Chapter 7

Conclusion

The present research has attempted to examine China's approach to multilateral frameworks in addressing its security concerns in the post-Cold War era. It has focussed on how China has gradually acknowledged the role and importance of multilateral organisation. China's positive approach to multilateralism is also a reflection of a broader phenomenon of growing demand for multilateralism among developing countries. Though the concept and process of multilateralism took shape in the US and West Europe, at present, it is practised by several countries. In the contemporary context, the irony, felt worldwide, is that US, the main propagator of multilateralism in the first half of the last century and throughout Cold War era, is seen subverting multilateralism. In this context, the onus of defending and espousing multilateralism has shifted to developing countries. For them, multilateralism in the true sense of the term is a pointer to, and an indication of, democratization of the world order. As for China, its official theorization of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence also comes very close to the principle of multilateralism. Multilateralism, based on democratic principles and spirit, has immense potential to safeguard the interests of the developing countries. Therefore, it is quite understandable why the developing states, including China, advocate multilateralism. China's position on multilateralism together with its advocacy for multipolar world conveys a message that China is ready to assume regional as well as global leadership with an alternative agenda.

While analyzing multilateralism in Chinese foreign policy and its approach towards SCO and ARF, one should take two points into account. First, multilateralism necessarily involves common acceptability of multilateral cooperation. The concept of multilateralism has emerged at a certain juncture of history when the nation-states found it to be an effective tool to resolve international issues. In the western world, the concept of multilateralism started shaping in the first quarter of last century. Before finally evolving into its present form, it had to pass through the severities of the Second World War. Europe could
realize the virtues and utilities of multilateralism only after the Second World War. Second, though multilateralism has been effective in strengthening and consolidating international cooperation, it has not been able to undermine sovereignty. For instance, strong nationalist forces do exist in Europe, which harbour aversion for multilateralism. French and Dutch rejection of the idea of constitution is a telling example of how even European Union has to face stiff resistance from nationalistic assertions. Therefore, analyzing China's position on multilateralism, one should be realistic in one's analysis and avoid over-expectations. Multilateralism in Chinese foreign policy is essentially being shaped by Asian context. In Asia, sovereignty, undoubtedly, matters more than in Europe. In most of the countries of Asia, sovereignty overrides developmental and other larger issues pertaining to fundamental transformation of identity of nation-states. Urge for community-building through multilateralism in Asia is not as intense as it was in post-war Europe. Multilateralism in Europe, in fact, has become a philosophical end, implying fundamental transformation of identity of nation-states. But in Asia multilateralism is taken as a model that ensures democratic international governance and paves for multipolar world. Chinese understanding fits into this overall Asian understanding of multilateralism.

A radical change in China's approach to multilateralism has not been an independent phenomenon. It is a change that has taken place along with many other changes in Chinese political-economy with the beginning of China's economic reforms and opening up. These changes were in complete contrast to Mao's period when China was totally opposed to multilateralism. This opposition was consistent with overall global security scenario, China's characterization of international politics and accordingly China's strategic vision and nature of security issues of that era. In the post-Mao period, China consciously but gradually made a paradigmatic shift. The change that was brought about was multi-directional. In contrast to Mao's period, China stopped visualising the world in compartments. China came to believe that overall peace and cooperation was possible and no major war would break out. This was also the time when waves of economic reforms were unleashed. Integration with the world was then a natural corollary. In the realm of security, since 1990, nature of issues related to security began to acquire new dimension. In the post-Cold War period, issues of transnational nature started gaining importance and at the same time, non-state actors also began rising to prominence, necessitating cross-border
negotiations. All these together paved the way for multilateralism to gain adequate space and attention in China's foreign policy. Also, China realized that multipolar world was not going to become a reality in near future. The show of American might in the Gulf War I and its sharp unilateralism in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Gulf War II and Kosovo have sent amply clear message that American hegemony is not going to come to an end. In this scenario, China has found in multilateralism a way to ease pressure of American hegemony and to cope with it. It can be argued that China considers multilateral institutions one step short of, but one step towards, multipolar reality of the world.

In regards to the issues of traditional security, China until 1990 was a staunch opponent of these issues being discussed in multilateral forums. Thereafter, it revised this position and became active on many issues, with exception of Tibet and Taiwan, to be discussed in multilateral bodies. As of now, it has informally and formally discussed issues like maritime disputes in South China Sea and North Korean nuclear programme in ARF. Related but independent development of participating in the UN Peacekeeping forces since 1990s also showed China's changed position on security issues. The UN has become a central feature of its discourse on multilateralism. It views the UN as a multilateral institution that provides fair global governance despite occasional hegemonic pressure. Therefore, it strongly advocates democratization of the UN. However, on the question of expansion of the UNSC, its stand is not convincing to many countries like India and Japan. Nevertheless, it believes that the UNSC can play a vital role and perform a critical function in international security, if it truly follows the UN Charter in its letter and spirit. In fact, China's growing engagement in multilateral management of security reflects its integrated approach towards security and its great-power-ready-to-assume-larger-responsibility like attitude.

China has been actively offering its cooperation with the other states in the realm of non-traditional security at multilateral fora. The non-traditional security issues that are being dealt in such multilateral frameworks are simply not limited to terrorism. Non-traditional security has wider dimensions that go beyond military security. Issues like energy and food security and insecurity coming out from volatility of finance capital also constitute the concept of non-traditional security. China has responded to every call on these issues. Howsoever novel is the concept of non-traditional security, it operates under the state sovereignty, which goes down well
with Chinese understanding of international security in which sovereignty of states is much emphasised.

Further elaborating on the issue of non-traditional security issues, China has to deal with a host of non-traditional security issues during the post-Cold War era. First of all, China has been facing terrorist problems in its Western region of Xinjiang, which has transnational dimensions. Moreover, energy security has rapidly emerged as a major issue for China as its economy has been growing astoundingly. Vis-à-vis energy security it has twin objectives: diversifying energy resources, and safeguarding energy supply route. Therefore, the stabilization of its Western periphery becomes a pertinent task as this region is adjacent to the Central Asian sources of energy. Besides, in recent years, security of transportation which mainly includes oceanic lanes has emerged as a major issue for both international community and China. China has major stake in the security of Malacca strait as it is a lifeline for China's trade like that of many other states. In addition to this, drug trafficking from the Central Asia and especially from Southeast Asia is a serious health and law and order issue in China. Moreover, environmental pollution has acquired space also in China's concerns. As far as this issue is concerned, the Central Asian member states also have much to share with China on this issue. Issues like public health and food security also lie in the broad ambit of non-traditional security concerns. China has realized that the nature of these issues and concerns is such that managing them is beyond the potential of a single state. Therefore, China fully recognises the seriousness of non-traditional security issues. Considering their nature it addresses them through multilateral efforts, while at the same time, ensuring that they do not undermine its sovereignty.

China's participation both in SCO and ARF, to a great extent, is driven by its national interests. However, China has, time and again, been appreciated for its positive contribution to them in the direction of making them models of international cooperation. China upholds its vision and ideas on democratic international order in these organisations. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence combined with New Security Concept explains and justifies its engagement in both the organisations. Despite China's emphasis on sovereignty and its participation in SCO and ARF being, to an extent, driven by balance of power consideration, China has left the era far behind when it used to take international multilateral organisations for imperialist handiwork. Now, it does not harbour any
intrinsic aversion to the idea of community-building on the basis of multilateralism. Instead, its argument is that any such development should come out from evolutionary process, and regions should move towards this end gradually. Gradualism or incrementalism is the basic feature of China's understanding of multilateralism. Any unnecessary haste or external imposition is simply not welcome. But then, this position very much reflects its general approach towards any change.

China in SCO and ARF is classic example of the view that actors who enter a multilateral framework never come out of it same. China's gradual entry and prolonged stay in these two have changed and correct mutual perceptions, through continuous and reciprocal interaction. These organisations have provided platforms where China and other member countries have understood each other well. Given the opportunity any state can be internationally socialized. SCO and ARF have played their role in socializing China.

China’s engagement with ARF and its sustained participation in the activities conducted by ARF have resulted in building confidence by dispelling mutual apprehensions. At present, China is assured that the ASEAN countries are not part of any containment policy that targets it, while the ASEAN countries also are assured that the rise of China could be an opportunity rather than a threat. They have been seeking benefits from China's growing economy. However, the correction in mutual perception has come gradually in the last around two decades. Their interaction with each other at ARF has played a significant role in this direction. China has benefited from the ARF process both in the arena of non-traditional and traditional security issues. China and ARF share similar views on non-traditional security issues wherein the former enthusiastically participates in the latter's activities related to non-traditional security issues. In addition to this, what could be described as success of China is that it has convinced the ASEAN countries to stay away from Taiwan and has not let Taiwan figure in ARF agenda. Besides, on the issue of remilitarization of Japan, ASEAN countries in ARF share Chinese point of view. Though on strategic level ASEAN countries are interested in keeping US engaged in the region, China has emerged more reliable power for them. China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are more appealing to them because of their emphasis on non-interference in the affairs of other countries. American insistence on promotion of democracy and protection of human rights are
viewed in the region with scepticism as it is perceived in any other part of the world. In fact, ASEAN finds itself more comfortable with China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as they resonate, in a way, spirit of live and let live whereas American agenda of promotion of democracy and Human Rights appear to be irritating and ominous white man's burden. Consciously or unconsciously, ARF has increasingly become a security body that can contribute to China's aspired regional order at its eastern side. ARF shares China's view of collective security which does not permit violation of sovereignty.

China's multilateral credentials are tested mainly on the basis of its role in SCO more than in ARF. In ARF China has been playing the role of a civilized and courteous guest, while in SCO it is calling the shots jointly with Russia. Although SCO provides a useful vehicle to coordinate multilateral efforts to deal with traditional and non-traditional security issues, there is a widespread understanding in some section of political and academic circles that SCO is being led towards becoming another NATO in Post-Soviet space or it is a reincarnation of Warsaw Pact. In the light of this view, the development that needs to be kept track of in future is whether SCO will continue to work under Chinese and Russian patronage or will it come out of their towering shadows and become true representative of the region. Simultaneously, China's response towards the developments taking place in Central Asia also need attention as whole erstwhile Soviet-controlled Asia and Europe has a potential of becoming a playground of 'second Cold-War' between resurgent Russia and the US. Besides, the dynamics of Sino-Russian relationship in its own right also has been affecting the evolution of SCO. A downplayed competition between China and Russia in SCO has not gone unnoticed. A general competition and implicit mistrust among the SCO countries is noticeable. Nevertheless, China has been highly active in SCO. It has played an important role in setting up of normative framework of the organisation. The normative framework or the founding principle of SCO is the reflection and clear approval of China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Perhaps China is the most enthusiastic and serious player in SCO. The reason for China's perceived enthusiasm is that SCO can play a significant role in stabilizing its Western periphery and at the same time, in providing an outlet where China can test its leadership ability as SCO is the only regional organisation in the creation of which it has played an instrumental role. Despite some note of caution, what could be
drawn from the China's multilateral trajectory and record in SCO and ARF is that if these organisations start moving towards becoming security communities in their respective regions, China will probably not come in their way.

The study establishes China's involvement in both the organisations witnessing a radical change in its understanding of the role and importance of multilateral forums. Its understanding of multilateralism has made a paradigmatic shift from anti-multilateralism to nominal and finally to qualitative multilateralism. Change in understanding has been brought about by a host of factors ranging from China's own increased confidence to multilateralism becoming buzzword in the field of international cooperation on traditional and non-traditional security issues. However, it remains to be seen whether China would continue on its current path as it becomes more comfortable with multilateralism and emerges as a major power in world politics in the foreseeable future.