁴ There are several divergent aspects concerning bilateral and international between CICA members (e.g. China and India, China and Turkey, India and Pakistan). If not managed well, they can have a negative impact on the development of CICA.

⁴⁵ The Economic integration is also growing. Moscow has proposed connecting the Russian-led EEU—a trading bloc composed of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia—with China's Silk Road Economic Belt, a series of investments stretching across Eurasia and South Asia. President Vladimir Putin stated that the SCO will work 'actively on convergence between' the EEU and the Silk Road Economic Belt, in part to add legitimacy and resources to the fledgling EEU. 'Vladimir Putin met at the Kremlin with participants in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting,' *The Official Website of Russia's Presidency in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2014-2015*, June 3, 2015, <http://en.sco-russia.ru/transcripts/20150603/1013405461.html> (accessed June 15, 2015).