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ДИЈАЛОЗИ О КИНИ

对话 中国

DIALOGUES ON CHINA

The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Academic Conference - Dialogues on China 2023

# New Chinese Initiatives for a Changing Global Security

## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



Nenad Stekić  
Aleksandar Mitić (Eds.)







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The 3<sup>rd</sup> “Dialogues on China” International Academic  
Conference:

# New Chinese Initiatives for a Changing Global Security

November 9-10, 2023

Dr. Nenad Stekić  
Dr. Aleksandar Mitić (Eds.)

Conference organisers



Institute of International Politics and Economics  
Institute for European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences  
China-CEE Institute

Belgrade, November 2023

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**New Chinese Initiatives for a Changing Global Security**

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Institute for European Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences  
China-CEE Institute

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### AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ASSESS CHINA'S ROLE IN THE CHANGING WORLD

“Right now, changes of the world, of our times and of history are unfolding in ways like never before” – this is how China’s President Xi Jinping set the context for the introduction of his concept of Global Strategic Initiative (GSI) at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in April 2022.

Indeed, the GSI, just as the two other initiatives proposed by President Xi since 2021 – the Global Development Initiative (GDI, 2021) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, 2023) – search for ideas, principles and actions to move our troubled world away from confrontation, inequality and misunderstanding.

By deciding to focus on the topic of China’s new global initiatives on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the annual international academic conference conducted within the framework of “Dialogues on China” put an accent on both the complementarity of Xi’s proposals, but also on the need to find an innovative approach to assess Beijing’s role in the changing world.

The “Dialogues on China”, in their third edition, pursued a significant role in advancing global scholarly discourse regarding the contemporary developments in China’s political, economic, and security policies. This year’s conference, themed “New Chinese Initiatives for a Changing Global Security” convened experts hailing from Europe, China, and diverse global regions. Its primary objective was to dissect the intricate and evolving panorama of global security from a Chinese vantage point. The conference serves as a pivotal forum for the examination and deliberation of paramount security challenges confronting both China and the global community. Topics of discussion encompassed an array of pressing concerns, including worldwide security dynamics, political uncertainties, the BRI analyses, and newly introduced Chinese endeavors such as the GDI, the GSI and the GCI.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> “Dialogues on China” were held on November 9-10, 2023 at the premises of the Institute of International Politics and Economics (IIPE) in Belgrade. The conference was co-organised with the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the China-CEE Institute from Budapest. It garnered support from the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia.

At the opening of the conference, the participants were addressed by Professor Dr. Branislav Đorđević, the Director of the Institute, and Ms. Irena

Šarac, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. Additionally, H.E. Li Ming, the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Serbia, and Dr. Feng Zhongping, Director of the Institute for European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, also addressed the audience.

Professor Dr. Branislav Đorđević, in his address, emphasized that the third annual conference within the “Dialogues on China” series contributes to a better understanding of contemporary international relations, economy, and security. He highlighted the Institute’s mission to excel in scientific research on both domestic and international levels. Ms. Irena Šarac, in her speech, referred to the October 2023 “Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation” in Beijing, underlining the robust bilateral and economic ties between the Republic of Serbia and the People’s Republic of China. Ambassador Li Ming highlighted that China’s new initiatives align with the country’s diplomatic philosophy, focusing on peace, stability, material prosperity, and spiritual wealth. He emphasized China’s commitment to high-quality development for the improvement of living standards globally. Dr. Feng Zhongping, in a video message, expressed confidence in the continued scientific cooperation between the two institutions and wished participants success.

The conference’s working session included a Keynote Speech by Dr. Ivona Lađevac, Deputy Director of the IIPE, titled “China’s responses to the New World Order”. Dr. Lađevac analyzed the outcomes of the BRI’s first decade. Pointing out the challenges facing China and the implementation of BRI, Dr. Lađevac presented arguments in support of the openness of official Beijing’s policy towards all countries interested in deepening cooperation. In the continuation of her presentation, Dr. Lađevac presented the initial achievements of the three new Chinese initiatives. She argued that China will remain an advocate of the idea of creating a “Global Community of Shared Future” that will lead all of humanity to the desired prosperity.

Besides the official opening ceremony and the keynote lecture, the Conference saw four plenary sessions in which 24 papers were presented.

The Conference achieved another record as more than 70 attendees from 16 countries worldwide were present during the two-day event. The publication of the Proceedings is one of the Conference’s main outputs, representing a volume of chosen 24 peer-reviewed papers derived from the presentations at the event, including a keynote speech delivered at the beginning of Day 1 (November 9) of the Conference. Attendees at the conference presented their individual assessments regarding the feasibility

of realizing the objectives, delineated within three distinct initiatives: the GSI, the GDI, and the BRI. Particular emphasis was directed toward key focal points within these initiatives, including global security dynamics, global development imperatives, China's role as a mediator in international affairs, its role in the new world order, and other facets encompassing China's foreign relations and security policies. This publication contains 24 papers written by 35 authors from 15 countries worldwide<sup>1</sup>. The Scientific Committee of the Conference counts 18 renowned scientists from 10 countries.

This publication, which commences with the keynote speech delivered at the Conference by Dr. Ivona Lađevac, is organized into four separate parts.

The first part – “Rising China in the New International Context” – compounds insightful papers that investigate China's potential revisionist role, cultural influences on global visions, Eurasia's integration or division, China's impact on the international legal order, and the challenges and prospects of its global initiatives. The diplomatic complexities of Southeast Asia, the evolving dynamics of Russian-Chinese relations in the face of globalization, and the broader implications of China's ascent are intricately examined. This part of the Proceedings provides a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of China's evolving role in the contemporary global order.

An exploration of the far-reaching impacts of the BRI, titled “Belt and Road Initiative: New Impetus for China's Global Presence”, constitutes the second part of this monograph. The papers delve into the BRI as a framework for a new world order, showcasing China's foreign strategic capabilities through this initiative. Geopolitical perspectives on a decade of the BRI in Central Asia, its investments in renewable energy, and the effects of Chinese port investments on bilateral trade are also examined. Additionally, the chapter assesses Sino-Croatian relations, tracing the trajectory from a “diamond” phase to cautious engagement, providing a comprehensive analysis of China's global outreach.

China's confident global vision constitutes the crux of the third part of the Proceedings, titled “China Goes Assertive? Beijing Shares its vision of global security”. This section examines the strategic communication of China's global initiatives, its security initiatives in Africa, and mediation diplomacy in the Gulf. Insights into Central and Eastern European security strategies amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict are presented, alongside an analysis of China's GDI in the context of evolving multilateral paradigms. The chapter also scrutinizes

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<sup>1</sup> Namely from: Belgium, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, PR of China, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland, Russian Federation, Türkiye, Serbia, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom.

the evolving European security order and compares Chinese foreign and security policy with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, offering a nuanced understanding of China's role in shaping global security dynamics.

The subtle interplay of soft power and discourses is presented in the last, fourth chapter of this Proceedings, titled "Soft Power and Discourses: China's New-Old Image". The papers explore the influence of Chinese soft power on fostering collaboration within the BRI, unravel the discursive force of the GSI, and present a case study on the impact of the BRI on the development of area studies in China. This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of China's evolving global image, shedding light on the refined ways in which soft power and discourses shape its international presence.

This Conference Proceedings is a valuable resource open to academics, researchers, policymakers, and individuals interested in gaining insights into the complex dimensions of China's role in the evolving global landscape. It might also serve as a scholarly repository, offering comprehensive analyses and diverse perspectives on China's political, economic, and cultural impact. Academics and researchers can leverage this resource for in-depth exploration, while policymakers can find valuable insights for informed decision-making. Additionally, the Conference Proceedings cater to a broader audience, fostering a deeper understanding of China's global initiatives in the post-pandemic period and their implications for those seeking knowledge on international relations and global affairs.

With this publication, the editors look forward to achieving further advancement of China studies and to promote the latest results and scientific practices in the area to the global academic community. The pace of transformation of Beijing's role in the reshaping of international relations indeed puts China studies on the forefront of social science's most dynamic fields. Lastly, the Organizing Committee would hereby like to express its special gratitude to the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, to the Institute for European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (IES CASS), the China-CEE Institute from Budapest, the Scientific Committee of the Conference, and to the leadership of the Institute of International Politics and Economics for their continuous support in organizing this event and making it possible.

In Belgrade,  
November 2023

Editors  
Dr. Nenad Stekić  
Dr. Aleksandar Mitić

## WELCOME SPEECH

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### BY PROFESSOR DR. BRANISLAV ĐORĐEVIĆ AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE CONFERENCE

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to greet the conference participants, respected colleagues, representatives of the diplomatic corps, and the media who are with us today at the conference dedicated to contemporary Chinese initiatives.

I am especially pleased that today, with us, is the delegation of our strategic partner, the Institute of European Studies, led by the director general of the Institute, my dear friend Dr. Feng Zhongping.

I am also thrilled that we can host a great friend of the Institute of International Politics and Economics and a member of its International Advisory Board, Professor Dr. Richard Sakwa.

Dear friends,

Today's conference is held with the support of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, and we are glad that this ministry has recognised the importance of this conference and its scope.

Along with the Institute of International Politics and Economics, the co-organisers of this event are the Institute of European Studies from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the China-CEE Institute from Budapest. We are pleased that, with this conference, we can continue our more than successful and fruitful long-term cooperation.

Through our cooperation with the Institute of European Studies (CASS) in 2017, we established a distinguished centre that deals with studies related to the Belt and Road Initiative, which highlights the significance of our cooperation.

Additionally, the sole fact that, just a few days ago, my colleague Dr. Ivona Lađevac, deputy director, and I returned from Beijing from the 9<sup>th</sup> High-level Symposium of Think Tanks of China and Central and Eastern Europe, organised by the Institute of European Studies, testifies even more about our fruitful cooperation.



Dear colleagues,

“Dialogues on China” is a traditional conference of the Institute of International Politics and Economics, which is organised for the third year in a row. Today is the first one to be held in person, as the first and second conferences were held in online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main task and goal of the Dialogues is to consider China’s place and role in contemporary international relations through various subjects.

Every year, we have a theme to which we pay special attention, and this year’s conference theme is *New Chinese Initiatives for a Changing Global Security*.

China today, in addition to the Belt and Road, promotes other initiatives that are equally important, such as the Global Security Initiative and the Global Development Initiative.

Through the development of these initiatives and along with the economic support for world development, China wants to contribute to the peaceful and all-acceptable development of international relations.

Dear friends,

Contemporary political and economic circumstances are complex, dynamic, and conflicting, so it is crucial to analyse and understand international processes and flows from different angles.

We believe that our Institute, as well as our country, is an excellent conversationalist in this case because we have the experience and the ability to listen and understand all sides. We also hope that today’s participants, with their insightful and inspiring topics, will further contribute to learning and understanding China’s place and role in international relations.

Additionally, we are thrilled to have researchers from 15 countries in attendance. All of them are experts in this field and are here by invitation, so I do not doubt that, thanks to them, this conference will be more than successful.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The diplomatic relationship between Serbia and China is currently at its peak due to the “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” Agreement signed in 2016. It appears that there is no area where our cooperation does not extend, ranging from culture and health to the economy and politics.

Thanks to its participation in the China-CEE and Belt and Road formats, Serbia has successfully continued the development of its economy, and the

progress is visible in the improved road infrastructure and the development of the industrial sector.

Chinese companies have recognised the potential of this market, the stable macroeconomic environment, the proximity to Europe, and the candidate status for EU membership, which all together represent a recommendation for continued economic cooperation.

Dear colleagues,

With today's conference, the Institute of International Politics and Economics contributes to a better and more comprehensive understanding of complex contemporary international relations and the economy, thus fulfilling its mission to be a place of research excellence recognisable at the domestic and international levels.

As a prominent institute in the social sciences field in the Republic of Serbia, we do everything to ensure that our Institute and our researchers contribute to the development of social science in our country, and, due to that, over the past ten years, we have received all the awards you can see on the walls of this beautiful hall.

This time, I would like to single out the one we received this year, the Saint Sava Award of the Republic of Serbia for 2022, awarded as a recognition of our decades-long contribution to education and science.

Dear friends,

In addition to thanking the People's Republic of China for its principled support for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, I would also like to thank all the participants of this conference for their participation and analyses.

I want to express my gratitude to all the partners and organisers who have worked alongside our Institute to make "Dialogues on China" recognised as a conference to be counted on and which will have higher quality each year.

Once again, I wish you all successful work, and I hope our dear guests from abroad will have a pleasant stay in Serbia!

Long live China, long live Serbia!



# KEYNOTE SPEECH





# CHINA'S RESPONSES TO THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Ivona LAĐEVAC\*

**Abstract:** The last decades of the 20th century were very turbulent and caused major changes in international relations. To a significant extent, the changed balance of power between the world's leading countries has had an impact on international security. The changes became even more drastic with the transition to the 21st century. And while the majority of countries in the world met them unprepared, the People's Republic of China (PRC) distinguished itself by its ability to respond to them in a way that ensured its growing role in international relations.

**Keywords:** international relations, international security, People's Republic of China, strategic partnership, Russian Federation

## INTRODUCTION

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the collapse of the international order established at the end of World War II. As a consequence of that collapse, the world faced the process of regrouping forces in post-Cold War international relations, and the outcome of the regrouping was the creation of a formally multipolar world in which the dominance of one state, the United States of America (USA), stood out. In this way, the period of Pax Americana has begun, which a number of theorists of international politics refer to as the time of US hegemony (Lađevac, 2020).

The absolute dominance of one state in international relations, or at least the impression that such dominance exists, leads to a transformation of the balance of power, which, as such, presents a challenge to other states. In such circumstances, the given countries, first of all, change their foreign policy strategy, and if they cannot catch up with their competitors, they opt for alliances with similar countries in order to thwart the current hegemon.

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The paper presents findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2023", financed by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia and conducted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.

In contemporary international relations, this hypothesis is confirmed by the foreign policy strategy of the People's Republic of China (PRC), apparently caused by 'dissatisfaction with the world order led by America' (Bolt, 2014, p. 49).

### ABOUT THE WORLD ORDER

The term order comes from the Latin word *ordo*, which in its original interpretation means order, series, or class; that is, it represents a whole organised by establishing a hierarchy of parts included and integrated into that whole based on certain rules.

When we talk about the concept of order, we must always keep in mind that it is primarily about public order as a political entity that integrates other parts in itself, following certain rules based on common values and rights, and that it ultimately builds a political order of institutions with the state as its end by explanation (Simić, 1999).

The concept of order is always radically opposed to the concept of disorder as its antithesis, which prevails in a state of anarchy, irregularity, and chaos. It is precisely at this point that international relations, which in part of the already described literature are defined as anarchical and chaotic, therefore as a state of disorder, try to prevail by creating a particular order of states that should regulate them by means of particular rules. It is about the efforts of states throughout history to bring some order to their relations and create, at least for one part of them, regulatory rules that will generate some kind of prerequisite for peace and development, which most of them have generally strived for (Деспотовић & Дробац 2020).

There have been numerous efforts throughout the history of international relations to create some kind of International Order as a condition for the peaceful coexistence of nations. In the modern phase of the development of international relations, the term system is increasingly used in theory, which should cover more or less the same meanings as the term order in the case of many theoreticians, while for a number of them it has acquired a completely new, more specific meaning.

According to some of them, the term order was used more in the traditional school of thought and primarily for the state and its accompanying phenomenology, while the term system is more recent and should reflect the

specifics of changes in international relations and express the essence of international relations in an elastic and more scientific-informatics way through the theoretical matrix of systems and subsystems. For example, realists are more inclined to use the concept of order in a traditional way, as it is more suitable for them to express the essence of international relations as power relations. At the same time, institutionalists, legalists, and a number of neorealists are more inclined towards the concept of system as an expressive analytical expression (Trapara, 2017).

The world has been in a constant process of changing since the 1970s, even before the new, massive challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Global connectivity was made possible by fast information and communication technology. The field of international relations has grown increasingly intricate. Worldwide, there have been new disturbances in international relations.

The end of the bipolar world called into question the place and role of the state, exposing all problems of power. The geopolitical transition of power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific region (especially from the United States to China) is still ongoing. It was confirmed by geopolitical analysts such as Nye, Brzezinski, and Kaplan (Lađevac & Mileski, 2022).

Changes in international relations, new driving processes, and directions of development are not only the impression of member states of the international community but an objective fact recognised in the United Nations system as well. Although this organisation is often criticised for failing to adapt its activities to the changed circumstances, under its auspices, there have been attempts to identify the challenges faced by the actors in international relations.

Thus, at the session of the General Assembly of the United Nations at the end of 2004, the then Secretary General, Kofi Annan, presented a document in which he pointed to the fact that the world is at a crossroads and that it is necessary to reach a consensus regarding threats and challenges with which the world organisation, as well as its individual members, meet every day. With particular emphasis on the differences in the characteristics of international relations in 1945 and international relations in 2004, the aforementioned document summarises six categories of threats that the world is facing today:



1. Threats of an economic and social nature, which include poverty, infectious diseases, and destruction of nature;
2. Interstate conflicts;
3. Internal conflicts, including civil wars, genocide, and other forms of serious criminal offences;
4. Nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons;
5. Terrorism;
6. Transnational organised crime (see more: United Nations, 2004).

In addition to these new or non-traditional challenges, regardless of globalisation as a phenomenon that erases borders, states continue to face traditional, realistic challenges and issues of strengthening and preserving power, which show that territory, as one of the basic categories of realism, just like political geography, has not lost its importance.

### **CHINA AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER**

International relations abound with diverse circumstances and factors that pressure states to opt for alliances and/or partnerships instead of confrontational relations. In the background of such determinations, there was always the interest of preserving the territory, the population, and, to a possible extent, political stability. However, modern international relations, under the influence of globalisation and the growing interdependence caused by it, differ in the fact that states, as well as their populations, face new challenges and threats to which it is not always easy to find an answer. Precisely, these new challenges and ways of overcoming them made states more creative in responding to them (Lađevac, 2020). China showed its creativity through the development of new strategies.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, China often proved willing to play by international rules and norms. As its economy grew, however, Beijing assumed a more active role in global governance, signalling its potential to lead and challenge existing institutions and norms. The country boosted its power in four ways: it took on a more significant role in international institutions, advertised its increasing influence, laid the groundwork to create some of its own organisations, and sometimes subverted global governance rules.

A prominent challenge appeared in 2013 when Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the remarkable initiative of restoring an old idea, the idea of the One Belt, One Road Initiative, which very soon became globally known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Although this initiative, by its nature, was an example of connectivity politics—it includes investment in infrastructure and international lending, broadening cooperation with and influencing institutions in research, finance, and policy-making, acquiring international media houses, and disseminating technical and regulatory standards—reactions that followed were not positive. The idea was criticised as pursuing hegemon policy, Chinese intentions to rule the world, and even splitting the European Union (Lađevac & Jović-Lazić, 2022).

For Chinese, the Belt and Road Initiative has elements immanent to connectivity policy: proactivity, multidimensionality, discourse power, and the internationalising impact of the Communist Party. Some scholars consider “proactivity” (*zhudongxing*) as a key aspect of connectivity politics because it can be asserted in political rhetoric that one’s own foreign policy is committed to the idea of “openness”. China is also pursuing this strategy beyond the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is attempting to involve more and more countries by using “openness” and “expanding the circle of friends” among groups such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS (Lađevac & Jović-Lazić, 2022).

Although the Belt and Road Initiative turned out to be very effective and equally successful in responding to the changing world order, China designed a few new initiatives: the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, as a practical contribution to the concept of community with a common future for humanity. These initiatives offered China’s solution to facing the changes in the world.

### **Global Development Initiative**

President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Development Initiative (GDI) at the General Debate of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, calling on the international community to accelerate implementation of the 2030 SDGs for more robust, greener, and more balanced global development and foster the development of a global community with a shared future. The GDI embraces the people-centred core

concept, follows the guidelines of practical cooperation, and advocates the spirit of open and inclusive partnership. Focusing on the development agenda, the GDI meets the needs of various countries and attracts nearly 70 countries to join the Group of Friends to work together on poverty alleviation, food security, COVID-19 and vaccines, financing for development, climate change and green development, industrialization, the digital economy, and connectivity.

The core concepts and principles of the Global Development Initiative are: prioritising development as a key to all problems but also as the prerequisite for safeguarding world peace and protecting and promoting human rights; people-centred as an expression of the need to continuously improve people's livelihoods and enhance their sense of happiness, gain, and security; leaving no country and no one behind as a promotion of inclusive development (MFA, 2021).

Priority areas addressed by the Global Development Initiative are: poverty alleviation, food security, COVID-19 and vaccines, financing for development, climate change and green development, the digital economy, and connectivity.

There is no doubt that defined priority areas request a cooperation network, i.e., multilateral cooperation.

Above all, the GDI should effectively mobilise and allocate resources to forge the greatest possible synergy for development and continue to build consensus around development as a priority to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

### **Global Security Initiative**

The Global Security Initiative (MFA, 2023a) as the concept of "China's vision of shared, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security" was presented by the President of the People's Republic of China during the Boao Forum in April 2022. Although a closer explanation of the content of this concept was not given on that occasion, it became clear in the following period that this initiative aimed at strengthening multilateral forms of cooperation essential for preservation of global security. At the same time, traditional and non-traditional security threats were equally defined as the basic challenges.

The key principles of the Global Security Initiative are formulated as: commitment to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security; commitment to respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; respecting the goals and principles of the UN Charter; commitment to taking seriously the legitimate security concerns of all countries; commitment to peaceful resolution of differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation; and maintaining security in traditional and non-traditional domains.

In that respect, China is ready to conduct bilateral and multilateral security cooperation with all countries and international and regional organisations under the framework of the Global Security Initiative and actively promote coordination of security concepts and convergence of interests. China calls on all parties to carry out single or multiple forms of cooperation in aspects including but not limited to the following ones so as to pursue mutual learning and complementarity and to jointly promote world peace and tranquility.

The GSI pursues the long-term objective of building a security community and advocates a new path to security featuring dialogue over confrontation, partnership over alliance, and win-win over zero-sum. Over 80 countries and regional organisations have expressed their appreciation and support.

### **Global Civilization Initiative**

On March 15, 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping introduced the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting as another important public good China shared with the world in the new era (MFA, 2023b). After the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the GCI will inject strong impetus into advancing humanity's modernization process and building a community with a shared future for mankind.

The Global Civilization Initiative includes everything China has been doing and creating in the last ten years. In contrast to the economic and security elements discussed earlier, the Global Civilization Initiative was first concisely presented in a speech by the Chinese President Xi Jinping in March 2023. It rests on the fact that we are all different. Of the two directions, one of which is to reduce diversity and the other to promote respect for differences between

cultures, the Global Initiative proposes to take the best. It is necessary to preserve differences, but not at the cost of destroying what is good.

The Global Civilization Initiative advocates respect for the diversity of civilizations, the common values of humanity, the importance of inheritance and innovation among civilizations, and robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

Even in the current state of international relations, burdened with numerous challenges, China remains devoted to advocating the idea of creating a Global Community of Shared Future. But it goes even further than simple advocating. China offered exact solutions: the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, and the Global Security Initiative.

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**RISING CHINA  
IN THE NEW  
INTERNATIONAL  
CONTEXT**

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# IS CHINA REVISIONIST? CHINA, THE POLITICAL WEST, AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Richard SAKWA\*

**Abstract:** American strategic documents in recent years have denounced China as a revisionist power. This paper examines whether that really is the case. It defines the meaning of “revisionism” in the context of international politics and then defines the character of the international system and China’s relationship with it. The paper then looks at China’s recent conduct in the sphere of international politics and its relations with the political West. At the level of the international system, China is assessed as a conservative status quo power, as befits a founder state of the United Nations system and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. However, at the level of international politics, China has exhibited signs of revisionism. The Global Security Initiatives and other documents indicate that China is ready to exert its growing power to shape international affairs and global developmental agendas. This revisionism, paradoxically, is pursued in defence of the international system. Hence, it can be defined as neo-revisionism: defending the international system but revising the conduct of international politics. Beijing considers that the international system is threatened by America’s ambivalent relationship to it, exercising multilateralism when it advances Washington’s national interests but discarding it when it is perceived to threaten its positions. From this perspective, it is the US that has become a genuinely revisionist power. Neo-revisionism always has the potential to become fully-fledged revisionism when changing practices transform the system itself. The perils and opportunities of the present conjuncture, marked by the clash of revisionisms, are assessed.

**Keywords:** Revisionism, neo-revisionism, international system, international politics, Global Security Initiative.

China is increasingly accused of being more than a spoiler but an outright disruptor.<sup>1</sup> As Cold War II intensified, US strategic documents and much Western commentary argue that China has become a revisionist power, intent on challenging the foundations of international order (Owen, 2021). But what precisely does this mean? China, along with Russia and some other rising

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws from Sakwa, 2023.

powers, seek to change the conduct of international politics and thus repudiate the primacy of the US and its allies. However, the goal is certainly not to destroy the Charter international system, as it has developed since 1945. As a founder member and veto-wielding permanent member of the UN Security Council, it would be irrational for China to destroy a system that guarantees its great power status. This is balanced by increasing dissatisfaction with the way that international politics is conducted, above all what it considers to be the usurpation of international law and Charter principles by Washington and the political West more broadly, the US-led liberal international order, which has taken to calling itself the “rules-based order”, established during Cold War I and shaped by that conflict.

The assertion of multipolarity and sovereign internationalism renders China a neo-revisionist power, defending Charter principles but condemning the universalist pretensions of the political West. China’s defence of the Charter international system against the expansive ambitions of liberal hegemony reflects a status quo and conservative position. It turns the argument on its head. If this postulate is correct, it is the US and its allies that have become revisionists, not China. Thus, China positions itself as the defender of the established system and challenges only the intrusive and hegemonic practices of the liberal powers. The key documents issued by China in the recent period reflect this paradoxical position: defence of the Charter international system, but criticism of the existing balance of power in international politics. The challenge is not to Charter principles but to the practices of liberal hegemony.

### WHAT IS REVISIONISM?

Before going further, it is important to examine what we mean by revisionism. Barry Buzan distinguishes between three types. *Orthodox revisionism* is the classical contestation for privilege, power, and status and has been the norm since at least the eighteenth century as the great powers sought to enhance their comparative position. In the early post-Westphalian era, ideology was largely absent. Hence, the classic practices of diplomacy were devised to regulate conflict and manage the balance of power. There was not much in the way of an international legal system, and thus order emerged out of the relative balance of forces, and a

revisionist power was one that tried to change that balance. By contrast, *revolutionary revisionism* challenges the very foundations of the international system in which the conflict is fought. This characterised the revolutionary wars waged by France in the 1790s to 1815, the revolutionary socialist challenge led by Soviet Russia after 1917, and the Nazi revolution in Germany. In between, Buzan identifies a third category, *radical revisionism*, which is close to the model of neo-revisionism presented here (Buzan, 1991, pp. 303-24). Buzan offers the example of Third World countries in the 1970s trying to adjust the relative power balance within the system in the 1970s through the New International Economic Order (NIEO), and this is indeed an example of neo-revisionism. The goal is to change the practices rather than the system itself.

In our era, this takes the form of a struggle against what is perceived to be the usurpation by a group of states of the prerogatives that are held to be the property of the international system as a whole. This substitution generates a fourth category of its own, dubbed *inverted revisionism* by Philip Cunliffe. He argues that this describes ‘the historically unprecedented moment of status quo great powers pathologically gnawing away at the very order that they created—a revisionism that is “internal” to the status quo (hence “inverted”)’ (Cunliffe, 2020, pp. 21, 24-62). In this reading, the Atlantic powers subvert liberal internationalism’s own foundations by making exaggerated universal claims and engaging in ill-considered interventions. If this interpretation is correct, then the US hegemon itself becomes a revisionist power, no longer defending the status quo but seeking to entrench its power in an alternative world order that then claims the privileges and prerogatives of the system as a whole. The US-led sub-order, in this reading, seeks to substitute for the impartiality and autonomy of the system in which it is embedded.

This challenges classical power transition theories, which argue that revisionism is a typical characteristic of rising states and that the dominant power is interested in preserving the status quo. The current period is therefore characterised by a more fluid and dynamic situation in which the established categories of revisionist or status quo power are questioned (Chan, 2021). This inversion provokes two inter-related reactions: neo-revisionism and the creation of anti-hegemonic alignments, above all in the non-Western world (on Russia, see Sakwa, 2019).

## THE POLITICAL WEST CONDEMNS CHINA

The US *National Security Strategy* unveiled on December 18, 2017 (NSS-2017) warned against the ‘revisionist powers of China and Russia’, ranked alongside the ‘rogue powers of Iran and North Korea’, and the ‘transnational threat organisations, particularly jihadist groups’ (*National Security Strategy of the United States*, 2017, p. 25). The *Strategy* reflected the concerns of the traditional Republican national security establishment over those of the neoconservatives and liberal interventionists. The new strategy had nothing to say about promoting democracy, a key theme of the George W. Bush and Barack Obama presidencies, and instead reflected Donald Trump’s anti-globalist “America first” concerns. Traditional interpretations of primacy gave way to an agenda of American “greatness”, accepting not so much a multipolar world as one comprised of competing powers. China condemned America’s globalist and interventionist agenda, rejecting the insinuation that it was a ‘revisionist state’ and urging the US to ‘abandon its cold war mentality’ (RT, 2017).

These themes were prominent in the *National Defence Strategy*, an 11-page unclassified version of which was issued on January 19, 2018. The document noted that the US faced ‘increased global disorder’ in which ‘inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in US national security’. Top of the list of challengers was China, which was characterised as ‘a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbours while militarising features in the South China Sea’. China, along with Russia, as in NSS-2017, were labelled ‘revisionist powers’. The document noted the ‘resilient, but weakening, post-WWII international order’, and warned that competition with China and Russia threatened America’s global predominance and eroded its military advantage (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 2). The document made no bones about its concern over the loss of American military superiority, which used to be total and unquestionable: ‘We could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted. Today, every domain is contested—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace’ (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, p. 3). Such days would not return, and Russia and China were indeed the main challengers.

Biden’s *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* in March 2021 recognised the problem, but the response only highlighted the enduring

tension between autonomous multilateralism and US primacy. The document insisted that ‘the United Nations and other international organisations, however imperfect, remain essential for advancing our interests...Across a range of crucial issues... effective global cooperation and institutional reform require America to resume a leadership role in multilateral organisations’. Following the turbulence of the Trump years, the terrain and scope of the competition were clear. As the *Guidance* put it, ‘it is also critical that these institutions continue to reflect the universal values, aspirations, and norms that have underpinned the UN system since its founding 75 years ago, rather than an authoritarian agenda. In a world of deepening rivalry, we will not cede this vital terrain’ (White House, 2021, p. 13). This represented an important restatement of US commitment to the Charter system, both as a principle of association as well as the representation of a set of values, but in declaring that this was yet another arena for contestation, the autonomy of the Charter system was thereby diminished. The forceful assertion of democratic internationalism—the view that the ethical component in relations between states is of overriding importance—exacerbated the long-standing problem of double standards, where allies were treated more indulgently than opponents, but in certain respects ran counter to the pragmatic approach that had allowed the UN to be established in the first place.

The sovereign equality enshrined in the Charter system was now subordinated to the allegedly higher order advanced by the US and its allies. The radical post-Cold War model version of liberal hegemony destabilised its own achievements (cf. Ikenberry, 2020). Diplomacy gave way to a moral crusade. This was evident in NATO’s *Strategic Concept* adopted by the Madrid summit in July 2022, which accused China of striving ‘to subvert the rules-based international order’ (NATO, 2022, para. 13).

## CHINA AND THE WORLD ORDER

The question then appears to be the one posed by John Ikenberry: ‘Will China overthrow the existing order or become part of it?’ (Ikenberry, 2008, p. 23). This is a fundamentally misleading way of posing the question. China already considers itself a member of the international system by right, so there can be no question of “joining” anything else. Nevertheless, Ikenberry is right to question how China will behave within the international system.

After 1945, the US took the lead in creating the institutions of the liberal international order, which later provided the framework for globalisation, thus fostering China's rise. The liberal order is a power system, but it also has its own rules that are mostly compatible with the larger international system within which it is nested. China stands accused, above all by the US, of violating some of these rules. These infractions include the poor defence of intellectual property rights, unfair access to the Chinese domestic market, the dominance and distorting effect of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), militarising the South China Sea, and intimidating countries in which it has invested to prevent them from criticising China.

Beijing's early success in containing the COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied in spring 2020 by the radicalization of China's foreign policy rhetoric (the so-called 'wolf warrior' diplomacy), which trumpeted China's successes while hitting back hard against critics, an approach that proved deeply counter-productive. China moved beyond the legitimate striving for parity of esteem in the international system and advanced its governance model as superior to what it perceives to be a declining political West. The more assertive China of President Xi Jinping amounts to what Elizabeth Economy calls a 'third revolution', a new phase in communist China's development following the revolutionary élan of Mao Zedong and the 'quiet rise' masterminded by Deng Xiaoping. She notes that on becoming leader, Xi talked about the rejuvenation of the 'Chinese Dream', which was defined not as political reform or constitutionalism but 'a call for a CCP-led China to reclaim the country's greatness' (Economy, 2018, p. 4). The economy argues that Beijing seeks a radical change in international politics whereby the US is essentially pushed out of the Pacific and becomes merely an Atlantic power (Economy, 2021). Given the economic weight of the Asia-Pacific region, this would turn China into the new global hegemon (Doshi, 2021). The goal is no longer simply to exercise China's increased economic muscle, but Xi's vision of the centrality of China 'connotes a radically transformed international order' (Economy, 2022). The failure to distinguish between system and order renders the argument confused and also confusing.

The structural factors that prevented Russia from becoming part of the expanding political West after 1989 apply with even greater force to China, which never considered itself part of the historical, let alone the political, West. Ikenberry called for the liberal order to become 'so expansive and so

institutionalised that China has no choice but to become a full-fledged member of it', but the conditions of entrance into the 'liberal order' were problematic for Russia and prohibitive for China. Beijing will not enter into a hierarchical relationship with Washington, let alone become a subaltern like the post-war European states. Ikenberry is right to call for China's power to be exercised within 'the rules and institutions that can protect the interests of all states in the more crowded world of the future' (Ikenberry, 2008, p. 37). These are the rules not of the US-led liberal order but of the international system, which in large part overlap. But the other part is a US-dominated power system that China and Russia will resist joining as "vassals". The former provides a broad framework for sovereign development and a common peace order, working in partnership with the US and the political West if an appropriate formula for cooperation can be found.

### POWER AND PURPOSE

The sheer scale, power, sense of purpose, and historical grounding will make China a far more formidable power than the Soviet Union ever was. China is potentially the centre of its own model of world order, incorporating a modified version of sovereign internationalism into some sort of recreated tributary system. This China-centred order will subtly but corrosively subvert the norms and principles of the Charter international system, although not formally repudiating it. This is the fundamental charge advanced by China's critics in the West. China's return to global preeminence is a paradigm-shattering process, but although China strains at the limits of the Charter international system, it remains within it, defending globalisation and international law while enjoying the privileges and protections they afford. The US-China clash so far is between interpretations of order *within* the international system, but the conflict erodes the viability of that system.

Does that make China a revisionist power? In its rhetoric, the opposite is the case, and Beijing seeks to ensure that the international system becomes less hierarchical and more balanced. That means challenging liberal hegemony, and thus China (like Russia) becomes neo-revisionist, defending the international system against the encroachments of a particular sub-order. China is a staunch defender of post-1945 sovereign internationalism and thus condemns forced regime change. Xi stressed that China was a 'participant



and builder' of the international system, but in the same speech in September 2015, he emphasised that 'China merely seeks to reform and perfect the existing international system, and this does not mean fashioning a new order but only moving towards a more just direction' (Tang, 2018, p. 34). This was a point Xi made at the January 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, when he explicitly defended globalisation and once again proclaimed that China was a defender of the existing international system, thereby asserting China as a core leader in international politics (*Full Text of Xi Jinping Keynote at the World Economic Forum, 2017*). This entailed challenging the selectivity and arbitrariness of liberal hegemony, hence the conflict with the US.

It is in this context that China has assumed a stronger leadership position, overcoming its earlier reluctance to do so. Beijing condemns the expansive agenda of democratic internationalism and even more liberal hegemony but defends the more modest framework of the Charter international system and hence defends its principles (Weiss & Wallace, 2021). The war in Ukraine from 2022, however, threatens the viability of the Charter international system more than any event since 1945, with an interstate war provoked by a clash between interpretations of that order, prompting a return to the brutal great power politics that Charter multilateralism was precisely designed to avert. China was caught between its alignment with Russia and its declared commitment to Charter norms (Lukin, 2022).

## DECOUPLING: THE POLITICAL WEST AND CHINA

China is now caught in the same spiral of deteriorating relations with the political West that Russia had found itself trapped in. The US repeated with China the pattern of relations that had so disastrously failed with Russia. Many of the same factors were at work. The relationship had been based on two key principles. First, China's development would also benefit the West. For many years, this was indeed the case, with China being the locomotive for a sustained period of global economic growth in the 2000s, which pulled the world out of recession after the 2008 financial crash (Tooze, 2019). China's rise lifted millions out of poverty, but it also benefited the broader international community. However, common economic self-interest is not enough on its own to overcome diverging political and strategic imperatives. The second postulate was that engagement would lead to system transformation in China,

along the lines of Germany's "change through trade" strategy with the Soviet Union from the 1960s. The limitations of such an approach were exposed when Xi changed China's grand strategy from an essentially defensive posture to one actively advancing China's global interests.

In a country where the source of legitimacy has for hundreds, if not thousands, of years operated according to a different logic, it could hardly be expected that there would be systemic convergence. Whether this should take the specific form of the CPC rule is certainly debatable. Issues of human dignity, the rule of law, and constitutionalism have long been part of Chinese political discourse, but it is clearly a mistake to believe that China will turn into some sort of pale imitation of the historic West, let alone the political West as constituted during the Cold War. In the end, the two pillars crumbled: economic relations with China became increasingly perceived as zero-sum, and disappointment with China's failure to "reform" in a Gorbachev-like manner fostered suspicion and ultimately hostility.

Nevertheless, the political West is far from monolithic. French President Emmanuel Macron warned against exporting NATO-style divisions into the Asia-Pacific region. Others noted that the US had patiently handled the threat from the Soviet Union, and a similar approach would work for China (Zakaria, 2020). However, the scale and character of the challenge in this case are very different. Since the 2011 'pivot to Asia', the US has 'resisted the expansion of even entirely legitimate Chinese economic influence in the world'. This included 'the blank refusal to allow China a say' in the World Bank and the IMF 'commensurate with its economic weight in the world' (Lieven, 2021). China is not interested in exporting its ideology, but it does defend its positions and principles. It increasingly believes that the US response is no longer a matter of improving its bargaining position to reach some compromise in the future but 'is aimed at isolating China, ousting it from added value high-tech chains, slowing down its growth, drawing it into an arms race, and marginalising it in international affairs' (Kashin & Timofeev, 2021, p. 3). This certainly was the sentiment of the 2020 Trump White House *Strategic Approach* to China, which lamented that 40 years after the restoration of diplomatic relations, Washington could no longer expect China to become a fully-fledged market democracy. Instead, China had become a threat to the US economy, values, security, and leadership, and the response had to be a

more competitive approach and pressure to defend US prosperity, although this should not cross the line to open conflict (White House, 2020).

An epochal separation is under way. The Chinese and American economies had become entwined and even interdependent, but now, with brutal resolve, the divorce began. The “clean networks” policy announced in August 2020 sought to guard ‘our citizens’ privacy and our companies’ most sensitive information from aggressive intrusions by malign actors’, such as the CPC. A comprehensive programme of technological decoupling was envisaged, with Huawei in the sphere of communications excluded from 5G development and Chinese media and chat platforms, such as Tik-Tok, constrained. China was excluded from US-based cloud-based storage systems, undersea cables, and even US mobile app stores (Pompeo, 2020). Trump banned the supply of microprocessors, forcing China to develop a more self-sufficient technological base but causing untold economic damage in the meantime. Biden’s CHIPS Act in 2022 committed \$50bn to “reshore” microchip manufacturing from Asia. Four decades of engagement based on cooperation and mutual benefit came to a shuddering end.

The US slid ‘into open-ended conflict with China with eerily little debate’. Politicians in Washington competed to show their toughness. The underlying rationale was that ‘pre-Trump Washington was a place of Whiggish credulity, forever betting on material enrichment to make of China a vast Japan or South Korea: a democracy, a friend. In this account, its admission to the World Trade Organisation [in December 2001] was the inadvertent crowning of a rival by American enablers’. In this reading, the only options were ‘liberal naïvété and a second Cold War’, when in fact a succession of American leaders had imposed sanctions and other restrictions on China. The absence of a debate now was ‘disconcerting’ (Ganesh, 2020). There were dissenting voices arguing that there was no need for the US to become trapped in the logic of great power conflict and that the US should avoid a policy of containment, prevent decoupling, and avert a new Cold War. Instead, a policy of ‘conditional competitive cooperation’ with allies and China should lead rather than destroy the global economy (Bergsten, 2022). The contrasting view argued that the West had been caught unawares in helping China develop, failing to take seriously the CPC’s commitment to maintain its power, allowing China to exploit the policy of engagement to build up national power to pursue its geopolitical goals (Friedberg, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

China's spectacular rise caught the US unprepared. As one commentary puts it, 'American political culture has never been particularly adept at dealing with foreign adversaries' as equals. Accustomed to post-Cold War unipolarity, China's emergence as a peer competitor found America trapped in a 'very precarious, painful, and incoherent process' of adjusting to a new global balance of power (Kortunov, 2020). In successive years from 2021 on, China advanced the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative. These were flanked by other important documents, notably the Joint Statement with Russia of February 4, 2022, just weeks before Russia launched its 'Special Military Operation' in Ukraine on February 24, and the document 'US Hegemony and its Perils' of February 20, 2023. The latter text began as it meant to continue: 'Since becoming the world's most powerful country after the two world wars and the Cold War, the United States has acted more boldly to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, maintain and abuse hegemony, advance subversion and infiltration, and wilfully wage wars, bringing harm to the international community' (PRC MFA, 2023). The dominance of the political West is being challenged as never before, with a growing group of states aligning with post-Western associations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the BRICS association, as well as alternative financial institutions and trading arrangements. For the political West, this represents a threat to "global order", but for the post-Western states, it is the opposite: a reversion to the operation of the international system as originally intended in 1945. It signals the "democratisation" of international politics to reflect the maturing of the post-war order. In that context, the definition of revisionism has itself become the core issue in the political contestation of our era.

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# THE ORDERING OF THE WORLD: EASTERN AND WESTERN VISIONS?

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**Abstract:** Interactions between nations necessarily occur in specific temporal and spatial contexts and depend on how nations perceive each other. These perceptions are strongly affected by cultural settings and historical experiences. In this respect, the populations of the EU member states and those countries aspiring to become EU member states especially perceive the EU as normative. Outside of this context, the normative character of the EU is far less obvious. The fact that China is increasingly portraying itself as a norm/system setter rather than a norm/system taker, as is visible in the country's Global Security Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, has therefore been conducive to the narrative that a new bipolar world order is developing: the United States and Europe against China. The call for economic decoupling from China (recently re-conceptualized as "de-risking"), which is the direct result of the race for technological leadership between the Western world on the one hand and China on the other hand, can be seen as an important outcome of this narrative. Following the observation by Michel Foucault that discourses have a formative power, this contribution underscores the potential self-fulfilling prophecy power of the bipolar world narrative and formulates a "one world" narrative as an alternative. The viability of this "one world" narrative is related to the fact that China, just as any other country, compartmentalises its foreign policy, which opens perspectives for diversified policies.

**Keywords:** narratives, European Union, normativity, historical experiences, perceptions.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The document *Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu dang de bai nian fendou zhongda chengjiu he lishi jingyan de jueyi* (eng. *Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the major achievements and historical experience of the Party's century-long struggle*), published on November 16, 2021, states that 'Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The main task facing the Party

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is to realise the first centenary goal, start a new journey to realise the second centenary goal, and continue to move forward towards the grand goal of realising the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' (Xinhua, 2021b). This evaluation of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, which started on November 8, 2012, and on which Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), testifies to the way the Central Committee of the CCP evaluates the Party's economic and political achievements and how it projects CCP leadership into the foreseeable future. Taking a broader perspective, this statement also reveals how the CCP perceives and narrates the 'century of national humiliation' (*bai nian guo chi*) that started with the country's defeat in the First Opium War (1839–1842). With respect to the latter, in the conclusion to their article *Narrative in Political Science*, Molly Patterson and Kristen Renwick Monroe (1998, p. 330) noted that:

Narratives—the stories people tell—can provide a rich source of information about how people make sense of their lives, put together information, think of themselves, and interpret their world. Narratives can be indicative not only of the experiences that people have but also of the means of interpreting those experiences that are available to them in a given culture.

The observation that actual experiences, over a course of time, are interpreted within a certain cultural context and that this interpretation is narrated in such a way that some “sense” is given to these experiences (the “rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” as “second centenary goal” for 2049 (the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China) after, in 2021, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the CCP was celebrated as its “first centenary goal”), provides some important cues for understanding the shifting rhetoric in US-China and EU-China relations. It is this shifting rhetoric that is the topic of this contribution.

### SOME HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

When the government of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) was forced into the “unequal treaties” (*bu pingdeng tiaoyue*) as a result of its defeat in the First Opium War (1839–1842), the event that has become recognised as the beginning of China's “century of national humiliation”, this not only called into question Qing leadership but also Confucianism, which

had been the dominant political ideology of the unified imperial dynasties ever since the founding of the Han dynasty in 206 BCE. The fact that this defeat happened under a Manchu government resulted in the growth of Chinese Han nationalism and the aspiration to create a Han Chinese state, a concept that was coined “ethnic nation-state” (*minzu guojia*) and modelled on Western political, social, and economic ideas. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Republic of China (*Zhonghua Minguo*) was founded, and the Republican government decided to join World War I in 1917. This was partly given in by what Xu Guoqi (2005, p. 9) explained in the following terms: ‘[t]he war provided the momentum and the opportunity for China to redefine its relations with the world [...] and thus position itself within the family of nations’. This Chinese hope was, however, shattered as the 1919 Versailles Treaty stipulated that the German possessions were not to be returned to China but would be transferred to Japan. International recognition as a nation-state among equals was once again put to the question as a result of the civil war that ensued between the Nationalists and the Communists after the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). The CCP came to power on the mainland with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), but this could not prevent the Nationalist Guomindang (GMD) from continuing to rule on Taiwan and some smaller islands in the Taiwan Strait.

Just as the GMD had done after the fall of the empire, the CCP also endeavoured to create a Chinese nation-state, no longer one that was based on ethnic premises (*minzu*), but one that would be built on Marxist-Leninist concepts. In this process of transforming imperial China into a modern nation-state among equals, Avery Goldstein (2020) has discerned two major phases. The first phase concerns the period from the establishment of the PRC in 1949 to 1992. The major concern of the country’s leadership in this period was the acceptance and survival of the PRC as a nation-state, as, in the context of the Cold War, the Western world continued to recognise GMD leadership on Taiwan as the sole legitimate successor to Chinese imperial rule, and the GMD government represented China in the United Nations. Indeed, in the context of the Cold War, during which the division between the capitalist West and the communist East constituted a forceful geopolitical discourse, the members of the European Communities anchored their geopolitical identity in the transatlantic community (Gaenssmantel, 2014, p. 276). It was in these circumstances that the PRC forged an alliance with the Soviet Union. The *Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance (Zhong-Su youhao*

*tongmeng huzhu tiaoyue*) signed on February 14, 1950, had to help rebuild the Chinese economy, a prerequisite for the PRC to survive as a nation-state. The fact that the Soviet leadership, confronted with the disastrous outcome of the Great Leap Forward (*da yue jin*), discontinued the Treaty in 1958 helps to explain why, after 1958, the PRC started to present itself as the “third way” of economic and political development, a policy aimed at African and Latin American countries.<sup>1</sup> The economic debacle as a result of the Great Leap Forward was one important element that enabled economically more moderate voices within the CCP to come to prominence. It is this development that would lead to a rapprochement to the Western world and that would, eventually, result in the establishment of diplomatic ties with the majority of the European countries in the 1970s and with the United States (US) in 1979. The fact that the PRC had been voted into the United Nations on October 25, 1971, replacing the GMD government of Taiwan as a legitimate representative of “China”, with African countries playing a major role, was of fundamental importance herein.<sup>2</sup>

Coupled with the conviction that it was necessary to improve living standards for the Chinese people, the international recognition of the PRC as a sovereign nation-state was an important asset for Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) to launch his “reform and opening-up” (*gaige kaifang*) policies in 1978. China’s choice to pragmatically engage in economic collaboration with the West while maintaining its authoritarian political system—the so-called “socialism with Chinese characteristics” (*you Zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi*)—incarnates a transition from Mao Zedong’s (1893–1976) “revolutionary nationalism” to “developmental nationalism”. One might even argue that “developmental nationalism” became China’s “Grand Strategy”.<sup>3</sup> This pragmatic attitude and the knowledge that a stable international context over a prolonged period of time

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<sup>1</sup> This policy was “materialised” in ideological support for the independence movements and revolutionary groups that opposed several established African and Latin American regimes. See Larkin, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> The PRC was voted into the UN with 34 percent (26 countries) of its votes from African countries, thus passing the required two-thirds majority. Ten of the fifteen African countries that supported Taipei changed to the PRC in the next few years. See Wei, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Matossian, 1971, pp. 113-122, in this respect, claims that a pragmatic attitude that accepts those Western elements that are supportive of national interest and strength is of primordial importance for “developmental nationalism” to be successful.

is conducive to economic collaboration also explain Deng Xiaoping's (1904–1997) famous motto, 'observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide the capabilities and bide the time; never claim leadership; make some contributions' (*lengjing guancha; wen zhu zhenjiao; chenzhe yingfu; taoguang yanghui; shan yu shou zhuo; jue bu dangtou; you suo zuowei*) for the country's international policies (cf. Chen, 2005).

The end of the Cold War in the early '90s and China's increased economic collaboration with the West also explain the following statement President Bill Clinton gave during a speech he delivered at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University on March 9, 2000, i.e., in the process of admitting the PRC to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001:

By joining the WTO, China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products. It is agreeing to import one of democracy's most cherished values: economic freedom. The more China liberalises its economy, the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people—their initiative, their imagination, and their remarkable spirit of enterprise. And when individuals have the power, not just to dream but to realise their dreams, they will demand a greater say (Clinton, 2000).

The attitude to which President Bill Clinton gave testimony in the above quotation is in line with the "cultural conviction" that prevails in the West that it has a normative function in world politics. This interpretation is tantamount to the European integration process and the transatlantic security alliance, which were significantly enhanced with the EU and NATO membership of countries of Southern Europe that had thrown off their former authoritarian regimes and with former communist states after the demise of the Soviet Union. Corroborating the observation by Ian Manners (2002, p. 238) that the internal collapse of regimes across Eastern Europe was due to the fact that their ideology 'was perceived as unsustainable by its leadership and citizens' and 'by the collapse of norms rather than the power of force', this has indeed complemented the economic and political European integration project with the narrative that the EU is (also) a normative power. This narrative is instilled by the reality that the countries that aspire to EU membership agree to engage in shared practices that conform to a "logic of appropriateness", as is evident in concepts such as democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human

rights. In his characterization of the European integration process, Emilian Kavalski (2013, p. 251) therefore noted that:

When discussing the external affairs of the EU, most commentators note its inter-dependent politico-economic framework flaunting the benefits of liberal democracy. Such a context informs the EU's intent to promote the establishment of transparent forms of governance, viable market mechanisms, and strong civil societies in countries around the world. These objectives are the very reason why the Brussels-based bloc has been referred to as a normative power. Thus, and owing to the dominant focus on enlargement, the EU's normative power has been treated largely as coterminous with the transformative potential underwriting the dynamics of accession-driven conditionality.

The countries that are yet to join the EU, which share the same historical experience as those former authoritarian and communist countries that have already joined the EU and have given more weight to the transatlantic security order, share the same rationale. Anastas Vangeli (2022) has in this respect observed that,

[t]he Balkan countries that are yet to join the EU (i.e., Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo) still pursue the dream of EU membership as their utmost strategic priority.

## **A CHINESE ALTERNATIVE MODEL?**

The EU may be perceived and accepted as normative among the populations of its member states and of those countries that are aspiring to become EU member states.<sup>4</sup> This identity of the EU outside of Europe and its direct neighbourhood and outside of the purview and the prospect of EU membership have, however, not materialised (Kavalski, 2013, p. 249). In a context in which the balance of political and, at least until recently, economic power in the world seemed to be gradually shifting to China and in which the resilience of the democratic Western world was heavily tested in its

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<sup>4</sup> This finding was reaffirmed in a 2022 poll conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations. See Puglierin & Zerka, 2023, p. 27.

confrontation with successive economic, financial, migratory, political, and health crises, China has increasingly been perceived as presenting itself as a norm/system setter rather than as a norm/system taker. As noted by Pu Xiaoyu (2012, p. 365), a non-Western, *in casu* Chinese, normative order is theoretically speaking just as legitimate as a Western one.<sup>5</sup> When we in this respect evaluate the EU as a normative power against the possible Chinese alternative model, it appears that as much as the EU's normative power 'seems to be constrained to "Europe" and its neighbourhood', China's normative power 'does not seem to extend beyond the developing world and the non-West' (Kavalski, 2013, p. 263). Recent developments on the global arena hereby appear to have even enhanced this dichotomy, as public perceptions of China in Europe develop predominantly negatively (Turcsányi et al., 2020, p. 2), despite the bolstered interdependence of the European and Chinese economies.<sup>6</sup> This dichotomy is seen to be vocalised in the fact that China's integration into the world economic system, which is, according to Avery Goldstein, a second phase in China's development that started in 1992, has been seen to be accompanied by the rhetoric of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua*

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<sup>5</sup> Wang (2016) notes that, for a country to have strong discourse power, it has to come up with a set of international values or theories/doctrines that can benefit or potentially benefit the majority of the world's countries economically and also security-wise. Besides, the country itself has to practice and uphold this doctrine in a sustainable and predictable manner so that the doctrine is likely to become an ideological form of the international community.

<sup>6</sup> Of the 13 countries surveyed in September and October 2020 (the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), Russian and Serbian respondents have the most positive view of China, with almost 60% of respondents having very positive or positive views, and Latvia being the only EU country having a predominantly positive view of China (43% of respondents). The four Visegrad countries (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) end up in the middle of the spectrum, although with prevailing negative sentiments. Only Russian and Serbian respondents trust China more than they trust the EU and the United States. Even in Serbia, Russia is the most favoured foreign partner to be aligned with, not China. Also in Hungary, where Victor Orbán stated, 'We are sailing under a Western flag, though an Eastern wind is blowing in the world economy' (Braun, 2017) in his address to the Hungarian Permanent Council in 2010, public opinion in 2021 shifted to the negative when it concerns China's effect on democracy in other countries, and the US is the great power most positively seen. Even respondents in Russia and Serbia judge the human rights conditions in the EU better, albeit not with significant differences, than in the US, Russia, or China. See Turcsányi et al., 2020, pp. 2-6.

*minzu weida fuxing*). The launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (*yi dai yi lu changyi*) in 2013 has, in this respect, been interpreted as an illustration of China's bolstered confidence on the world stage. China's more recent Global Development Initiative (2021) and Global Security Initiative (2023) further add to this perception (see Global Development Initiative, 2021; The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper, 2023).

The recognition that narratives can be used as tools for nations to tell their stories and experiences, to create an international reality, and to make sense of how the world and international politics operate was, in this respect, clearly acknowledged by Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CCP, when he addressed a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee on May 31, 2021. On this occasion, he stated that China should have 'a profound understanding of how important and necessary it is to improve the country's international communication, and [...] develop a voice in international discourse that matches with China's comprehensive national strength and international status'. China, so he stated, should 'construct China's own discourse and narrative, interpreting China's practices by its own theories, [...] using new concepts, domains, and expressions to better tell China's stories and the spiritual strength behind the stories' (Xinhua, 2021a). Nadège Rolland (2020, p. 6) has estimated the importance of this new narrative for Beijing as 'whoever controls the narrative and formulates the norms and concepts, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of thought, can define the contours of a new order'. This underscores the statement by Alister Miskimmon et al. (2017, p. 6) that 'strategic narratives are a means by which political actors attempt to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors'. This is also illustrative of what Michel Foucault (1972, p. 49) stated:

Discourses are the practices that systematically form the object of which they speak. In addition, discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects; they constitute them, and in the practice of doing so, they conceal their own invention.

This regained self-confidence that, at least on an ideological level, falsifies the liberal conviction as expressed by President Bill Clinton in the quotation given above has incited a new narrative that expresses the "disappointment"

with the absence of democratic development in China. In the document *National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017)*, e.g., we read:

For decades, American policy was rooted in the belief that support for China's rise and its integration into the post-war international order would liberalise China [...] Contrary to our hopes, China expanded its power at the expense of the sovereignty of others [and] part of China's military modernization and economic expansion is due to its access to the U.S. innovation economy.

### A "ONE WORLD" NARRATIVE

China's economy is largely interdependent on the European (and US) economies, and the country needs economic collaboration to further make the transition from a manufacturing industry to a high-tech and innovative industry. This has recently been acknowledged by New Prime Minister Li Qiang when he mentioned the three "urgent tasks" (*jinqpo renwu*) for the Chinese economy: (1) restoring trust among private companies in the government; (2) attracting Foreign Direct Investments and restoring investors' trust; and (3) avoiding the "middle income trap" (see BBC, 2023). This explains why China, just as any other great power, compartmentalises its foreign policy and overall pursues a policy of "silent pragmatism" on major global issues so as not to jeopardise international cooperation for its economic development.

This observation gives peculiar value to the document *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, and the Council "EU-China – A Strategic Outlook"*, which states the following:

China is, simultaneously in different policy areas, a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance (European Commission, 2019, p. 1).

As Sven Biscop (2023, p. 11) stated, 'Artificially dividing the world into a "good", democratic and a "bad", authoritarian camp is a misreading of the dynamics of global politics'. An adjusted narrative, away from a bipolar one, needs to be created urgently. It is therefore important to acknowledge that although European citizens may, as mentioned above, increasingly value



China in negative terms, they are, however, not found to be majoritarily seeing China as a power that challenges and wants to undermine Europe (see Puglierin & Zerka, 2023, p. 4).

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# EURASIA IN THE 2020s: BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND DIVISION

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**Abstract:** The chapter provides a macro-perspective on the developments in China, the European Union, and Russia through the prism of the dialectics of integration and division against the background of the transformation of the world international system and the transition from hegemonism towards polycentrism. This transformation is interpreted in terms of a clash between *liberal internationalism*, enforced by liberal democracies and based on the concept of the rules-based order, on the one hand, and *sovereign internationalism*, on the other. The latter is seen as a common denominator among the heterogeneous group of countries constituting the *Global Majority* and adhering to peaceful coexistence. The countries of the EU are increasingly prone to *liberal authoritarianism (postliberalism)*, which is typical of large-scale securitisation and restriction of fundamental rights internally, and cementing the transatlantic partnership and lacking actorness externally. Russia, in turn, took steps to defend its vital interests and dared to solve the growing contradictions with the political West by military means. Russia's proxy conflict with the political West has accelerated its pivot to the East, opening the opportunity to transform the identity of the state and eliminate internal exponents of Westernism. While Russia is deepening its *comprehensive sovereignty*, China combines strengthening internal national security at different levels with proactive external initiatives aimed at the acceleration of cooperation and integration after the pandemic depression. Taking these dynamics into consideration, the paper tries to identify the risks, challenges, and opportunities of the interactions in Eurasia amidst the lack of strategic autonomy on the part of the EU, the intensifying offensive against China and Russia based on containment, deterrence, and encirclement (*CDE strategy*), and the increasingly complicated relations between China and the EU.

**Keywords:** China, sovereignty, European Union, hegemonism, postliberalism, Russia, sovereign internationalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Eurasia is the largest continent in the world and is abundant in an immense richness of cultures, religions, nations, political systems, and unique human experiences and worldviews. It was home to the leading empires in history, starting with the Mongol and Russian Empires and ending with the Great Qing China. Sometimes the vastness of the Eurasian landmass has become an obstacle to development and progress, but it turned out quite soon that this disadvantage could be overcome. The ancient Silk Road connected two opposite tips of the continent, stimulating an exchange of people, goods, and ideas. The heritage of this pivotal historical socioeconomic phenomenon has been recently revived by China under Xi Jinping's leadership (Frankopan, 2018).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was put forward by Xi in the middle of Eurasia, in Kazakhstan, ten years ago. It has been the first grand international initiative since the beginning of reforms and opening up after Mao Zedong's death. The BRI not only reflects China's economic rise and the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) but also responds to the relative stagnation of the world economy after the global financial crisis in 2007–2008, which cast doubt on the neoliberal model of globalisation and the Western development model as a whole. Both state and non-state actors need to seek new paths towards sustainable development, open new doors and horizons, and strive for understanding, recognition, and common prosperity. The BRI has been one such proposal and instrument aimed at establishing new partnerships and cooperation and delivering benefits to all sides (Wang, 2016).

## LIBERAL AND SOVEREIGN INTERNATIONALISM

An important aspect of the initiative is that its core lies in Eurasia, which enhances the continent's geopolitical and geoeconomic relevance and places it at the centre of global development all the more that individual Eurasian actors promote and are engaged in principal projects whose objective is to rearrange the international order to rid it of the negative effects of hegemonism (Zhao, 2020). The latter emerged from both the hard power and ideology of the Western actors, whose position strengthened immensely as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The decline of the socialist

superpower and fatal mistakes committed by Mikhail Gorbachev and his entourage in the course of Soviet perestroika paradoxically suspended the already ongoing transition to a polycentric world and revived and reinvigorated Western dominance. This structural imbalance with a wide array of controversial normative as well as material effects in economic, political, social, and cultural fields is being reversed in very recent times, especially thanks to China with its robust and dynamic economic basis and increasingly active external behaviour and Russia with its courage to actively oppose the hegemonic practices conducted by a handful of countries from the West.

The partnership between Beijing and Moscow has turned into the backbone of the emancipatory movement, which embodies and expresses the democratic aspirations of the 'Global Majority', that is, the international community minus the political West (Karaganov, 2022). The Sino-Russian partnership, however, is not exclusive and directed against any third party while setting no boundaries for mutual cooperation. Both politicians and experts, therefore, describe this relationship as a new pattern of international relations between major powers (Bai, 2023; Xi, 2023). From this perspective, the ties between China and Russia and their further expansion are not only one of the crucial elements and engines of the construction of a polycentric world order but also a necessary component of China's international initiatives. Last but not least, the thriving Sino-Russian partnership is a *conditio sine qua non* for the successful development and rise of dozens of countries with billions of people living on the Eurasian continent (Zemánek, 2020).

The Sino-Russian linkage can be seen as a cornerstone of regional and supraregional integration. Cooperation and integration among non-Western actors in Eurasia have specific characteristics different from Western patterns, which are based on *liberal internationalism*. The latter enforces the so-called *rules-based order* (RBO) as the only legitimate international order. The RBO does not reject the principles and international law based on the United Nations and its Charter but supplements them with rules that are formulated by the hegemon and selectively applied to enforce and protect its interests. Such a practice, naturally, is in breach of the democratic and inclusive nature of the UN system. Richard Sakwa (2023) shows how, after the end of the Cold War, the political West sought to impose its model on the international community and eventually invented the concept of the RBO as a political instrument of Western hegemonism.

An opposite model can be conceptualised in terms of *sovereign internationalism*. This paradigm is grounded in the UN Charter and the UN-centred system that was laid out by the Allies at the end of World War II. From my point of view, sovereign internationalism develops these foundations along the line of peaceful coexistence, which creates favourable conditions for both effective and equitable regulation and management of the international environment. Not by coincidence, sovereign internationalism is shared by the countries constituting the Global Majority despite the existing heterogeneity of interests, political regimes, socioeconomic models, and civilizational trajectories. The ongoing clash, which has been accelerated by the war in Ukraine, is not between “democracies” and “autocracies” but rather between liberal and sovereign internationalism, between the Global Minority and the Global Majority. The conflict centres on the fundamental question of whether the UN-promulgated normative framework, which is of a multilateral, inclusive, and democratic nature, can eventually materialise in a polycentric international order free of hegemonism (Zemánek, 2023). Sovereign internationalism is adopted by both China and Russia, being embodied in the regional integration projects—BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)—as well as China’s international initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (with its multilateral regional instruments like C+C5, 14+1, or CASCF), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), and last but not least in the free trade areas inclusive of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and 15 other concluded FTAs with 24 agreements under negotiation (Ministry of Commerce, 2023).

### EURASIA IN THE PAST AND TODAY

Peculiar forms of interstate interactions coincide with the abovementioned plurality of political regimes, socioeconomic models, and perspectives on the world in Eurasia. Modernization, which is sometimes conceptualised as a distinctive civilization (Eisenstadt, 2001), has brought diverse cultures and peoples closer to each other to such a degree that some authors argue that the entire world has been Westernised (Lukin, 2023). At the same time, the dominance of Western patterns of globalisation, ideology, and way of life has been increasingly challenged by alternative models whose

bearers are concentrated, especially in Eurasia. One can argue that this fact is far from random. The continent plays a central role in many geopolitical theories, starting with Halford Mackinder's and Karl Haushofer's concept of the Heartland. Rethinking the former's theory by John Spykman along the lines of the Rimland does not change anything in the centrality of the continent (Graziano, 2022). Both history and the present indicate that at least a part of the geopolitical thinking is relevant, since the competition and struggle over Eurasia typical of the permanent efforts of "maritime powers", that is, the US and, to a lesser degree, Britain, to control the continent, belong to a commonplace in the lives of the Eurasian peoples.

Even though I tend to consider geopolitics to be only a partial and limited perspective that cannot lay claims to universality and comprehensiveness, its dichotomy between land and "maritime powers" does provide a useful insight into the dynamic of international relations and some constants of the behaviour of individual actors. The geopolitics' insistence on the different nature of Eurasia and "maritime powers", nevertheless coincides with findings from other disciplines, including history, sociology, and anthropology. Chris Hann (2016) argues that Eurasian societies have tended to subordinate the economy to social and political imperatives and needs and prefer common interests and community to individualism. This German anthropologist goes on to assert that the evolution of industrial society (that is, capitalism) and modernity did not root out this long-term cultural feature, and even Western European societies have gradually come to a model of mixed economy with a strong principle of redistribution and solidarity, which have been traditionally ascribed to socialism during the modern era. If we follow this line of reasoning, we may argue that Eurasian societies have more in common than it seems at first glance. From this perspective, Chinese, Russian, Indian, Islamic, and European societies share a common ancient cultural pattern ("inclusive embeddedness"), which could be further examined, revived, and used for the development of communication, understanding, and cooperation throughout the vast continent.

Gerard Delanty (2003), in turn, points to the transition to a post-Western Europe, which can be interpreted as a certain revival of different cultural identities (especially Slavic-Orthodox and Islamic) within Europe itself. It can contribute to the departure from the perception of Europe as an essential part of the transatlantic community and the modern West under American



leadership and open the door for seeking new ties in the East. It would coincide with John Hobson's findings, which reveal the historically deep and substantial ties between Europe and Eastern civilizations (Hobson, 2004). Generally speaking, such rethinking of European identity and Europe's place in the world can be stimulated by the objective shift of the geoeconomic centre to East Asia, huge economic opportunities for Europeans in this region, as well as new initiatives aimed at mutually beneficial cooperation. It was the Chinese BRI that entered such a constellation and aroused interest among many European countries. This move was accompanied by an agreement on deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership and negotiations between the EU and China about the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) and other joint projects and activities, including a joint military exercise (European Union External Action, 2013; Stanley-Lockman, 2018). Cooperation with China and Russia, however complicated due to differing interests and a low level of understanding, could have provided Europe with sufficient instruments, sources, and stimuli for overcoming the 'secular stagnation' and a comprehensive socioeconomic transformation, as well as adoption to the conditions of post-Western polycentrism and post-industrial society (Jackson, 2018).

## **GEOPOLITICAL GAME CHANGERS**

This opportunity was, however, missed as a result of no less than two crucial geopolitical factors. First, the increasing pressure exerted by Donald Trump's administration on Beijing resulted in a trade war between both parties after Washington introduced tariffs and other trade barriers against China, referring to the alleged unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and risks to national security (Huang, 2023). Trump's democratic successor, Joe Biden, has continued the Republican course, making it even more assertive. The American side has imposed sanctions on Chinese subjects, considered the removal of Chinese companies from the domestic stock exchanges, introduced strict export controls, and last but not least, taken active steps in the Asia-Pacific to cultivate groupings of countries with the aim of deterring China's development, thus reviving the bloc mentality, creating divisions, and increasing tensions in the region. The establishment and reanimation of organisations such as the AUKUS, Chip4Alliance, I2U2, NATO, the Partners in Blue Pacific, and the QUAD are designated to containment,

deterrence, and encirclement ('CDE strategy') of China and Russia and follow older patterns employed during Cold War I (ANZUS, CENTO, SEATO, and CoCom). Nonetheless, some active measures against Beijing were introduced back under Barack Obama, so the anti-Chinese policy cannot be identified solely with Trumpism, with its protectionism and unilateralism. Obama's strategy of pivoting to Asia laid the foundations for larger engagement with China but also created space for possible disputes with the rising major power (Siripurapu, Berman, 2022). The confrontational stance adopted by both Republican and Democratic administrations points to a strengthening bipartisan consensus on China, which is, moreover, accompanied by a black-and-white perception of Russia and the staunch allegiance to transatlanticism in the case of Democrats, which paradoxically makes Donald Trump, with his pragmatism and realism, a more acceptable alternative.

Second, the continuous efforts to extend Western dominance eastward have violated Russia's core interests and provoked active counteractions from Moscow. Any country—and all the more a major power—has core interests and "red lines", and these should be taken into account in considering every step. The essential problem of the conflict with Russia is that the Western actors have given up realpolitik thinking and behaviour while resorting to radical moralism and normative declarations, which might be of some interest in political theory but definitely not in political practice. The war over Ukraine is multilayered and multifaceted, and the simplistic idea that there is only one aggressor and one victim belongs to the realm of fairy tales and has nothing to do with actual life. The conflict has both *progressive* and *regressive* impacts. The Kremlin's decision to launch the military operation has been accelerating the democratisation of international relations and the global political landscape and strengthening the rise of the Global Majority. In other words, the war gave a strong impetus to the emancipatory movement of those actors who have been marginalised, oppressed, and exploited by the leading Western countries and institutions, the Global Minority. Not surprisingly, therefore, some experts and politicians interpret Russia's military campaign in terms of a catalyst for a struggle against neocolonialism and Western hegemony (Tikhonov, 2023; Valdai Discussion Club, 2023).

This progressive impact on a global scale is accompanied by a regress in Russo-European relations and the position of Europe as such. The relations between Russia and both the EU and individual member states hit their long-

time minimum, and mutual cooperation has been suspended in some countries entirely. The war over Ukraine thus destroyed the remnants of Gorbachev's "anti-Fulton" heritage and resuscitated the mentality and practices of Cold War I. The European elites, whose part was capable of pragmatic interactions with Moscow, abandoned any ambitions to conduct an independent foreign policy, sought ways of mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia, and accepted American hegemony. While the European countries have launched a wide-scale campaign to decouple from Russia, discontinue the imports of relatively cheap raw materials from the country, and replace them with much more expensive sources from different suppliers, including those from the US, Washington apparently continues to do business with Russia if necessary. According to recent data, the US doubled its imports of Russian uranium in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022, and its purchases reached the highest level since 2005 (Al Mayadeen, 2023). It follows that the US is largely benefiting from the war to the detriment of the minor European partners (Politico, 2022). The Europeans have cut themselves off from one of the crucial partners needed for Europe's economic development at a time when the EU is about to carry out the green transformation and is suffocated by high inflation. In an opening speech at the EU Ambassadors Annual Conference in October 2022, Josep Borrell noted that the EU could have flourished thanks to security protection from the US and economic cooperation with China and Russia. The European Commission's vice president realistically observed that these favourable conditions were over (Borrell, 2022). However, this basic observation has not been accompanied by a sober, unbiased analysis or a comprehensive realpolitik strategy.

## EUROPE'S IMPASSE

The ideological framework implemented by the EU actors and adopted by the transatlantic ally obstructs the development of any pragmatic vision. A constructive attitude towards the war in Ukraine and Russia alike is missing, despite the simple fact that Russia will remain Europe's biggest neighbour. Instead, in August 2023, Borrell made a statement declaring the sanctions against Russia economically and politically efficient, and morally right (Borrell, 2023). While concealing the serious impacts on the EU itself, the representative of EU diplomacy highlighted the slump in trade with Russia as the main achievement. In the meantime, Russian experts take note of the specific

historical context of this stance. The EU leaders set the reduction of trade with Russia as the chief parameter for evaluating the efficiency of sanctions. Interestingly, the same parameter was made one of the conditions of accession to the EU for CEE countries. In the course of Cold War I, the European Economic Community (EEC) promoted regional integration in Western Europe but at the same time created obstacles for trade and other forms of economic cooperation with third parties, including the Soviet Union and COMECON. This logic of inner integration and external protectionism has been inherent in the postwar European integration process since its inception (Bordachev, 2023). The present sanctions against Russia and increasing protectionist measures excluding Chinese subjects from the European single market and its individual sectors can therefore be seen against this background.

The strategic political impotence, together with the adherence to the transatlantic paradigm among the European elites, has significantly contributed to the loss of economic dynamics and performance, the emergence of multiple crises that may bring about a substantial deterioration of living standards, the loss of historical optimism, which was a typical feature of Western modernity no later than since the French Revolution, and last but not least, the deindustrialization of the cradle of capitalism. The lack of actorness and subordination to the transatlantic ally is accompanied by the acceptance of external expansionism and internal repression, both of which are based on the discursive strategy of inventing the external and internal enemy to justify and legitimise the repression and militarism and gain public support for these policies.

The US hegemony over Europe has several objectives, and one of them is creating divisions throughout Eurasia. The European elites have failed to play an independent role and act against the pragmatic interests of the nations. The discrepancy between people's interests and actual policies, between rationality and ideology-driven behaviour, and between democracy and the hegemonic "liberal" ideology (in conjunction with shifts in the external environment) has triggered the process of transformation of liberal democracies into *postliberal authoritarian* regimes. Liberal authoritarianism is not a new phenomenon, but the scope, aim, and context of the present authoritarian turn are indeed new and perhaps irreversible. That is why I conceptualise the present, qualitatively new developmental stage of the

liberal democratic model in the era of the global transition to polycentrism as *postliberalism* (Zemánek, 2023).

## POSTLIBERALISM AND POLYCENTRISM

The European liberal democracies increasingly abandon or modify some liberal fundamentals such as free trade, freedom of speech and research, and the right to property, as these are subject to *national security* interests. Securitisation and protectionism are becoming the main tendencies today (Echikson, 2023). The securitisation entails the introduction of investment screening mechanisms, the exclusion of foreign subjects from strategic fields such as the energy industry and telecommunication, the restriction of possibilities of joint research and academic cooperation, the exclusion of Chinese nationals from studying specific subjects (especially technology, nuclear physics, and so on), the ban on Confucius Institutes, or the prospective introduction of laws on foreign agents (Vinocur, 2023). Even though these policies have multiple negative effects and do not avoid excesses and mistakes, there can also be identified positive sides of this process, such as the focus on own security, strengthening of resilience and military capabilities, countering excessive external interference into internal affairs, and interest in boosting domestic or regional production capabilities that correspond with analogous processes in other countries and regions and create fertile ground for autonomy and actorness, which are prerequisites for successful development in a polycentric world.

Russia has developed a strategy of strategic and comprehensive sovereignty, which has been accelerated by the proxy war with the political West over Ukraine (Zemánek, 2022). The conflict made Russia's pivot to the Global Majority inevitable and provoked the need for a multilayered revision of state policies and a rethinking of national identity, accompanied by necessary purges in the administrative apparatus. At the normative level, the concept of Russia as a peculiar state-civilization is being developed as a part of the revision of identity and the possible emergence of a new state ideology. It is worth noting that the political leadership is not against cooperation with the Western actors, but any development of relations is conditioned by mutual respect and equality. Moscow does not prefer the formation of bloc politics in the Cold War spirit but the institutionalisation of multipolarity and

further pragmatic integration (Kosachev, 2023; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023b). It focuses on support for the vision of the Greater Eurasian Partnership and active involvement in a wide array of multilateral organisations whose roles will be strengthened. The unprecedented enlargement of the BRICS is a typical example of this tendency (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023a).

Similarly, China combines the protection of her national security interests and emphasis on domestic development and advancement of internal capabilities with active engagement in external affairs, deepening of reforms, and opening up. From this perspective, there is no contradiction between such strategies as Made in China 2025, dual circulation, or the adjustment of the Law on Foreign Relations on the one hand, and the BRI, GCI, GDI, GSI, or the concept of community with a shared future for mankind on the other. At the same time, it is fair to admit that all these initiatives embody the paradigm of sovereign rather than liberal internationalism and, therefore, go against Western hegemonism. It will produce controversies and conflicts, but these are hardly avoidable in the course of the transition to a democratic and polycentric international order.

## CONCLUSION

The EU has a positive vision of strategic autonomy, which could provide it with lacking actorness. Europe is torn between allegiance to Washington, which entails further strengthening of securitisation, protectionism, and isolation from the rest of Eurasia, and a difficult path towards strategic autonomy. It must be emphasised at this point that both China and Russia do wish for the EU to be autonomous, strong, and prosperous. Some leaders understand the need for autonomous development and the risks posed by US hegemony, for instance, Emmanuel Macron and Viktor Orbán (Anderlini and Caulcutt, 2023; Grove, 2023). Overall, however, the European elites are not prepared for such difficult tasks, being prone to reactionary and authoritarian policies (in a paradoxical mixture with cultural progressivism, weakening social coherence and identity), which go against pragmatic cooperation and globalisation while leading to isolation and economic and technological backwardness. Not by coincidence, major macroeconomic parameters are deteriorating from a comparative perspective. The share of

the EU in global GDP based on purchasing power parity decreased to 14.56% in 2022, compared to 15.39% of the US and 18.92% of China. Prior to the economic crisis in 2006, the figures amounted to 18.13% (EU), 18.60% (US), and 10.24% (China), while Russia's position has been significantly weaker but stable, oscillating around 3% (International Monetary Fund, 2023). China is the EU's largest partner for imports of goods (20.8% in 2022) and the third-largest partner for exports (9.0% in 2022). Between 2012 and 2022, the EU's imports from China nearly tripled while its exports almost doubled. A similar trajectory can be observed in the case of Sino-Russian economic exchange (Global Times, 2023).

The economic flows, therefore, reflect the objective rise of China in contrast to the (geo)political thinking and ideology that are working in the opposite direction. If the EU continues to deepen restrictions aimed at China and ignore Russia's interests, Europe's socioeconomic problems will likely worsen. The structural transformation of the global landscape is based on the complex dialectics of globalisation, regionalization, and protectionism on the one hand and hegemonism and genuine multilateralism on the other. The transition to polycentrism, nevertheless, requires a revived *realpolitik* in order to adapt to new circumstances together with classic diplomacy to mitigate and solve the risks of military conflicts, whose possibility will be higher than in the period after the end of Cold War I. From a pragmatic perspective, the transatlantic alliance poses an obstacle to Europe's peaceful development. In contrast to Russia, the European elites have not understood the need for a pivot to Eurasia, despite the economic and geopolitical reasons as well as metacultural affinities. One might conclude that only the Eurasian pivot can bring long-term, sustainable development and peace to Eurasia in general and Europe in particular. This pivot entails a path towards a single economic area with indivisible security from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Arctic to the Indian Oceans. In this regard, China's role will be irreplaceable.

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# THE GLOBAL CHINESE INITIATIVES AND THE EMERGING PLACE OF CHINA IN THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL ORDER

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**Abstract:** China plays an increasingly significant role in global affairs, rebalancing the international political and economic order and promoting a shift in global power to the East. At the same time, along with its development reorientation, China has been attempting to establish itself as an active shaper of global legal governance. This paper presents the results of a non-doctrinal study on the legal dimension of the four global Chinese initiatives (namely, the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, plus the concept of “Community of Shared Future for Mankind”) within a broader framework of China’s changing role in the international legal order. The paper concludes with the place of the four initiatives in transforming Chinese approaches to law in foreign policy and claims that the new initiatives enhance China’s potential to promote its legal vision in the developing world.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilization Initiative, Chinese law.

## INTRODUCTION

As a part of China’s pursuit of change in the world order, a special role is played by the concept of the “Community of Shared Future for Mankind” (later, CSFM) and the Global Chinese Initiatives, namely the Belt and Road Initiative (later, the BRI), the Global Development Initiative (later, the GDI), the Global Security Initiative (later, the GSI), and the most recent, the Global Civilization Initiative (later, the GCI). The initiatives were proposed with scope to emphasise China’s views on a wide range of issues and to propose relevant solutions to the challenges of international concern. Due to the novelty of most of the initiatives, there have been no extensive scholarly studies on them. Therefore, this paper seeks to partially cover this gap by exploring the legal dimensions of the initiatives and

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placing them within China's evolving role in the international legal order. This is done through a non-doctrinal legal analysis of primary and secondary sources, including the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with the existing China scholarship. Finally, the paper concludes that there are no signs that the new Global Chinese Initiatives are a major shift away from existing China's approach to international law, but the initiatives contribute to China's strengthening of its potential to promote legal vision in the developing world.

### **CHINA'S CHANGING ROLE IN THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL ORDER**

The accession to power of Xi Jinping in 2012 marked a turning point in China's self-positioning in the international legal arena. As many China scholars point out, China has become an active advocate for international norms consistent with its state ideology (Pils, 2019). First, this regards the human rights domain. According to Zhang and Buzan, China is moving 'from a human rights pariah state to an active participant and shaper of global human rights governance', while Chen and Hsu suggest that 'China in the Xi-era has sought to market and mainstream its state-centred norms and principles in the international human rights system', 'upgrade its status from a norm-taker to a norm-maker in multilateral human rights institutions', and 'market and mainstream the Chinese model of national development as the new universal norm of global governance for the advancement of human rights' (Zhang and Buzan, 2020, p. 170; Chen and Hsu, 2020, pp. 241-242). In practice, we see China's normative campaign targeting the international human rights community in events of public diplomacy, such as the Beijing Forum on Human Rights (2008–2015) and the South-South Human Rights Forum in December 2017, but also China influencing other countries' voting behaviour in the UN (Xinhua, 2017). For instance, the voting behaviour and public statements of many African and South American and some European countries, such as Greece and Hungary, are in support of China's stance at the UN on human rights (Flores-Macías and Kreps, 2013).

Second, China is advancing its global security agenda, particularly within the United Nations Security Council. This agenda is mainly guided by the emphasis on sovereignty and non-intervention, which has its roots in

Chinese history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when China heavily suffered from a series of foreign interventions and was made to sign unequal treaties. Today, in practice, the promotion of the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention is manifested in several key ways. First, China disapproves of the interventions in the domestic affairs of the third states in the case of human rights breaches. This applies both to China's defence from critiques of its human rights policies in Tibet and Xinjiang (UN, 2022; Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other international organisations in Switzerland, 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Canada, 2021) and to the UN resolutions regarding alleged human rights violations in other countries. For example, China vetoed the Draft Resolution that 'would have called on Myanmar's government to cease military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions and begin a substantive political dialogue that would lead to a genuine democratic transition' (UN, 2007 reference). It also used its veto power to turn down the Draft Resolution of the UNSC, which was aimed at 'condemning Syrian authorities for their violent crackdown against pro-democracy protesters this year and calling for an immediate end to human rights abuses' (UN, 2011). Second, China strictly opposes sanctions and highlights the necessity of solving issues through political dialogue and negotiation. This was manifested in China's veto of the UNSC Draft Resolution on Zimbabwe of 2008, which called for an arms embargo along with financial and travel restrictions (UN Security Council, 2008; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Hellenic Republic, 2008). It was also the case in 2022 when China vetoed the UNSC Draft Resolution, which would have strengthened sanctions on North Korea over its ballistic missile launches (United Nations, 2022). As we can observe, China's approach to tackling global security issues has been shared by a few developing countries that, like China, suffered from foreign interventions and put a major emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference (Osondu-Oti, 2016).

Another important element is China's ideology on the rule of law and its global implications. As President Xi Jinping said in 2019 in front of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 'In foreign struggles, we must take up the weapon of law, occupy the commanding heights of the rule of law [...] and we should actively participate in the formulation of international rules and be participants, promoters, and leaders in the

process of global governance reform’ (Xi, 2019). The substance of China’s view of the international rule of law was outlined by Xi Jinping in April 2022. In his speech titled “Adhering to the path of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics and better promoting the construction of socialist rule of law system with Chinese characteristics”, President Xi emphasised that China should first strengthen legislation in foreign-related fields; second, further improve anti-sanctions, anti-interference legislation, and counter ‘long-arm jurisdiction’ laws and regulations; third, promote the construction of a legal system applicable outside the jurisdiction of China; and fourth, expand law enforcement and judicial cooperation and extend the security chain to protect China’s overseas interests (Xi, 2022). Finally, he firmly opposed ‘benchmarking of Western rule of law system and pursuing the Western rule of law practice’ (Xi, 2022). A further outlook into China’s perception of the rule of law can be found in the Law on Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China, which came into force in July 2023.<sup>1</sup> The law largely echoes China’s security policy as outlined above and supports building a socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics. First, it obliges the state to ‘strengthen the implementation and application of laws and regulations in foreign-related fields and employ law enforcement and judicial measures in accordance with the law to preserve national sovereignty, security, and development interests, and protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese citizens and organisations’.<sup>2</sup> Second, the law complements China’s stance on international human rights and states that China ‘upholds the principle of universality of human rights in combination with national realities’.<sup>3</sup> This is consistent with China’s behaviour at the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council, where China recommended other states pursue human rights in line with their national conditions (Kinzelbach, 2012). Third, the law references Xi Jinping’s

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<sup>1</sup> 中华人民共和国对外关系法（2023年6月28日第十四届全国人民代表大会常务委员会第三次会议通过）[‘Law on Foreign Relations of the People’s Republic of China’ (Adopted at the Third Meeting of the Standing Committee of the 14<sup>th</sup> National People’s Congress on June 28, 2023)], retrieved from [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjwb\\_673085/zfxxgk\\_674865/zcfg/fl/202306/t20230628\\_11105189.shtml](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/wjwb_673085/zfxxgk_674865/zcfg/fl/202306/t20230628_11105189.shtml). Accessed 29 August 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Ch.3. Art.22

concept of ‘a community of shared destiny for mankind’ (CSFM) by advocating ‘that all countries in the world transcend national, ethnic, and cultural differences and promote the common values of peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom for all mankind’.<sup>4</sup> Finally, China embeds its Global Initiatives into the law by calling for ‘putting into action the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative’ and endeavouring to ‘advance a foreign affairs agenda on multiple fronts, at different levels, in various areas, and in multiple dimensions’.<sup>5</sup>

## LEGAL DIMENSIONS OF THE GLOBAL CHINESE INITIATIVES

### The Belt and Road Initiative

Out of the Global Chinese Initiatives, the Belt and Road Initiative has been studied most extensively. Since its inception in 2013, there have been numerous legal studies on this Initiative. This paper does not specifically focus on the BRI but rather summarises the key findings of the existing legal scholarship and then brings new knowledge by placing the BRI among the recent Global Chinese Initiatives and within a broader context of China’s evolving role in the international legal order.

In official Chinese discourses, the BRI is presented as ‘a peacefully progressive endeavour led by a forward-looking yet norm-abiding China’ (Chan and Song, 2020, p. 423). For instance, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Forum on Belt and Road Legal Cooperation in July 2018 stated that ‘China has always respected international law as well as national laws in its cooperation with different nations’ (China Daily, 2018). In 2019, together with a group of like-minded countries, China launched the Clean Silk Road Initiative (China Daily, 2019). This initiative is mainly focused on tackling corruption but also on fostering exchanges ‘on the development of integrity and rule of law’ and strengthening the ‘supervision and administration of the Belt and Road cooperation projects’ (China Daily, 2019). Along with this, the Clean Silk Road echoes China’s

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Ch. 2. Art.23

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



stance at the UN on respect for sovereignty, different development paths, and multiculturalism by calling to ‘safeguard the development of the Belt and Road Initiative [...] in accordance with the existing international rules and legal frameworks, on the basis of respecting state sovereignty, cultural differences, and national actualities’ (China Daily, 2019).

Apart from the Clean Silk Road agenda, China has been attempting to promote its vision of law through the establishment of international commercial courts. These courts were set up to deal with international investment cases, including those arising from the Belt and Road projects. The courts are aimed at ‘propelling the Belt and Road with the rule of law’, while the judges must handle these disputes adhering to socialist core values (CICC, 2021; Finder, 2022). Together with international commercial courts, China set up the China-Africa Joint Arbitration Centre (CAJAC) to promote its legal vision overseas.

Finally, since the BRI is closely linked to Chinese infrastructure building, contracts, bilateral agreements, and memoranda of understanding also constitute an important legal element of the Belt and Road Initiative. These documents greatly vary from each other and touch upon various domains, from trade to the environment and labour conditions. Although they normally reference existing international legal standards and rules ‘to show the consistency of primary agreements with the normative status quo’, the documents have still received a lot of criticism for using vague and too general terminology to ‘take advantage of the elements of soft law instruments to address sensitive issues’ (Wang, 2021, p. 297).

### **The “Community of a Shared Future for Mankind”**

In 2017, roughly four years after the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping introduced the concept of a “Community of Shared Future for Mankind” (CSFM). This concept serves as a linking element for all the recent Global Chinese Initiatives and is also referenced in the new Chinese Law on Foreign Relations. The concept was first briefly mentioned by Xi Jinping at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2017, and then at the United Nations office in Geneva, the Chinese President dedicated a speech entirely to it (Xi, 2017a, 2017b). The main goal behind the CSFM concept is to provide a series of global solutions on how to

‘overcome difficulties, create a better world, and deliver better lives for the peoples’ (Xi, 2017). As outlined by President Xi, building a Community of a Shared Future for Mankind should be guided by the principles established in the Westphalian Peace, Geneva Convention, UN Charter, and Five Principles of Coexistence. In particular, Xi emphasises that sovereign equality is a paramount ‘norm governing state-to-state relations over the past centuries and the cardinal principle observed by the United Nations and all other international organisations’ (Xi, 2017). By sovereignty, Xi implies abstaining from interfering with other countries’ domestic affairs and giving them the right to choose their social system and development path in an independent manner (Xi, 2017). Then, Xi adds that ‘law is the very foundation of governance’ and that international rule of law should be upheld based on democracy in international affairs and be deprived of dominance in international relations (Xi, 2017).

As said before, the CSFM unites all the key elements of other Global Chinese Initiatives. Among others, it says that to achieve its goals, the international community should promote security, growth, and inter-civilization exchanges (Xi, 2017). In terms of security, the CSFM calls on all countries to ‘pursue common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security’, and ‘build a global united front against terrorism’. In terms of development, it calls to ‘strengthen macro policy coordination, pursue both current and long-term interests, and focus on resolving deep-seated problems’ (Xi, 2017). Concurrently, in terms of inter-civilization exchanges, it highlights that diversity ‘should be an engine driving the advance of human civilizations’ and calls to ‘make exchanges among civilizations a source of inspiration for advancing human society and a bond that keeps the world in peace’ (Xi, 2017).

As we will see in the following parts of the paper, the concept of a “Community of Shared Future for Mankind” will appear in all the recent Global Chinese Initiatives and will serve as one of the bases for China to advocate its vision of international law.

### **The Global Development Initiative**

The first of the recent Global Chinese Initiatives, the Global Development Initiative, was launched by President Xi Jinping in September

2021 at the General Debate of the 76<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The initiative was presented as an effort to ‘accelerate implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development so as to build a global community of development with a shared future’ (Xi, 2021). As we know, before the GDI, China had also made efforts to link the Belt and Road Initiative with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2021). It can be assumed that by drawing a connection between the GDI and the UN SDGs, China is attempting to increase public understanding of its development agenda, remove suspicion, and subsequently attract broader global participation in the initiative.

The key legal elements of the GDI related to international law echo both China’s stance on global security at the UN Security Council and the CSFM, i.e., upholding the “international order underpinned by international law” based on the principles outlined in the UN Charter; “improving global governance and practicing true multilateralism”; opposing military interventions from the outside; and “advancing democracy and rule of law in international relations”. Importantly, in his speech, President Xi does not specify what exactly is meant by democracy and the rule of law. As some scholars point out, the Chinese understanding of these two concepts may be very different from the Western one. So, China is assumed to be pursuing the so-called “thin” rule of law, which ‘places emphasis on the procedures through which rules are formulated and applied’, as opposed to the “thick” version of the rule of law, which ‘does not only look at formal and procedural characteristics but also at the letter of the law’ (Burnay, 2018; Tommasoli, 2012). Along with it, building on Chinese legal history, we may add that for China, democracy means that people delegate their power to rule the country to the state, which has unquestionable authority, and not vice versa. This is in stark contrast to the Western view of democracy, which is normally from the ground up. So, when reading Chinese legal discourses, we should keep in mind that the use of terms such as democracy and rule of law does not necessarily mean that the content of these terms in China and in the West is the same. This can also have certain practical implications for China’s interaction with the international legal order.

Finally, another important feature of the GDI is that it calls for promoting human rights through development. Although there is not much explanation of how exactly this should be done, we may recall Chinese human rights

narratives at the UN Human Rights Council, where China actively mainstreamed the right to development along with certain economic rights, as opposed to civil and political rights emphasised by the West (Kinzelbach, 2012). This is also consistent with China's behaviour at the Universal Periodic Review, where China, when commenting on the human rights situation in other countries primarily, focuses on economic, social, and cultural rights and 'does not endorse most of the recommendations other countries have made on civil and political rights' (Kinzelbach, 2012).

### **The Global Security Initiative**

The Global Security Initiative was launched in April 2022 at the Boao Forum for Asia with the aim to 'eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance [...] and promote durable peace and development in the world' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The legal agenda of this initiative generally follows China's habitual legal discourse. It emphasises sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs, respect for the UN Charter, multilateralism, cooperation, and dialogue as opposed to war, and confronts "unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction", and terrorism. Along with this, the GSI introduces some new, distinct elements.

First, the GSI encourages countries to fight transnational crimes, and in particular, drug trafficking, to 'build a community with a shared future for mankind that is free from the harm of drugs' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The anti-drug campaign implies cooperation on 'law enforcement on the basis of respecting each country's sovereignty' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

Second, China highlights its support for the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, and the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum and expresses its willingness to provide training for law enforcement officers from developing countries to address global security issues. Here we clearly see that the main target of the Global Development Initiative is not the West but the developing world, where it aims to promote its legal vision.

Third, China proposes to 'strengthen international security governance on artificial intelligence (AI)' by developing 'standards and norms based on

extensive consensus’ and calls to ‘safeguard the international nuclear non-proliferation regime based on the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and actively support the efforts of countries in relevant regions to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2023).

Fourth, the GSI emphasises China’s efforts to manage outer space governance. It calls to ‘carry out activities in outer space in accordance with international law’, ‘respect and ensure the equal right of all countries to use outer space peacefully’, and ‘support the negotiation and conclusion of an international legal instrument on arms control in outer space’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2023).

Finally, while China allegedly supports a thin vision of the rule of law, which is deprived of morality, the GSI underlines that true security ‘is underpinned by morality, justice, and the right ideas’ (Burnay, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, 2023). So, in the GSI, morality and justice go hand in hand. Here the question arises of how exactly China views justice and morality and what “rights ideas” the initiative is talking about. For the moment, the GSI does not give explanations for this.

As we see, the Global Security Initiative, while generally consistent with China’s approach to international law and legal governance, incorporates a series of relatively new elements. It seeks to help China move to the forefront of the fight against transnational crimes and establish China as a leader in international outer space, artificial intelligence, and non-proliferation governance.

### **The Global Civilization Initiative**

In March 2023, at the High-level Dialogue between the Communist Party of China and World Political Parties, President Xi Jinping launched the Global Civilization Initiative. Apart from a brief reference to the promotion of equal rights, President Xi did not focus much on the legal aspects of the initiative in his inaugural speech (Xi, 2023). However, he touched upon several elements that are still of legal relevance for this study.

A general message behind the Global Civilization Initiative is the advocacy of respect for the diversity of civilizations, the inheritance and

innovation of civilizations, and people-to-people exchanges. As we observe, the ideas behind the GCI indirectly mirror China's multilateralism and non-interference rhetoric, respect for sovereignty, and free choice of development path. Along with this, President Xi calls to promote the common values of all mankind, which, as he says, are peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy, and freedom (Xi, 2023). Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives Wang Lixin further substantiates the content of the GCI and says that 'countries need to [...] refrain from imposing their own values or models on others and from stoking ideological confrontation' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). As M. Rudolf claims, the GCI 'incorporates the PRC's "Modernization does not equal Westernisation" narrative into a strategic umbrella' (Rudolf, 2023).

The question that arises here is again regarding the inherent meaning behind the "common values of all mankind" and consequently the realisation of these values. As mentioned above, the Chinese understanding of certain concepts may be substantially different from the Western one. However, when operating these concepts, China usually does not substantiate their content, which leaves some room for interpretation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although most Global Chinese Initiatives are quite new and many things will very likely unfold soon, this paper can still draw a series of conclusions regarding the legal dimension of Global Chinese Initiatives and their possible implications for the global legal order.

First, the legal frameworks of the four initiatives are not developed evenly. Due to its seniority, the legal framework of the BRI is much more developed than that of the other initiatives. The main difference is that the BRI has much more developed practically-oriented legal mechanisms, which, before all, include commercial courts and bilateral documents (memoranda of understanding, contracts, and agreements). In the case of the more recent Global Chinese Initiatives, we do not see this yet. We assume that in the coming years, the legal frameworks of the Global Development, Global Security, and Global Civilization Initiatives will also develop. This is also evidenced by China's calls for strengthening legal governance in a series of domains and launching training for foreign law enforcement officers.

Second, the new global Chinese initiatives cannot be said to challenge China's stance on international law. The initiatives are incorporated into Chinese legislation and do not contradict China's practices at the UN, which is one of the main mechanisms for the implementation and formation of international law. At the same time, the launch of the Global Initiatives is an attempt for China to strengthen its position in the international law arena, with Xi Jinping's thoughts on the socialist rule of law at the core of China's international law agenda. This agenda highly emphasises non-interference in other countries' internal affairs, respect for state sovereignty and the choice of other countries to handle their internal affairs and development in their own way, multiculturalism, multipolarity, and opposition to sanctions. This implies that, in China's view, possible foreign interventions on the pretext of the protection of human rights and upholding the rule of law should be either very limited or absent. Such a stance can be very appealing to many developing countries. China is presenting itself as a part of the developing world and opposing itself to the former colonialist Western countries, which, together with the US, as China claims, seek to foster unipolarity and hegemony. Indeed, China is proposing to reform the global system of international relations based on the principles of multipolarity, multiculturalism, and multiple development paths. China is actively seeking to market its vision of international law among developing countries through cooperation programmes such as the Belt and Road Legal Cooperation Forum, the Clean Silk Road, the South-South Human Rights Dialogue, and financial mechanisms (mainly through the BRI). As a recent study shows, in many African countries, more people already view China, rather than the EU or the US, as a development role model (Afrobarometer, 2020). We hypothesise that the new global initiatives may help China strengthen its position in the regions where it already enjoys an overall positive image.

Finally, as said earlier, the new Global Chinese Initiatives are still in their initial development stages. We may therefore expect to see their legal frameworks developing with time and becoming a stronger tool of China's foreign legal policy. As for now, the fact that Chinese law is making an appearance on the world stage is 'eyebrow-raising, given that only forty years ago, scholars were debating whether China even had a legal system' (Erie, 2023, p. 1).

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# CHINA'S GLOBAL INITIATIVES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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**Abstract:** As China gained more influence in terms of its economic power, the political ambitions of Beijing have dramatically grown. These tendencies are reminiscent of the continuing centralization of authority after the 19th Party Congress in 2017. Over the last ten years, China has actively promoted its vision of the international order and, by introducing issues to the international resolution, promoted its own industrial cycles. Since 2012, along with the centralization of power by Xi Jinping, China has become more assertive in promoting its own vision of human rights and internationalising its domestic norms through activities at the UN General Assembly and other UN agencies. In this regard, we need to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly contributed to China's global activities. First of all, China was supported by dozens of developing countries and positioned itself as the leader of the Global South community. During and after the widespread pandemics, the Chinese authorities introduced a series of initiatives, including the Global Data Security Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, which signalled China's readiness to build its political influence in the international forums through four forms of reshaping the current global order. To gain more prominence and position itself as the leader, China has influenced current international organisations like the United Nations and its agenda, proposed co-produced initiatives with emerging markets (emerging developing countries) like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or the BRICS, and introduced China-led multilateral forums like the FOCAC or China-CELAC. Apart from this institutional dimension, the authorities in Beijing cultivate informal networks through "circle of friends" and party-to-party relations, thus shaping China's position in the current context as a peace broker and the future development model for the Global South community.

Keywords: China, Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, multilateralism.

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## INTRODUCTION

China's multilateral approach has undergone significant transformation since the initiation of the reform and opening-up policy by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 (Schram, 1988). Transitioning from a relatively isolated and ideologically stringent nation, China has gradually integrated into the global system and actively engaged in various multilateral institutions and mechanisms. This shift in China's multilateral diplomacy can be attributed to evolving domestic and international circumstances, amplified economic and military readiness, and strategic objectives focused on safeguarding sovereignty, fostering development, enhancing global influence, and shaping a favourable external environment. In recent years, China has introduced several significant global initiatives to underscore its vision and leadership in addressing humanity's shared challenges and opportunities (Gering, 2023). These initiatives encompass the Global Data Security Initiative (GDSI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). The GDSI primarily establishes a framework for managing data storage and securing digital commerce. Meanwhile, the GDI is tailored to advance the timely realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by revitalising global development partnerships and promoting a more robust, environmentally sustainable, and equitable global development paradigm. On the other hand, the GSI emphasises the importance of upholding the principle of indivisible security, constructing a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture, and opposing the construction of national security premised on insecurity within other nations. Lastly, the GCI advocates for the appreciation of cultural diversity, the promotion of shared human values, the preservation and innovation of civilizations, and the reinforcement of international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. These initiatives reflect China's desire to contribute to global governance and the provision of public goods, coupled with its recognition of the world's complex interdependencies and interconnectedness. Moreover, they embody China's distinct perspectives and approaches to multilateralism, which underscore the significance of respecting sovereignty, non-interference, mutual benefit, dialogue and consultation, diversity and inclusiveness, and win-win cooperation (MFA of China, 2014). However, it is essential to note that these initiatives are not immune to challenges and criticism from other nations and stakeholders.

Such scrutiny may encompass questions concerning China's motivations, intentions, capabilities, and responsibilities in pursuing its "true multilateralism" vision. Thus, this paper focuses on a comprehensive examination of these initiatives' origins, contents, implications, and prospects to gain a deeper understanding of China's contemporary multilateral approach and its role in the developing world.

### CHINA'S MOTIVATIONS AND A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHINA'S GLOBAL INITIATIVES (CGIS)

The analysis of Chinese diplomacy is essential, as it indicates and justifies China's growing political and economic power within multilateral institutions. The debate over Beijing's role in these institutions is inherently linked to the People's Republic of China's (PRC) status. It revolves around defining China as a *status quo* power or a *revisionist power* (Wuthnow et al., 2012). Scholars examining the behaviour of the PRC within international institutions came to various conclusions. Alastair Ian Johnston claims that China's increasing cooperation within international organisations, alignment with their norms, and general acceptance of their operational principles suggest that China is oriented towards maintaining the *status quo* (Johnston, 2003). Conversely, Barry Buzan, in his work titled *China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?* refers to China as a *reformist and revisionist power* due to its acceptance of some international community institutions while resisting and seeking to reform others (Buzan, 2010). It is significant to highlight that numerous regulations and frameworks governing international organisations were implemented before the People's Republic of China became a member. This poses a significant challenge for Chinese foreign policy, as the interests of countries such as the United States and other Western nations were incorporated from the outset due to their status as founding members of these institutions. As China's political and economic power has grown, Beijing has had to determine its role and position within global and regional governmental institutions as it engages in multilateral processes. This enables the identification of the spectrum of China's activities within existing international organisations. Regarding the spectrum of multilateral actions, there are two dominant typologies in the literature concerning the approach of the People's Republic of China to international organisations. These typologies were initially developed by Joel Wuthnow, Xin Li, and Lingling Qi

in their article titled *Diverse Multilateralism: Four Strategies in China's Multilateral Diplomacy* and were later modified by G. John Ikenberry and Darren J. Lim in their report for the Brookings Institution titled *China's Emerging Institutional Statecraft: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Prospect for Counter-Hegemony*. The second, five-point typology has a significant drawback due to its omission of the essential element of "observation" of an international organisation. Therefore, based on the previously mentioned works, this paper proposes a new six-point typology to illustrate the broad spectrum of strategies Chinese diplomacy employs for participation in international institutions.

*Table 1. Spectrum of China's activities in international organisations*

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Status-quo participant</b>	<b>Participant seeking authority</b>	<b>Participant facing institutional or ideological obstacles</b>	<b>Participant in opposition</b>	<b>External innovation</b>
No involvement within an international institution. Characterised by the process of learning and understanding how an international institution works.	Joins an organisation and operates on the basis of already developed law, rules, and international practices, e.g., the Interpol.	Joins an organisation but is looking for "a voice" in the decision-making process, e.g., the IMF.	Joins the organisation but encounters undesirable rules and tries to change them. The action is also aimed at hindering or stopping the taking of certain decisions within the organisation, e.g., the WTO and the UN Security Council.	Open opposition or non-participation in institutional arrangements, e.g., the UN Forum	Creating its own international organisation, offering alternative forms of cooperation and international standards, e.g., the AIIB.

Source: Author's own compilation based on: Ikenberry & Lim, 2017, p. 7; Wuthnow et al., 2012, pp. 273-7.

Analysing the table, it is important to note that observation entails passivity in decision-making within international institutions. Chinese diplomatic practice involves dispatching its representatives as experts to participate in the working meetings of international institutions. However, Beijing does not promote its own agenda or formulate demands. The observational approach is aimed at gathering information about the spectrum of an organisation's activities and the obligations and rights of its members. The conclusions drawn from observations relate to the interests of the People's Republic of China. Lack of active participation may result from a lack of technical knowledge regarding the issues discussed within the organisation or from the minimal significance of China's interests in the negotiations within the organisation. It may also signify a strategic and deliberate passivity aimed at learning about the organisation through observation (Wuthnow et al., 2012, p. 274). A status-quo participant is a state's most basic form of active participation in an international organisation. This type of participation signifies acceptance of the existing rules and norms prevailing in the institution. The People's Republic of China's activity as a "status-quo participant" includes participation in organisations like Interpol. China accepts the general principles of the organisation's operation and engages in collective international tasks (Ikenberry & Lim, 2017). Another distinguished model is participation in seeking authority, characterised by seeking more significant influence in the formal processes within the institution, defined as "distributional change". This situation pertains to increasing a member's rights in the decision-making process based on fundamental characteristics of the state, such as demographics or the prevalence of a particular phenomenon within the country. In this case, redistributing decision-making power affects the potential for more significant benefits from international cooperation within the institution. It should be emphasised that a state with this characteristic does not seek to reform the substantive principles of the institution. China's pursuit of a more influential voice in the International Monetary Fund's operations is an example of active participation in seeking authority within an international institution (Wang, 2018). The fourth category pertains to participation in international organisations to actively change, obstruct, or impede the implementation of certain provisions within the institution. In Chinese diplomatic practice, such a strategy implies attempts to hinder the fulfilment of tasks that support the liberal characteristics of the international order.



Obstructing decision-making processes and hindering routine activities aim to undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of the institution. In the context of this strategy, the People's Republic of China accepted and implemented the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm,<sup>1</sup> but its diplomatic efforts in the UNSC focused on restricting its definition and practical application. As Ikenberry noted, 'the motivation of Chinese diplomacy was to halt a process that was putting pressure on expanding the liberal character of the international order at the expense of state sovereignty' (Ikenberry & Lim, 2017, p. 8). Per the theoretical assumptions, participation in opposition signifies complete opposition or a formal lack of participation in existing institutional frameworks. Sometimes, this strategy is combined with the "external innovation" described below when a state prefers to operate outside established international practices and norms. However, participation in opposition entails a violation of international practice norms without showing any interest in introducing an alternative institutionalised format. The actions of the People's Republic of China concerning the South China Sea situation serve as an example of this practice, where China's growing assertiveness leads to the rejection of international legal judgments. External innovation fundamentally differs from the strategies described above, as it involves the creation of a new international institution. In this context, some goals and strategies may overlap with those pursued within existing institutions. Typically, it constitutes an alternative node of international cooperation aimed at mutual benefit in economic and developmental aspects. Additionally, a new institution provides the opportunity to build bilateral and multilateral influence in the region concealed through cooperation. Newly established institutions usually challenge the dominant substantive rules and norms in the economic and political realms, which, in the case of the People's Republic of China, aim to reduce the United States supremacy over most global international institutions. In the practice of Chinese foreign policy, examples of such actions include the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Ikenberry & Lim, 2017, p. 8). As presented, the wide spectrum

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<sup>1</sup> R2P – Responsibility to Protect is an international norm that aims to ensure that the international community never ceases to stop mass atrocities, which include genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The R2P concept was developed in 2001.

of Chinese diplomacy within international organisations encompasses a range of strategies, from passive observation to active participation in various forms, each serving China's interests and objectives within the global and regional context. These strategies are shaped by China's evolving role as a global actor and its efforts to influence the international order to align with its interests and preferences. Therefore, considering the novelty of the Chinese initiatives, it is important to analyse the background and motivations for establishing new China's Global Initiatives, such as the Global Data Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative.

### **The Global Data Security Initiative**

China introduced the Global Data Security Initiative (GDSI) in September 2020 to address the complexities and opportunities associated with data security in the digital era (Wong, 2020). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced this initiative during a Beijing seminar on global digital governance. The primary objective of the GDSI is to establish a comprehensive framework of global rules and principles concerning data security that takes into account the interests and concerns of all nations, with a specific emphasis on developing countries. This initiative is structured around eight fundamental principles encompassing various facets of data security, including data protection, data sovereignty, data access, data utilisation, and data governance. Furthermore, the GDSI outlines three fundamental principles to guide international cooperation in data security: multilateralism, secure development, and equity and justice. Wang Yi emphasised that the GDSI is grounded in recognising that data security is a shared challenge necessitating collaborative efforts and mutual respect. The genesis of the GDSI can be traced to China's response to mounting pressure from the United States, particularly its concerns regarding Chinese technology firms and products. The United States has accused China of posing national security risks by collecting and transmitting user data to the Chinese government and has initiated measures like the Clean Network programme to exclude Chinese technology from the global internet infrastructure (Park, 2022). China has consistently refuted these allegations, contending that the United States is politicising data security matters and applying double standards. China has actively advocated for the GDSI among other countries and regions through

diplomatic overtures and engagement in multilateral forums. The initiative has garnered support from countries such as Russia, Tanzania, Pakistan, Ecuador, and members of the Arab League and the ASEAN. China has also extended invitations to other nations to join the initiative and contribute to formulating global rules on data security (Min Htin, 2023). Beijing has persuaded the world that the merits of this initiative are multifold. Firstly, it could facilitate cultivating a more open, secure, and stable global digital environment conducive to innovation and collaboration. Secondly, it has the potential to harmonise the interests and requisites of diverse nations and stakeholders in data security, thus averting unilateral actions and hegemonic interference. Thirdly, it could bolster mutual trust and confidence among nations concerning data security, mitigating conflicts and tensions. Lastly, it may stimulate the digital economy and digital governance advancements in alignment with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Guo, 2023).

### **The Global Development Initiative**

The Global Development Initiative (GDI), introduced by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2021, signifies a substantial endeavour to promote international collaboration for global development and address shared global challenges (MFA of China, 2021). This initiative is strategically aligned with and dedicated to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation, with a particular emphasis on attaining the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2022a). Its overarching objective is to inaugurate a novel development phase characterised by equilibrium, synchronisation, and inclusiveness. The GDI is underpinned by fundamental principles that underscore the priority of development, a people-centric approach, the equitable dissemination of benefits, the cultivation of innovation-driven development, the preservation of harmony between humanity and the environment, and the pursuit of results-oriented actions. China has proactively advocated for the GDI through various international platforms, encompassing the World Economic Forum, the G20, the BRICS, and numerous regional cooperation forums. Significantly, the United Nations has instituted a Group of Friends of the GDI, which, by January 2022, had garnered participation from more than 60 countries (United Nations, 2022b).

There are various values of adopting the GDI, including the reinforcement of global solidarity, facilitation of worldwide economic recovery, advancement of global poverty alleviation, support of climate action and environmental conservation, promotion of innovation and digital inclusivity, and enhancement of global governance and multilateralism (Centre for International Knowledge on Development, 2023). The evolution of the GDI is rooted in China's own experiences and persistent commitment to addressing global dilemmas. Subsequently, in June 2022, President Xi presided over a High-Level Dialogue on Global Development, which generated applicable measures for cooperative action (MFA of China, 2022b). A significant development is the expressed support for the GDI by over 100 countries and international organisations. The Group of Friends of the GDI at the UN, comprising 68 participating nations, serves as a voluntary platform to promote policy coherence, facilitate knowledge sharing, foster capacity development, and facilitate the execution of projects supporting the GDI (Centre for International Knowledge on Development, 2023). To this end, it emphasises eight priority areas of collaboration: poverty reduction, food security, COVID-19 control and vaccination, development financing, climate change and green development, industrialization, the digital economy, and interconnectivity (State Council of China, 2022). Therefore, Beijing argues that the introduction of the GDI has wielded a transformative influence on the global development agenda, offering a vision for development that is more inclusive, balanced, and sustainable. By introducing the GDI, China attempts to revitalise global development partnerships, address critical global challenges, and direct progress towards realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **The Global Security Initiative**

The Global Security Initiative (GSI) represents a diplomatic and security framework introduced by China to challenge the predominance of the US-led system of multilateral treaties, alliances, and institutions. Initially announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping during the annual Boao Forum for Asia in April 2022, the GSI seeks to uphold the principle of indivisible security, foster the establishment of a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture, and oppose the foundation of national security on the basis of insecurity in other countries (MFA of China, 2022a). The GSI comprises four primary sections: foundational concepts and principles; areas of cooperation

emphasis; platforms and mechanisms; and international collaboration. The foundational concepts and principles encompass respect for sovereignty, non-interference, peaceful conflict resolution, mutual development, and adherence to multilateralism. Cooperation areas of emphasis encompass domains such as counter-terrorism, cyber security, nuclear security, biosecurity, maritime security, and outer space security. The platforms and mechanisms section incorporates China-led forums like the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Xiangshan Forum in Beijing, and the World Security Cooperation Forum in Lianyungang, as well as regional organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICS (MFA of China, 2023). The international cooperation segment underscores the central coordinating role of the United Nations (UN) in global security affairs, with China supporting the UN Security Council (UNSC) reform to amplify the representation of developing countries. Under the framework of the GSI, China has also entered into bilateral agreements on security cooperation with countries such as Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia (Standish, 2023; Long, 2023). The overarching objective behind the GSI revolves around China's strategic interests, encompassing the expansion of its global influence, countering US hegemony, and moulding a new international order that aligns more favourably with its values and interests. For other nations, particularly developing countries, the GSI may represent an alternative or complementary option to the US-led security system, offering enhanced flexibility, diversity, and autonomy in foreign policy decisions. Nevertheless, the GSI introduces challenges and risks to the existing security architecture, as it may undermine established norms and regulations implemented by the United States and its allies, generate conflicts and tensions with other major global powers, and erode the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions (Schuman, 2022).

### **The Global Civilization Initiative**

In recent years, the global community has faced unparalleled challenges and crises, spanning the realms of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, terrorism, poverty, and regional conflicts. Within this complicated environment, China understood and proposed the common advancement of humanity. It catalysed the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) proposal, an

innovative vision for human development that admires diversity, shared values, inheritance, and innovation within civilizations and fosters international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. Xi Jinping articulated the GCI during the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting on March 15, 2023 (CGTN, 2023). The GCI constitutes China's latest significant global contribution, following the introduction of the Global Data Security Initiative (GDSI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), and the Global Security Initiative (GSI) by President Xi in 2020, 2021, and 2022, respectively. These initiatives, including the GCI, collectively form the foundational pillars of a global community united under a shared destiny. At its core, the GCI aspires to achieve several key objectives, including profound respect for the diversity of civilizations, the advocacy of universal human values, the appreciation of the rich tapestry of cultural heritage and innovation across civilizations, and the promotion of international interactions and cooperation among people. The GCI's central mission is centred around the imperative for diverse civilizations to coexist harmoniously, thereby nurturing genuine equality and inclusivity among them to advance global peace and development (State Council of China, 2023). Moreover, the GCI underscores the significance of refraining from imposing one's values or models on others and avoiding fomenting ideological confrontations (Liu, 2023). The GCI has been proactively advocated through various international platforms and forums, including the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit, the BRICS Summit, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-EU Leaders' Meeting, and the China-CELAC Forum. Additionally, the initiative has garnered robust support from many political parties, think tanks, scholars, media outlets, and civil society organisations hailing from diverse countries and regions, especially within developing countries (Oppong, 2023). According to China's beliefs, the GCI has the potential to foster mutual understanding, respect, trust, and dialogue among civilizations. Moreover, as China argues, the GCI stands poised to invigorate cultural exchanges and mutual learning among diverse populations. The GCI can stimulate innovation and creativity by harnessing diverse civilizations' collective wisdom and achievements (Embassy of China in Samoa, 2023). Ultimately, the initiative seeks to contribute to creating a more harmonious, inclusive, prosperous, and sustainable global order that brings well-being to all.

## **CHINA'S GLOBAL INITIATIVES AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CURRENT WORLD ORDER?**

In light of the Global Data Security Initiative (GDSI), the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) as China's latest diplomatic overtures towards the developing world, it becomes crucial to assess their international significance. In each instance, China underscores the "core role" of the United Nations (UN) as an institution and its commitment to upholding the values and norms articulated in the UN Charter (Fung & Lam, 2022). Consequently, evident parallels emerge between the GCI and the UN Charter, particularly regarding the principles of respecting national sovereignty. The UN Charter's Article 2.1 asserts that 'The Organisation is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members' (United Nations, 1945). Similarly, the GSI explicitly states its commitment to 'respecting the sovereignty and security of all countries' (MFA of China, 2023). The United Nations Charter, adopted in San Francisco on June 26, 1945, after the United Nations Conference on International Organisation, serves as a treaty that delineates the objectives and tenets of the United Nations. The Charter's overarching objectives encompass the preservation of international peace and security, the cultivation of amicable relations among nations predicated on the principle of equal rights and self-determination, the promotion of international cooperation in resolving global issues spanning economics, culture, society, and humanitarian concerns, and the advocacy for human rights and fundamental freedoms, irrespective of distinctions such as race, gender, language, or religion. On the other hand, the Chinese initiatives offer nuanced but correlated perspectives. The Global Development Initiative (GDI) aspires to advance sustainable development globally by supporting developing nations in areas such as poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and environmental conservation (State Council of China, 2022). In tandem, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) advocates global security by strengthening international collaboration across dimensions like counter-terrorism, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and cybersecurity. Furthermore, the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) seeks to stimulate cultural exchanges among diverse civilizations and foster mutual understanding and respect among varying cultures. All four entities—GDSI, GDI, GSI, and GCI—aim to promote international cooperation and harmonious relations among

nations while respecting the sanctity of national sovereignty. They all underscore the significance of multilateralism, mutual respect, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Nevertheless, the distinctions between the UN Charter and these Chinese initiatives lie in their specific focal points and operational strategies. The UN Charter serves as the base of international relations, codifying essential principles ranging from state equality to prohibiting force in global interactions. That is to say that the UN Charter is a legal act formally binding all the UN Members and, since the end of World War II, has been practiced daily under the various multilateral UN bodies. By comparison, China's Global Initiatives are not legally binding treaties or arrangements. Beijing calls for practicing *true multilateralism*, and at the same time, the CGIs have emerged as a unilateral political act. In addition, China offers those political projections for the sake of a more inclusive international order, yet the CGIs are mainly directed to attract developing countries, which might not attract and fit the needs of some of the developed countries. Moreover, the CGIs were introduced to respond to the current global situation and its uncertainties and instabilities. Critics of the GCIs point out that the presented goals serve China's interests as a major developing country (Jash, 2022). However, with the introduction of the CGIs, Beijing anticipates fulfilling the goals and principles of the UN Charter in a more efficient, productive, and effective way. Furthermore, when it comes to overseeing its initiatives, China predominantly leans on bilateral agreements, multilateral initiatives, and regional projects where Beijing plays a substantial or leading role, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as opposed to the United Nations' array of organs and mechanisms for collective decision-making, including the UNSC and the UNGA. As a founding member of the UN and a permanent member of the UNSC, China has increasingly assumed a more pronounced role in the UN system. In this regard, the CGIs are emerging as proactive contributions to global governance, enunciating China's perspectives and concerns. While the UN Charter and China's initiatives exhibit common aspirations, they stand as complementary frameworks for global governance rather than antithetical ones. This complementarity underscores the necessity for dialogue, coordination, and compromise among diverse stakeholders to ensure these frameworks' effective implementation and alignment. China's global governance strategy encompasses multifaceted approaches, as it actively supports international institutions and agreements parallel with its objectives and norms, such as the World Bank and the Paris Agreement on climate



change. Simultaneously, where China's stances diverge from prevailing norms, particularly in the realm of human rights, it endeavours to challenge and offer alternative institutions and models (Tiezzi, 2021). Therefore, while the UN Charter and the Chinese Global Initiatives share overarching objectives, distinctions emerge in their management, strategies, and interpretations. China seeks to exert influence within the UN system to propagate its vision of global governance, which may not always align seamlessly with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter (Thibaut, 2022). This dynamic underscores the evolving landscape of global governance in the contemporary international arena.

### **PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CGIS: A SWOT ANALYSIS**

China's Global Initiatives encompass a range of proposals and endeavours aimed at tackling urgent global challenges and fostering collaboration and growth across various nations and regions. An assessment of these initiatives through a SWOT analysis delves into their internal and external factors, evaluating their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis serves to pinpoint the pros and cons of China's Global Initiatives while also highlighting potential hurdles and risks within the global landscape. Furthermore, it aids in exploring strategies to enhance and optimise these initiatives, leveraging existing resources and capabilities to achieve desired objectives. Ultimately, the SWOT analysis proves to be a valuable tool for strategic planning and decision-making, not only for China but also for its collaborative partners.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of China's Global Initiatives

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating its undeniable economic capabilities and worldwide impact, along with its readiness to impart its developmental expertise and assets to other nations.</li> <li>• Seek to tackle some of the most urgent global issues, including but not limited to COVID-19, climate change, cybersecurity, efforts to alleviate poverty, and the promotion of cultural diversity.</li> <li>• Based on the principles of mutual respect, consultation, cooperation, and benefit for all, and emphasise the importance of multilateralism and the role of the United Nations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face scepticism and criticism from some developed countries, especially the United States and its allies, who perceive them as threats to their interests and values.</li> <li>• Questionable transparency and accountability measures could give rise to worries regarding the recipient countries' debt sustainability, environmental consequences, human rights, and governance standards.</li> <li>• May encounter implementation challenges due to the complexity and diversity of the global situation, as well as the different needs and expectations of the partner countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the potential to maintain new platforms and channels for dialogue and cooperation among different countries and regions and foster a more inclusive and balanced global governance system alongside existing ones.</li> <li>• May play a significant role in advancing the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change, thereby strengthening the global collective effort to address shared challenges.</li> <li>• Promote mutual learning and exchange among different civilizations and cultures, and enrich the diversity of the world.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May face resistance and opposition from some countries or groups that view them as attempts to expand China's influence or challenge the existing world order.</li> <li>• May encounter competition or conflict with other regional or global initiatives that have different visions, agendas, or understandings of the same terms, such as the Quad or the Build Back Better World Partnership.</li> <li>• May be subject to external interference or sabotage from hostile forces that seek to undermine China's interests or stability.</li> </ul>

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Received positive responses and support from many developing countries, especially in Southeast Asia and Africa, who see them as opportunities for cooperation and development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be affected by the domestic and international pressures that China faces, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic slowdown, social unrest, geopolitical tensions, and ideological conflicts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Showcase China's image as a responsible major country and a leader in innovation and technology, and increase its soft power and international reputation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be affected and disrupted by unforeseen risks or uncertainties that may arise in the global environment, such as natural disasters, epidemics, wars, or terrorist attacks.</li> </ul>

Source: Own research based on official statements of the government of People's Republic of China, statements of the US representatives to the UN, and the UN Charter.

As mentioned above and shown in Table 2, an assessment of these initiatives through a SWOT analysis discerns their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, taking into account the internal and external factors influencing their implementation and impact. This analytical approach serves to recognise advantages and disadvantages inherent in China's Global Initiatives and to highlight potential obstacles and risks encountered within the global landscape. The strengths of these initiatives lie in China's formidable economic prowess and worldwide influence, its willingness to share developmental experiences and resources, its dedicated approach to tackling global predicaments, and its commitment to the principles of mutual respect, consultation, cooperation, and collective benefit. Conversely, the weaknesses of China's Global Initiatives encompass scepticism and criticism from certain developed nations, mainly the US and its allies, as well as the absence of transparent and accountable mechanisms, challenges stemming from the multifaceted and diverse global context, and the concurrent domestic and international pressures faced by China. Opportunities arise from these initiatives in the form of novel platforms and channels for dialogic engagement and cooperation, contributions to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change, the facilitation of cross-cultural learning and exchange, and the

presentation of China as a responsible major nation and a frontrunner in innovation and technology. However, threats to China's Global Initiatives loom in the form of resistance and opposition from specific countries or interest groups, potential competition or conflicts with other regional or global initiatives, susceptibility to external interference or subversion from adversarial forces, and vulnerability to unforeseen risks or uncertainties emerging within the global arena.

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# SOUTHEAST ASIA BETWEEN THE US' AND CHINA'S VISIONS FOR THE WORLD

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**Abstract:** The Chinese initiatives proposed in 2022 and 2023, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, along with the already existing Belt and Road Initiative, jointly present Beijing's views on the principles, values, and efforts for the future. On the other hand, Washington has a vision for the world that builds on the well-known and established rules, patterns, and norms promoted by the US since the end of the Cold War. The US National Security Strategy, unveiled by the Biden administration in October 2022 as the document concerned with the security aspect of this vision, is the most recent one that points to how the US sees the world and its role in it. The countries of Southeast Asia (SEA), the region where these two great powers directly interact with each other through overlapping spheres of influence, are particularly concerned about how these two contrasting visions affect them. The paper aims to determine how the SEA countries will respond to the new global initiatives launched by China and how these initiatives will impact relations in the region between local actors and great powers alike, particularly in the context of regional stability and the balance of power in the region. The paper draws from the works of Michael Leifer and the concepts of the English School of International Relations, primarily the writings of Hedley Bull, by which Leifer was greatly influenced, and is based on the idea that the balance of power is a strategy willingly employed by the states to achieve regional order. The paper will argue that the SEA countries will find aspects of China's initiatives appealing, especially those aligned with the core principles of ASEAN, while remaining careful to avoid being pulled into the binary division in the battle between democracy and autocracy.

**Keywords:** Southeast Asia, the US, China, regional stability, regional order, balance of power.

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## INTRODUCTION

The United States and China are the two great powers whose competition will shape the general character and ways in which states interact with each other in the international system. It will influence the main features, processes, and characteristics of international relations in the upcoming decades. China, as a challenger, and the US, as a hegemon whose supremacy is being contested, have their own visions for the international system, including how it should function, on which norms it should be based, and what role the major powers should have in it. Naturally, smaller powers must navigate these contrasting visions and try to find a place for themselves that will, in the best way, allow them to achieve their own goals. For some of them, being situated in the regions that are and will continue to be crucial in this rivalry brings additional pressure to formulate a foreign policy that will not make them collateral victims of the Washington-Beijing competition. Such is the case with the countries of Southeast Asia (SEA). They must navigate this global competition and articulate ways to make the best use of the opportunities and avoid the risks it brings. In this regard, their stances towards China's Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) are a good benchmark.

The article is divided into two parts. The first will outline the theoretical framework used in the analysis. It will explain the key concepts of the English School, such as international society, international order, and the role of balance of power, with a particular focus on the writings of Michel Leifer, who applied them in his work on Southeast Asia. The second part will first give a brief summary of the main characteristics of the three Chinese initiatives and the US's alternative vision while highlighting the role of Southeast Asia in them. Then, it will explain the different responses to the three initiatives by the SEA countries.

### ENGLISH SCHOOL, INTERNATIONAL ORDER, AND THE BALANCE OF POWER

In order to understand how the US's and China's contrasting visions of the world order reflect on Southeast Asia, we will turn to the ideas and theoretical concepts introduced by the English School of International Relations. Sitting outside of the three classical approaches to the study of international relations, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism, the authors of the English School

carved for themselves a distinct place in the history of the science of international relations and developed theoretical concepts that connect them to all three of the mentioned schools. In the opinion of this author, their ideas are most closely related to the realist approach to international relations. The state-centrism, importance of balance of power, and driving force of interests are among the main features that point to the connections between the two theoretical approaches, although the English School shows greater flexibility and willingness to include and rely on the ideas that bring additional complexity to the explanations of certain phenomena in international relations.

According to Barry Buzan (2014, p. 12), the 'English School of thinking is built around a triad of three key concepts: *the international system, international society, and world society*'. While the international system includes a number of states in interaction with each other, the international society contains units (states) interlocked in a more closely spun relational web. They are connected by shared goals and thus promote an international order aimed at accomplishing them, mainly through the maintenance of common interests, rules, and institutions. World society takes individuals as its units and encompasses the whole global population. It transcends the international society of states and establishes a world order that reflects the 'primary goals of social life among mankind as a whole' (Bull, 2002, p. 19).

International society is at the centre of the classical works by the English School authors, including the seminal work *The Anarchical Society* by Hedley Bull (2002). Bull deals with the issue of order in international society. According to him, the international order represents 'a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society' (Bull, 2002, p. 8). For the international order to be maintained, several conditions must exist: 'a sense of common interests in the elementary goals of social life; rules prescribing behaviour that sustains these goals; and institutions that help to make these rules effective' (Bull, 2002, p. 63). It is important to notice that the institutions are mainly understood in a more general way as 'deep and relatively durable social practices' that 'must not only be shared among the members of international society but also be seen among them as legitimate behaviour' (Buzan, 2014, pp. 16-17). Bull identifies five: balance of power, international law, diplomacy, war, and the great powers. Out of these, for further analysis in this article, the balance of power is the most important one and will be given further attention.

Bull distinguishes among several conceptions of the balance of power on the basis of various criteria. Among others, he makes a differentiation between the general and local or regional balances of power. Additionally, separation is made between a fortuitous and a contrived balance of power. While the first 'arises without any conscious effort on the part of either of the parties to bring it into being', the second 'is one that owes its existence at least partly to the conscious policies of one or both sides' (Bull, 2002, p. 100). For Bull, a contrived balance of power is a more potent understanding. He argues that balance of power is not an inevitability, and neither it is independently established without the effort of the states, nor is there a historical or any other law that pushes the states to act in order to create one. For him, there is 'only a need to maintain one if international order is to be preserved. States may and often do behave in such a way as to disregard the requirements of a balance of power' (Bull, 2002, p. 107). Thus, pursuit of the balance of power can be regarded as only one of the possible foreign policy choices for the states, which have to consciously put effort into it in order for it to be established. This understanding of the concept is also evident in the works of Michael Leifer, as will be shown in the next section.

### **English School theoretical underpinnings in the works of Michael Leifer**

Michel Leifer remains among the most important authors in the study of Southeast Asian politics. In his vast body of work, he analysed, among other subjects, the role and contributions of ASEAN, the effects of different crises, such as the Vietnamese-Cambodia war, on relations in the region, and the foreign policy of specific regional states, including Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. However, in his research on politics in Southeast Asia, he rarely relied on specific theoretical frameworks or aimed to contribute to the development of theoretical concepts in the science of international relations.

Nevertheless, as with any serious scholar, his theoretical starting points and assumptions, however implied or indirect, were consistent and strongly rooted. To which theoretical approach they can be most strongly linked is a different question altogether. Some authors define him as a realist (Peou, 2002; Emmerson, 2006; Tan, 2006), while others are more inclined to associate his thinking with the English School (Liow and Emmers, 2006; Khong, 2006; Haacke, 2006). The author of this article finds more potency in the second argument. Whatever the case may be, Leifer's use of the concepts

of regional order based on the idea of a society of states and balance of power, understood as a conscious policy of regional states and great powers, is useful in order to explain the current efforts of the SEA states to navigate the contrasting visions for the world offered by Washington and Beijing.

Leifer's definition of the concept of the international order is similar to the classic interpretation of the term by the English School: 'condition of international political life which is the product of shared assumptions about interests and conduct on the part of those states which play the major role in determining the central or global balance of power' (Leifer, 2005a, p. 91). Furthermore, he directly links the idea of international order to the great powers, which are instrumental in creating a balance of power. Their stance towards the existing international order is crucial because they possess the means to maintain or disrupt it in accordance with their perception of their own interests. The effect the great powers exercise on a particular region is dependent on whether they are geographically situated in it, as was the USSR in Eastern Europe, or they are only projecting their influence, which is the case with the US and China in Southeast Asia (Leifer, 2005a, pp. 92-93). Additionally, the internal structure and political situation in a region play a significant role as well. The existence of a particular regional order can shape the effects of great power influence.

Stemming from his definition of (global) international order, he sees regional order as 'the existence of a stable structure of regional inter-governmental relationships informed by common assumptions about the bases of inter-state conduct'. Moreover, it 'refers to a condition of security obtaining between regional states that is upheld by their deferring to a formal or informal set of rules' (Leifer, 2005b, p. 98). But it 'requires more than just a rudimentary code of interstate conduct. It also requires the existence of a set of shared assumptions about the interrelationships among resident and external states' (Leifer, 1986b, p. 152). From this, we can conclude that the role of the regional balance of power is equally important for the maintenance of the regional order as it is on a global level. This is evident in Leifer's writings on the ASEAN.<sup>1</sup> He points out that the origin of this organisation is in the

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that, at the time of writing of most of the works by Michael Leifer cited in this article, the ASEAN, which was created in 1967, consisted of the founding members Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, as well as Brunei, which joined in 1985. The so-called Indochina states (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam) became members in the 1995-1999 period.

regional conflict, and its main role was to overcome its consequences and legacies. The position of Indonesia as the most likely candidate for regional hegemony was contained by the formal constraints of the ASEAN. At the start of the 1970s, the organisation's push for reinforced commitment to values of sovereignty and non-interventionism by great powers was made through the idea of a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality (ZOPFAN), which was a response to a changing balance of external influences (Leifer, 1986a, p. 122). Additionally, the members of the organisation were eager to use the presence of US forces to check the potential overwhelming influence of China, which was one of the main ideas behind the establishment of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in the early 1990s (Leifer, 2005c, pp. 153-154).

Thus, the ASEAN and its adjacent platforms and organisations are seen as means for the preservation of regional order through a balance of power among the regional actors and the great powers that exercise influence in the region. It correlates with the second of the two meanings Leifer attributes to the balance of power. The first is seen as a distribution of power and 'is a description of a relationship between two or more states defined in terms of their respective capabilities'. The second is explained as a policy that is 'being directed at preventing the establishment of undue dominance by one or more states' (Leifer, 2005c, p. 153). This idea of a balance of power as an important tool to maintain the regional order in Southeast Asia, understood as a pattern of interactions among the actors that share common rules and norms and thus form an international (regional) society, will be used as a starting point in our further analysis.

### **SOUTHEAST ASIA'S REGIONAL ORDER AND THE US-CHINA RIVALRY**

As the great power that is taking a more assertive stance on the international stage and aspires to play a significant role in the tackling of all crucial issues of modern international politics, such as climate change, inequality, or regional conflicts, China has outlined its own ideas on how to address them. They are presented in the two concept papers on the Global Security Initiative and the Global Development Initiative. The Global Civilization Initiative, introduced by President Xi in his keynote speech at the Chinese Communist Party in Dialogue with the World Political Parties High-

Level Meeting, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has proven very successful in its implementation ever since its announcement in 2013, lay the foundation for Beijing's wide and multisectoral vision for the emerging international order.

In the aspect of security, the importance of a win-win approach is highlighted several times in the GSI concept paper. It ties to the holistic concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. The security of one country cannot come at the expense of the security of others (GSI, 2023). The value China attributes to the region of Southeast Asia is evidenced by the place it is given in the priorities of cooperation identified in the GSI concept paper. The aim to 'support and improve the ASEAN-centred regional security cooperation mechanism and architecture...' is ranked sixth, coming immediately after the global priorities and before any other specific region (GSI, 2023). In addition to security, the promotion of peace and development are additionally emphasised in the document. The importance of development as a significant concept is further strengthened through the GDI, which identifies eight core concepts and principles: prioritising development, people-centred, leaving no country and no one behind, harmony between humans and nature, innovation-driven, global development partnership, action-oriented, and synergy (GDI, 2021, pp. 2-3). Through its focus on development, Beijing can provoke interest in many countries of the global South, especially those that have already participated in the BRI, including those in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the attractiveness of the GCI lies in its focus on the diversity of cultures and civilizations and its refrain from imposing its own values or models on others (Xinhua, 2023).

The most recent American document that presents their vision of the world and particularly the role of the US is the National Security Strategy, published in October 2022. For Washington, the decisive conformation is between democracies and autocracies (NSS, 2022, p. 8). This confrontation is aimed at convincing people around the world of the benefits of the respective types of government, but the US is not alone in it. It relies on its partnerships and allies, and they do not include only democratic countries. In order not to exclude and alienate its important partners with autocratic regimes, the main criteria for the side on which a country stands in this clash is whether it supports and adheres to the current international order, as defined in the document as rules-based (NSS, 2022, p. 16). Stemming from

this, the main challengers are Russia and China. But, while Russia presents an immediate threat, it is China who is perceived as ‘the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective’ (NSS, 2022, p. 8). Naturally, the Indo-Pacific is singled out as the region where the Washington-Beijing competition will mostly take place, although the global aspect is not neglected. Additionally, the importance of the ASEAN is acknowledged, while the alliance with Thailand and the Philippines is additionally accentuated (NSS, 2022, pp. 37-38).

Of course, the nature and function of the Chinese and American documents previously analysed are very different. China’s initiatives are aimed at a global audience, present broader ideas and goals, and propose general future actions in order to achieve them, all in non-specific terms. On the other hand, the US National Security Strategy is targeted at the American audience, has a much narrower and more concrete aim, the protection of the US, its citizens, and its own national interests, and is more direct in proposing concrete measures and actions that should advance them. Still, given the nature of the status of both China and the US, the comparison can lead to meaningful conclusions. This is due to the fact that China is a challenging power that aims to shake the order organised in accordance with the benefits of the current hegemon and thus must present a viable alternative that can attract wider global support, while for the US, being the aforementioned hegemon, its own security and the current international order are inseparably linked, and because of that, it has the goal of maintaining the status quo.

### **The Southeast Asian countries response to Chinese global initiatives**

For the countries of South-East Asia, the norms and basic propositions of regional order are highlighted in the fundamental principles of ASEAN: ‘the mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity, and national identity of all nations; the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion, or coercion; non-interference in the internal affairs of one another; settlement of differences or disputes in a peaceful manner; renunciation of the threat or use of force; and effective cooperation among themselves’ (ASEAN, n.d.). They stem from

the mutual history of regional actors and the need to function in a geographical space of vital interest for great powers, primarily the US and China. Thus, the insistence on these principles is interconnected with the continual practice of maintaining good relations with both sides and attempting to maximise gains, but staying away from completely siding with one over the other.

This is mainly achieved through the application of the hedging strategy in their relations with Washington and Beijing. Hedging can be defined as ‘a middle way between balancing and bandwagoning, a strategy that is focused on the creation of backup options for response to a risk through engagement with the potential threat in military, economic, and political areas on the one hand, and deterrence through a form of soft or indirect balancing on the other’ (Nedić, 2022, p. 96). Naturally, manoeuvring space and the degree of alignment with either side vary, as the history, conditions, and current circumstances of each individual country in the region are different. For example, Thailand and the Philippines are, in some aspects, constrained by their formal alliance with the US. Summarily, the regional order for the SEA countries means the respect of the fundamental ASEAN principles and the maintenance of the balance of power amongst the regional countries and the great powers alike. Having that in mind, we can assess their stances on the different initiatives promoted by Beijing.

The SEA countries’ view of the GSI is largely shaped by the domain of interstate relations it covers. Security, as one of the core and most vital interests of any state, is always a sensitive issue. Since China is a neighbouring great power, whose geographical proximity and aspirations can pose a direct threat to many of the SEA countries, the support for a larger role for Beijing as a security provider in the region is limited. As the 2023 State of SEA survey report shows, citizens in the regional countries are unconvinced of the GSI’s positive effects, as at the ASEAN level, 15.4% of people express no confidence and 29.1% have little confidence, while 21.7% are confident and only 5.7% are very confident (Seah et al., 2023, p. 34). These attitudes in the population affect the stance of national leaders. Additionally, the larger security role of China can provoke a more direct response from the US and thus increase the potential for an escalation that would greatly affect all countries in the region. The firm and reliable US military presence in the SEA, the continual FONOP missions the US undertakes, and the increased focus on relations with the ASEAN countries during the Biden administration are a stark reminder that



Washington regards its interests in this part of the world as priorities. Furthermore, the many existing disputes between countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia with China regarding territorial waters and claims in the South China Sea make them reserved on the idea of a further reliance on China in the security domain (Camba, 2023).

The GDI is producing an altogether different response. The importance of development for all the countries in the region cannot be overstated, and China played an important role as a partner in their undertakings. The GDI is building on the success of the BRI, which has several major projects in the region, such as the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway in Indonesia or the China-Laos railway. All of the regional countries are members of the Group of Friends of the GDI. As a region, they are also the largest beneficiaries from this initiative, being partners in 14 out of a total of 50 projects (28%) in the GDI Project Pool's first batch (Thi Ha, 2023a, p. 5). On the other hand, Washington's results in providing meaningful alternatives have been mixed. The Trump administration's abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was supposed to be a serious alternative for economic development in the region through trade, caused a major lack of confidence among regional leaders. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), a sort of replacement initiative, has not thus far accomplished major results. The State of SEA shows that while 46.5% expect that IPEF's overall impact and effectiveness will be positive, 41.8% are not sure, mainly due to lack of information (27.2%) or dependency on the negotiation results (35.5%) (Seah et al., 2023, pp. 21-23). While expectations of results exist, the problem is that the framework is loosely defined and too vague. Consequently, the ASEAN states do not see in the US a reliable counterpoint for partnership with China in the economic development aspect, which is a stark contrast to their perception of Washington's role as a security actor.

Lastly, the GCI, as the most recent and at this point the least concrete initiative, can also incite support in some aspects, although in others it will find SEA countries more skeptical. Firstly, it is reminiscent of the discourse on Asian values, which also asserted that there are multiple paths to modernity and was promoted by the SEA countries in the 1990s, at the height of the unipolar moment but on the heels of their economic success. It was particularly advocated by Singapore and Malaysia, but it understandably receded after the Asian economic crisis (Thi Ha, 2023b). Secondly, the GCI states that the

modernization path is not uniform and that multiple understandings of the concept as well as approaches to its fulfilment are viable. This opens the space for cooperation among countries with differing histories and aspirations and reflects the way the ASEAN functions: advocating cooperation, promoting independence from external actors as much as possible, and relying on sovereignty and non-interference in order to accommodate communist regimes and US allies, autocracies and democracies, and majority Muslim or Buddhist states alike. On the other hand, the GCI is much more interlinked with the US-China global rivalry and presents a comprehensive alternative view to the western, liberal, individual rights-oriented outlook. China promotes an essentially Westphalian order focused on sovereign states, one where the needs of the collective are privileged over the rights or freedoms of the individual (Walt, 2021). In this clash, the SEA states will cautiously support the CSI aspects that are fundamentally aligned with the ASEAN principles while being careful to avoid being pulled into the binary division in the battle between democracy and autocracy.

## CONCLUSION

While the international order is based on agreed-upon assumptions and shared goals primarily by great powers, every region has its own regional order reflecting specific local characteristics. For Southeast Asia, it is mainly upheld by adherence to the principles of ASEAN, which focus on sovereignty and non-interference in order to accommodate diverse types of states in the region and to enable mutual cooperation despite that. Additionally, it is based on hedging between the major powers that project their influence in the region, the US and China. The rising rivalry between the two brings two contrasting visions for the world and the need for the ASEAN states to adjust their stances towards them. China's vision is most concretely expressed through the three global initiatives that have caused mixed reactions in Southeast Asia. While the GDI is being overwhelmingly supported, the stance towards the GSI is much more reserved, and the GCI is expected to be embraced only in some of its aspects. These different responses are shaped in part by the alternatives offered by the US, which are much more convincing in the security domain than in the economic domain. While this summarises the general response of the ASEAN states, the nuanced and specific reactions of each individual country could be the subject of further research.

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# ABOUT THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON MODERN RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS

Elena I. SAFRONOVA\*

**Abstract:** The article considers the main features of Russian-Chinese relations in the context of the current stage of globalisation. As a formulation of the issue, the author puts forward the assertion that the current stage of globalisation has certain specifics. At first, modern globalisation was a product of the Western world, but nowadays, noticeable shifts have begun in world processes. Russia's position in the world is undergoing large-scale qualitative changes. The Russian Federation (RF) is expanding its cooperation with developing countries, especially in Africa and Latin America. And China is rapidly evolving as a new global political and economic centre and the largest developing country, which the Developing World (DW) already calls its leader. At the same time, trying to remain unchanged, traditional institutions and mechanisms of global governance created during the Bretton Woods period are losing their effectiveness. All this is changing the global balance of power. The West no longer dominates. A new model of globalisation is emerging, which may meet the interests of the majority of mankind and not only the so-called golden billion. The author draws attention to the differences between the positions of Russia and China, on the one hand, and the Western views on the directions of globalisation, on the other. One of the differences is that Russia and China believe that multipolarity in international relations is not at all contrary to globalisation but can be an inherent feature of it if globalisation proceeds according to a scenario that takes into account the interests of most countries in the world, especially developing ones. In contrast, the West prefers not to recognise the effectiveness of development models other than its own. This article also shows the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on globalisation. The COVID-19 crisis confirmed that traditional Western institutions, the tools of globalisation that could function comfortably under normal conditions, quickly failed under the pandemic emergency.

**Keywords:** Russia, China, cooperation, political and economic globalisation, COVID-19 pandemic.

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## POSING THE ISSUE

The author relies on the premise that globalisation is an objective phenomenon that cannot be reversed. No one can go back in time, and no one has a time machine. So, globalisation may be accelerated or slowed down, but it never stops completely.

Globalisation dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to great geographical discoveries. And it became a tangible phenomenon only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the technological revolution, which has created unprecedented opportunities for industrial production. It should be noted that globalisation in the form observed since the 1980s is frequently nominated as Westernisation because it bears the stamp of its Western origin. Although the West no longer dominates the world as it did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the revolution in information technologies and communications, launched in the West, became a driver for global integration processes. So did instruments of financial markets formed according to Western patterns, as well as the international division of labour favouring Western consumers. All these determine features of Western-led globalisation.

However, due to globalisation, world trade and investment markets have expanded. A global trend towards the initiation of integration projects has emerged. It largely provoked the activation of industrial production in developing countries. Outside the Western world, new financial centres have arisen. These phenomena can be considered as the positive effects of economic globalisation, which have led to a qualitative increase in international economic cooperation and reformist sentiments on the world stage as well.

If we paraphrase the idea of Karl Marx and Friederich Engels that the 'development of Modern Industry' by the bourgeoisie produces 'grave-diggers' of the latter (Marx and Engels, 1848), i.e., objective forces corroding from within the obsolete orders of the old system, such forces can also be seen today. These are states and peoples that are politically and economically trying to resist the diktat of the West. Some of these states initially developed on the basis of the Western world order, but now it has become inconvenient and cramped for them. Therefore, they seek to form a new world order to move forward in accordance with their own development models and interests.

## FEATURES OF THE CURRENT STAGE OF GLOBALISATION

The current stage of globalisation<sup>1</sup>, connected with the growth of international connectivity, has generated new perils or exacerbated the existing ones. These are: international terrorism, illegal migration, transnational organised crime, food and energy shortages, pandemics, the outspread of domestic wars, drugs and human trafficking, environmental degradation, unemployment, and stagnant wages. Economic crises aggravate the situation.

Trying to remain unchanged, traditional institutions and mechanisms of global governance created during the domination of the West, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and some others, lose their effectiveness from year to year (Kortunov, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

In the last decade, all of that has led to the rejection of globalisation as a positive force. The response has been de-globalisation and protectionism. Many countries recognise the insufficiency of their own capacities to overcome these 'pathologies of globalisation' (Kortunov, 2020).

Therefore, we may say that sane globalisation implies *multipolarity* as an instrument of neutralising perils collectively and thus more efficiently. Russia and China believe that multipolarity does not at all contradict globalisation but can be an inherent and imminent feature of international relations. Globalisation, on the one hand, and win-win international cooperation and sovereignty, on the other, are not mutually exclusive. And here lies the difference between the stances of China and Russia and those of the United States and its allies.

The foundations of the multipolarity concept were laid in world political science as early as the mid-1960s (Large Actual Political Encyclopedia, *Mnogopolyarnost'*). For the next 30 years, the corresponding discourse took place in a purely academic framework until a prominent Russian statesman

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<sup>1</sup> The author associates the modern stage of globalisation with a sharp increase in the interconnectedness of economic and political life of different countries and regions, especially manifested since the late 1980s and early 1990s. It has been caused mainly by the rapid development of global information and logistics spheres, and the corresponding reduction of geographical distances, and increased worldview transparency.

<sup>2</sup> On the modern decline of the Western world, see, for example, Yao Zhongqiu, 2023.



and scientist, E.M. Primakov, put forward in 1996 the thesis that the transition to multipolarity has become one of the fundamental and tangible trends in world life (Primakov, 1996).

In 1998, Primakov, already the head of the RF government, gave this ideological thesis a practical dimension in the context of a trilateral cooperation structure called “Russia-India-China” (RIC). According to E.M. Primakov’s concept, the RIC can be considered the first applied tool for building multipolarity in international relations. Indeed, the RIC format launched the creation of geopolitical structures advocating a multipolar world (MID RF, 2014).

The Chinese view of multipolarity (*dojihua*) was first voiced in 1997 by then-Chinese President Jiang Zemin (Large Actual Political Encyclopedia, *Mnogopolyarnost’*). It became a statement of China’s unwillingness to continue tolerating inequality in international relations, which is characteristic of a unipolar system.

Later on, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan essentially shared the opinion of E.M. Primakov that the general trend of world development is to move towards multipolarity. The path to ‘may be thorny and long, but the historical trend is irreversible—all attempts to establish a “unipolar world” or to monopolise international affairs are doomed to failure’ (Safronova, 2000, p. 71).

According to the Chinese concept, the main role in world politics should belong to several centres of influence, which will not seek hegemony either separately or jointly. Therefore, they should not enter into any alliances, and this will become the key to the natural balance of world forces (Large Actual Political Encyclopedia, *Mnogopolyarnost’*). Since then, multipolarity has been interpreted by China as a universal and effective remedy against diktat in international relations. And the thesis of not joining alliances has now found a continuation in the non-bloc principle of Chinese foreign policy.

Since the proclamation of a course for reform and openness in the late 1970s, the Chinese economy has become increasingly integrated into the world economy. At first, the policy of openness aimed at creating conditions for lagging-behind China to enter the advanced echelons of international economic relations. The ideological confrontation did not prevent China from quickly establishing ties with the West, primarily through the creation of special economic zones favourable for foreign investment, advanced

technologies, and managerial experience. The process accelerated after China's accession to the WTO in 2001. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), when declared in 2013, was China's first large-scale attempt to change the existing world order through mechanisms of economic globalisation. Now, the BRI is a tool for the economic promotion of a value system different from the Western one.

It should be recognised that China benefited greatly from Western-style economic globalisation. But now it is trying to bring its own nuances to globalisation processes. China considers economic globalisation as an instrument to apply the country's comparative advantages in trade, investment, innovation, infrastructure construction, etc. The second economy in the world is no longer afraid of competition and is able to set the tone in the world economic arena.

Beijing characterises the "China-type" globalisation under construction with such semantic basic properties as openness, inclusiveness, balance, co-development, and benefit for all. China associates the new globalisation paradigm with unleashing the "vital forces of the world economy", abandoning the Cold War mentality, and striving for peaceful coexistence. It is also connected with the declared intention of the PRC to share its achievements 'in the field of development with the whole world', since, as Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised, 'China's development is an opportunity for the whole world' (Russian.News.Cn, 2022).

Despite the difficulties the Chinese economy has faced, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing does not abandon its policy of opening up to the world. Its course towards "dual circulation" is based both on the development of domestic consumption and production markets as well as on the optimisation of economic interaction with foreign countries. The two "wings" of the "circulation" should harmoniously and profitably intertwine and complement each other. The more open China is, the wider the field for its international economic activity.

China recognises the negative aspects of economic globalisation. The key one is the ease with which economic crises, originating at one point on the planet, spread to the rest of the world. However, China claims that it is able to neutralise their effects thanks to its own competent macro policies (Bank for International Settlements, 2019, pp. 101-102). China's experience in coping with crises appears useful for other developing countries.

At the same time, *political* globalisation, which Beijing considers a threat to the sovereignty of non-Western countries and a means of diktat in international relations, should be alien to healthy international relations. There is a visible coincidence between Russian and Chinese views on *political* globalisation. Both Russia and the PRC believe that the commonality of the problems caused by globalisation for most countries should not lead to the infringement of their sovereignty, even for the sake of international integration.

### GLOBALISATION, MULTIPOLARITY, AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY ISSUES

The West is trying to keep its model of globalisation intact in order to maintain its own global power while undermining the power of independent states. The main obstacle to Western-style globalisation is the position of independent countries, which seek to protect their identity and national interests.

Both Russia and China stand for the right of peoples to choose their own path of progress and development model. Russia and China, while advocating multilateral cooperation, do not accept the artificial unification of international life in its political, economic, financial, informational, cultural, and other aspects. The two countries believe that globalisation must emphasise the uniqueness of each state and not negate it. But American-led globalisation (Westernisation) implies the unification of development models and the smoothing out of national economic and ideological specifics.

The latest version of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2023) reflects the need to form such a system of international relations that would provide 'equal opportunities for development for all states, regardless of their geographical location, size of territory, demographic, resource and military capacity, or political, economic, and social structure' (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023).

In the run-up to the Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia in March 2023, the RF and China reaffirmed their commitment to building a multipolar world order at the highest level (Putin, 2023; Xi, 2023).

Now, the following circumstances favour the formation of multipolarity:

1. *The economic rise of the Developing World.* According to China's data, developing countries currently account for more than 70% of global economic

growth (Foreign Minister, 2023). In 1980, developed countries accounted for 75.4% of world GDP, while developing countries accounted for less than 25%. However, by 2021, the share of the first group in world GDP fell to 57.8%, while the share of the second increased to 42.2% (Cheng, 2023).

2. *The expansion of Russia's political and economic ties with developing countries as the RF overcomes numerous sanctions.* In China's foreign policy, the role of developing regions is also growing as a circle of support, a source of resources, and an argument in dialogue with the West. In response to the US containment policy, Russia and China seek to form a geopolitical alternative to the so-called liberal coalition. The West, observing the growing interest of the two countries towards the DW, does not remain passive. As a result, the global South is turning into a valuable "prize", which also increases its weight and image in world affairs.

3. *The growth of the global importance of international organisations and structures in which China and Russia actively participate.* Thus, nowadays, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation accounts for more than 30% of world GDP and 40% of the world's population (Multipolarity After Ukraine, 2023, p. 93; Feás and Steinberg, 2022). The GDP of the BRICS, even according to the IMF, amounted in 2021 to 46.16 trillion USD in terms of purchasing power parity, while the GDP of the G7 was only 44.9 trillion (Pilko, 2022). Chinese scientists predict that by 2030, the BRICS will account for more than half of the world gross product created, while the share of the G7 countries will reduce to a quarter (Nebrenchin, 2016, p. 104). If Argentina, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia join the BRICS, the likelihood of what is now growing is that the amount of the BRICS's GDP at PPP will reach 54.5 trillion USD (Pilko, 2022).

Therefore, thanks to the SCO, the BRICS, and other DW formats, a solid foundation is laid for a non-Western-oriented multipolar order.

4. *Self-discredit of a number of institutions established by the West.* Traditional Western mechanisms of global governance, created during the Bretton Woods period, are losing their effectiveness. The G7, the IMF, and the WB have shown an inability to solve international problems in the interests of the world majority, not just the "golden billion".

Of course, the unprecedented progress of the dialogue between Russia and China takes place not only because of their opposition to the Western worldview. The partnership has been strengthened on the basis of mutual

interests, benefit, equality, common views on the world order, the complementarity of economies, and considerations originating from a long common border (Trenin, 2021).

Having the opportunity to coordinate their positions, both countries remain absolutely free to choose their behaviour in the international arena. This is sometimes characterised as the 'sovereign internationalism model' (Zhang, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has become further evidence that both countries are guided primarily by national interests in their dialogue. This explains their reluctance to enter into binding bloc alliances based on military-political pacts.

### **RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The pandemic has become a dividing strip in the globalisation process, and it has definitely shown the time limits of Westernisation. Before the pandemic, the world was dominated by Western-style globalisation because it had been initially launched by the Western technological revolution and Western worldview. However, the Corona crisis has confirmed that Western instruments of globalisation, which could function passably under normal conditions, quickly failed in the pandemic state of emergency.

The pandemic generated such challenges as the reluctance of the West to share knowledge and vaccines with the non-Western world. Regretfully, the fight against the virus has not become a unifying but an additional separating factor in the international arena, exacerbating the competition between states and development models (Kortunov, 2020).

Russia was the first country to officially register the COVID-19 vaccine and the second after China to start vaccinating its population. Very soon, both countries began to mass produce vaccines and supply them abroad, while the West initially preferred to stockpile vaccines in quantities far in excess of its needs. Russia and China oppose this destructive state of affairs and the "politicisation of the pandemic".

The pandemic, with its border closings and connectivity breaks, has undoubtedly slowed the pace of globalisation. Also, the transport and logistics crisis has become both a consequence and a new cause of the connectivity problems. It seemed important for Russia and China to use the slowdown in

their own interests. The deceleration could give them time to take a new step forward in their partnership. This required the following:

To consider how to prepare for the fierce international competition driven by a new spiral of technological revolution. A full post-pandemic recovery will also boost competition.

To realise that only solid and efficacious states are capable of being benefit-gaining participants in globalisation (Kortunov, 2020). The pandemic has become new evidence of the principle that “the fittest one survives”.

So far, both Russia and China have been able to adequately resist the COVID-19 challenge. They quickly mobilised their healthcare systems and did not permit the pandemic to significantly damage their productive forces. Both countries have retained their potential to function efficiently and the ability to resist the policies of diktat, unilateralism, and hegemonism pursued by the US and the forces it leads.

Multipolarity, while being a factor in the democratisation of the international order, implies, at the same time, that the interdependence of countries requires serious global governance. Why so? Globalisation is a set of objectives but often a chaotic trend in world development. Therefore, to streamline the randomness, adequate mechanisms of global governance are needed. As we see now, market mechanisms cannot be the only and universal solution to international problems. Accordingly, the mechanisms should be supplemented by states’ effective strategies for economic growth along with respect for international equality. Otherwise, spontaneous globalisation will inevitably reproduce economic and financial crises (Kortunov, 2020).

In the long term, the natural course of globalisation may lead to a situation where the economies of Russia and China might enter into palpable competition. And then the question arises: How will this affect their mutual relations? It is encouraging that over the past 30 years, the two countries have always found mutually acceptable solutions, even when competing. For example, China is interested in close cooperation with Central Asia, which has historically been the focus of Russian interests. And in the region, the two countries have found an accommodation—a productive division of labour. Russia deals with security monitoring in Central Asia, while China tends to the region’s economic development. Another example is the Eurasian Economic Union, which some researchers consider the Russian response to the Belt and Road Initiative. But in 2015, Russia and China signed a joint

statement on cooperation between the BRI and the Eurasian Economic Union (Šćepanović, 2021). So, in the last four decades, Russian-Chinese competition has never drifted to confrontation, which is really encouraging. At the same time, both countries are striving to overcome the legacy of past historical contradictions. Overcoming misunderstandings observed in certain periods of Russian-Chinese relations will allow both countries to jointly meet the challenges of Western-style globalisation through their partnership.

While the pandemic has led to a decrease in the interconnectedness of the global community, this occurs at different rates in different areas and in different regions of the planet. There is no reason to declare the 'end of globalisation' or even a long-term trend towards de-globalisation (Kortunov, 2020). The logic of global economic and social processes and accelerating technological progress promise a new wave of globalisation, possibly in the 2030s. Globalisation is a living organism that breathes. Breathing in is the acceleration of globalisation, and breathing out is its deceleration. That is the dialectic of development.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we may say that a similar understanding of globalisation and multipolarity provides Russia and China with another opportunity for cooperation both bilaterally and globally. The two countries reject the extremes of Western-style globalisation as well as unipolarity. The common goal of Russia and China is to see an updated model of globalisation that meets the needs of non-Western countries with respect to their national interests. This aspiration can create a new field of conceptual cooperation for the two countries and their think tanks as well.

Therefore, a favourable factor of Russian-Chinese mutual understanding may become not only the complementarity of economies and coincidence of development interests, but also their perception of themselves as examples of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation. Russia and China are not opposed to normalising relations with the Western world, but not to the detriment of their national interests. The two countries are unwilling to put up with attempts to encroach on their identity and sovereignty.

However, the current stage of globalisation has a dual effect on Russian-Chinese relations. On the one hand, it reveals and emphasises the coincidence

or commonality of interests and political positions of the two states on many international issues. Globalisation creates the basis for new areas of interaction between Russia and China. The events of recent years have led to the fact that the level of trade and economic dialogue between Russia and China, which three years ago remained below the level of their political relations, is now actively rising.

On the other hand, (economic) globalisation provides the two countries with new opportunities to amplify the circle of their trade and economic partners, primarily in the global South. In the future, this may lead to competition between the two countries for better positions in a number of the world's regions.

One way or another, the *Pax Americana* world order does not suit Russia, China, or the Developing World, which realises its growing global importance. But the transition from unipolarity via bipolarity to multipolarity cannot be easy: the West's stiff opposition, on the one hand, and the increasing number of active poles on the other may complicate the coordination of solutions to global problems, including the reform of stagnant multilateral institutions such as the IMF, the WTO, or even some UN divisions. In the near future, the multipolar world order will be formed in conditions of tough competition with its opponents and a lack of coordination between its supporters (mainly due to the heterogeneity of the DW and the rivalry of its countries in the global markets). Perhaps the anticipated expansion of the BRICS and the SCO with 20 new members would contribute to the consent of developing states under a common roof.

In the context of the acute international situation, it should be noted that countries that do not support anti-Russian sanctions and/or are close partners of China may be subject to increasing pressure, including direct threats or bribery. This may further intensify the struggle between the East and the West for influence, especially in the global South, and for or against multipolarity as such.

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**BELT AND ROAD  
INITIATIVE:  
NEW IMPETUS  
FOR CHINA'S GLOBAL  
PRESENCE**

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Chapter 2



# THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE NEW WORLD ORDER

Levente HORVÁTH\*

**Abstract:** In the 21st century, we have observed the economic and political strengthening of Asian countries, as a result of which we can witness the formation of a new, multipolar, multi-civilisational world order. Over the past year, we have been reading more and more often that Asian countries are advocating the creation of a new world order, but the structure of the new system itself has not been discussed so far.

Ten years ago, China announced the “Belt and Road” Initiative, a global multilateral cooperation. In the last ten years, the Chinese initiative has achieved great success, thanks to which China has been able to present a new cooperation alternative to many countries. The Belt and Road Initiative now goes beyond cooperation and starts to show itself as a framework for a new world order.

In my study, I examine whether the Belt and Road Initiative would really serve as a framework for a new world order. But to understand this, China’s vision of the world order and its thoughts on the creation of the new world order must also be examined, leaving aside the Western way of thinking in order to understand the development of the new world order processes. This study helps to understand them.

**Keywords:** China, Belt and Road Initiative, world order.

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new world order is emerging as Asian countries gain economic strength and rise. The last 500 years have been characterised by Western dominance, with the United States being the only country after World War II to emerge from the conflict unscathed in terms of territory and, at the time, producing 60% of the world’s GNP. It defined its leadership role on the basis of its own domestic political experience. After the Cold War, as the first and only global power, it was even more dominant

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when it came to shaping the new world order. The US was a leader in four crucial areas of global power: military, economic, technological, and cultural. It was present in different parts of the world through its dominance of these four areas, extending its influence to parts of Asia that had hitherto been independent thereof. Part of the American system are global organisations such as the IMF or the World Bank, which represent global interests. They were, in fact, created at the initiative of the United States following the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944 and are, in reality, under US influence. So the world's affairs are decided in Washington, 'and that is where the power game has to be played, and played according to America's domestic rules' (Brzeziński, 2017, p. 48).

Today, however, 'in the favourite phrases of historians, "the expansion of the West" ended and "the revolt against the West" began [...] Western power declined relative to the power of other civilisations [...] the international system expanded beyond the West and became multicivilizational' (Huntington, 2019, p. 71). The 500-year Atlantic era of Western dominance is coming to an end, culminating in unipolar, hegemonic rule following the Cold War.

In recent years, we have heard from Chinese and Russian leaders on many platforms that the world needs a harmonious, multipolar world order that should not be run by one country or a single small community. Asian countries reject hegemony and constantly promote peaceful dialogue and joint cooperation. Although it is only in the last few years that we have often read in Western media about Chinese and Russian leaders' statements to this effect, in fact, the discourse in Asian countries has covered this for decades; however, until now, there has been no economically and politically strong country or community that could adequately represent this idea on international platforms.

In the 21st century, China's economic rise helped it become the second-largest economy in the world, and it launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, based on mutual benefits, peaceful coexistence, and respect for each other. In the past 10 years, more than 151 countries and 32 international organisations have joined the Chinese initiative, bringing a new kind of connectivity and cooperation to international politics, which could even serve as the framework for the new world order that is currently taking shape.

In this study, I examine China's vision of world order, the emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative, and its place and role in the new world order.

## WORLD ORDER

In international politics and even today, the phrase world order is frequently used, with no general definition and many different interpretations and uses, taking the meaning of the phrase "world order" as evidence. According to *The Encyclopaedia of Diplomacy* (Bába, 2018), world order is defined differently from different perspectives:

1. 'World order is identified with norms that regulate relations between states on a global scale, norms that are largely absent or not respected.'
2. 'Other approaches emphasise the subordination of global processes to physical and natural laws, spiritual and moral values, and the interests of power.'
3. 'The representatives of the legal-normative approach seek ways and means to create a just and regulated world order that does not yet exist.'
4. 'According to the descriptive, pragmatic approach of economic and political science, world order is, at any given time, an interdependent set of world economic, political, and ecological systems, ideas, and cultures operating in a given period.'

In addition to these approaches, the encyclopaedia also distinguishes between unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar world orders, which gives new meaning to the term.

There is no single definition of world order in international literature, but Henry Kissinger's *World Order*, in which he explores and discusses the ideas of world order over 430 pages, is certainly outstanding. According to Kissinger (2015), the world order we usually talk about is in fact the system established in the context of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Kissinger, however, could not provide an exact formulation of world order, and this paper does not attempt to do so either.

Defining world order is not easy because, looking at world history, it is only by the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century that we can say that the world has become fully globalised—in Marshall McLuhan's (2001, p. 45) words, a 'global village'. Throughout world history,



some civilisations, or even continents, have built up separate systems independent of one another, and regional “world orders” have emerged. In fact, the Peace of Westphalia also became the set of rules of the world’s great powers at the time, and not all civilisations and regions across the globe took part in the 30-year war. The notion of the Western world order was articulated eloquently by János Arany after 1877, and it is still relevant today.

In the past the warring nations  
Did not follow any precept:  
The strong plundered what he could, and  
Everything he looted, he kept.

That has changed now, as the world has  
A more legalistic flavour:  
When the strong now do some mischief  
They confer and – vote in favour.

As I mentioned above, there is no single concept of world order; thus, it is worth examining what notions of and ideas around world order have developed in other regions and civilisations and how they view them. Given the relevance of the study and the volume of constraints, I will present the Chinese definition of world order.

## **CHINA AND THE WORLD ORDER**

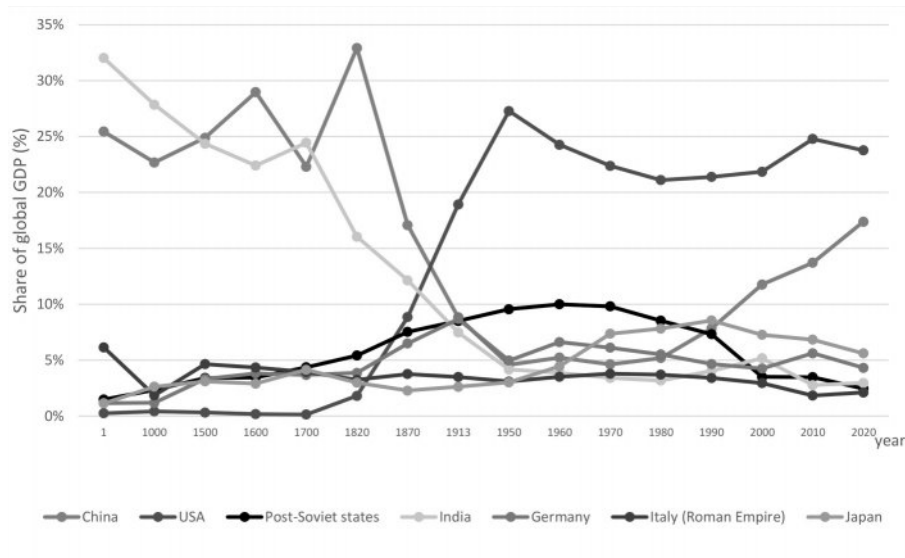
In the course of world history, various civilisations were initially completely separated in space and time. Then, around 1500 BC, neighbouring civilisations began to “meet”, but even in the 10th century AD, it took hundreds of years for ideas and technology to move from civilisation to civilisation (Huntington, 2019, pp. 63-64). Throughout its 5,000-year history, China developed “far away” from other civilisations, isolated by natural borders. The Chinese Empire saw the people beyond its borders as “barbarians”, as China was economically, politically, and socially more advanced and organised. Unlike Western civilisation, China had no colonial intentions. Chinese naval fleets led

by Chinese admiral Zheng He had already sailed across Southeast Asia in the early 1400s, reaching as far as Africa. But the Chinese ships did not sail the seas with colonial intentions. China did not make territorial claims on foreign countries but proclaimed a China-centred world, and foreign people had to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Chinese emperor (Kissinger, 2017, p. 27). Throughout history, until its “encounter” with Western civilisation in the 19th century, China saw itself as the centre of the world. Its Chinese name (Zhong Guo – 中国 – Middle Country) is the origin of the name Middle Kingdom. China also expected the surrounding people and countries to regard China as the centre of the world and the emperor as the Son of Heaven (Ye, 1998, p. 4).

China’s 150 years of humiliation, which Brzeziński (2017) called a historical aberration in his book *The Grand Chessboard*, began after the violent emergence of the West. The blame for these 150 years of humiliation is borne by Great Britain because of the Opium War; Japan because of the predatory wars in the late 19th and mid-20th centuries; Russia because of protracted encroachment on Chinese territories in the North and the Soviet-Chinese estrangement; and, lastly, the US because, through its Asian presence and support of Japan, it stood in the way of China’s external aspirations (Brzeziński, 2017, p. 223). The four great powers showed China that there is another world order, one of global scale, beyond the China-centred world order, whose rules are based on Western culture (Horváth, 2022).

By the 1940s, China had achieved reunification with a strong central power, foreign powers had been ousted, and, in 1949, the People’s Republic of China was established, which then regained its rightful place in the world under the policies of the “Chinese Dream” and the “Chinese Renaissance”, since from 0 AD until the advent of the West, China accounted for 20-30% of the world economy (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The development of the world economy from 0 AD to present day



Source: own editing based on Maddison, 2003 and the World Bank database

By the 21st century, as can be seen in Figure 1, China had become the second-largest economy in the world. According to Justin Yifu Lin (林毅夫, 1952–), a Chinese economist and former World Bank Vice President, China has an increasing role and responsibility in the world economy, but the rules of the game of the current US-dominated world order were laid down after World War II. From the perspective of Beijing, China is entitled to a much greater say in shaping the world order than it currently has, given its economic achievements and global economic responsibilities, which is why China has launched the One Belt, One Road Initiative (Li et al., 2020, pp. 3-5). In addition, of course, there were and are a number of macroeconomic factors that have contributed to China’s emergence as a globalisation leader.

As China’s economic and political strength grows, its voice is also becoming more audible in the international political arena. Unlike in the past, Chinese diplomats are increasingly speaking out in defence of their country, but without interfering in the internal politics of other countries, and as a result, they are often labelled “aggressive” or “war wolves” in Western media,

even though this is a far cry from the Western diplomats' statements that we have become accustomed to in recent decades.

While China's vision for the world and a new multipolar world order have been increasingly heard on international platforms in recent years, it is not in fact a "recent" development. Looking at Chinese and Western archival footage and writings, we can see that since the founding of the People's Republic of China, there have been continuous proposals for a new world order, the framework for which has already been outlined. These are presented below.

### **CHINESE WORLD ORDER**

In his book *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*, German sociologist Max Weber (1915) defined Confucian rationalism as a rational adaptation to the world, in contrast to the Western concept of rational control of the world.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's international relations have also been constantly changing, depending on the international situation. According to Wang (2019), it can be seen as going through four phases: initially, it moved from a policy of "leaning to one side" towards independence; then, it gained a more serious role for itself by becoming a nuclear power; the third phase is when it returned to the UN, by which time it had become a political and military superpower; and finally, thanks to the success of the "reform and opening-up" policy, it became one of the leaders in economic terms, thus becoming a real superpower (Wang, 2019, p. 16). Throughout this time, however, the position of the People's Republic of China has remained unchanged: a new world order must be established. The framework for this had been set over the past 70 years.

#### **"Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence"**

In 1949, the foreign policy guidelines promulgated by Mao Zedong at the founding of the People's Republic already included peaceful coexistence, but it was on December 31, 1953, that Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai first elaborated on peaceful coexistence in the form of five principles at a reception for an Indian delegation. China signed a joint declaration of agreement on the five

principles with India on June 28, 1954, and with Myanmar on June 29, 1954 (MFA, 2023). The five principles are:

1. mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty;
2. mutual non-aggression;
3. mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs;
4. equality and cooperation for mutual benefit;
5. peaceful coexistence.

Peaceful coexistence actually originated in Chinese culture, and if we look at Chinese history, we can see that although these five principles were not stated at the time, they were also preached by ancient Chinese strategists and philosophers. The works of Laozi, Confucius, Mozi, and many other Chinese sages have a strong anti-war and pro-peace stance. In his work "Tao Te Ching", Laozi writes explicitly about peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and harmonious relations (Horváth, 2022).

Although the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" initially applied to Sino-Indian relations, China later extended these to its foreign relations with other countries, and in 1955 they were presented at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung.

On the 60th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (June 28, 2014), Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted in his speech that, having been tested by the evolution of international relations over the past six decades, "the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", as open and inclusive principles of international law, embody the values of sovereignty, justice, democracy, and the rule of law (PRC, 2014).

### **The Bandung Conference**

On April 18, 1955, the Afro-Asian conference, co-convened by India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, began in Bandung, Indonesia. The conference was attended by 29 Asian and African countries that were not part of the post-World War II, Cold War, or bipolar world order blocs and were fighting for their own independence. It was the first international Afro-Asian conference without the participation of a colonising country.

A year before the conference, China had separately proclaimed the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" with India and Myanmar, the two founding

countries of the Bandung Conference, and China was, therefore, invited to the conference, represented by Premier Zhou Enlai. The Western bloc tried to prevent Chinese participation with an unsuccessful bomb attack on the Chinese Prime Minister (Hong, 2015).

A 10-point declaration was issued at the conference, in which the signatories reaffirmed the ideas contained in the UN Charter: respect for the sovereignty of nations, respect for the rules of international law, non-violent and peaceful resolution of conflicts, respect for human rights, the elimination of racial discrimination, cooperation based on mutual benefit, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, etc., i.e., building on China's "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence". An expanded 10-point set of principles for international relations was established, thus proclaiming a framework for a new world order.

### **Three worlds" theory**

Mao Zedong's "three worlds" theory was presented by Deng Xiaoping at the 1974 UN General Assembly and divided the world into three parts, as follows (Deng, 1974):

1. The "first world" comprises the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, which want to gain hegemonic power, control the developing countries of Asia, South America, and Africa, and intimidate less developed countries.
2. The "second world" means the developed countries.
3. And the "third world" includes developing countries in Asia, South America, and Africa.

In fact, with the "three worlds" theory, China hoped to establish a new system of relations in which it positioned itself as the leader of the third world. Deng also argued that the main threat to international peace and security is posed by the hegemonic ambitions of the great powers (Bartha-Rigó, 2018, p. 67).

### **Policy of "reform and opening up"**

In the context of the "reform and opening up" policy announced by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, Deng addressed the idea of a new world order in several

speeches. On March 4, 1985, he said at the gathering of foreign leaders that ‘the outstanding issue in the world today, the global strategic issue, is peace and development. The question of peace is an East-West issue, while the question of development is a North-South issue. This can all be summed up in four words: East, West, North, and South. The North-South problem is the central issue’ (Deng, 1993, p. 105). Deng believed that the economic gap between the North and the South was the source of the unrest, that it was all based on an ‘inadequate world order’, and that a new world order must be established based on the ‘Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence’ (Deng, 1993, p. 93).

### **“Harmonious world”**

In April 2005, Chinese Head of State Hu Jintao announced the concept of a “harmonious world” in his speech at the Jakarta Afro-Asian Conference and in September 2005 at the UN Headquarters, where he said that countries should “promote peaceful coexistence, equal dialogue, development, and prosperity among different cultures, and jointly build a harmonious world together”.

On July 1, 2005, during Hu Jintao’s visit to Russia, he and Putin issued a joint declaration on the international system for the 21st century, which already included the “harmonious world” that the two countries would work together with other countries to establish.

### **THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE**

In 2013, China launched the One Belt, One Road Initiative (initially called One Belt, One Road (OBOR), later renamed BRI), which is based on a Chinese vision of a common, peaceful, win-win cooperation.

Prior to the announcement of the BRI, President Xi Jinping had already been advocating a new world order on various platforms: ‘One must not cling to the Cold War mentality or zero-sum<sup>1</sup> game thinking since the times have changed. We must keep pace with new trends in the 21st century’ (Xi, 2017, p. 305).

In his speeches following his inauguration, President Xi Jinping spoke of peaceful development, mutually beneficial cooperation, harmony, close

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<sup>1</sup> Zero-sum, meaning that as much as one wins, the other loses.

cooperation among nations, win-win situations, the equality and independence of nations, and the new world order, laying the foundation for his speech entitled *Promote Friendship between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future* (弘扬人民友谊 共创美好未来) given on September 7, 2013, at Nazarbayev University during his official visit to Kazakhstan. It was the first time that the Chinese head of state had spoken about the Silk Road Economic Belt concept: ‘To forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation, and expand development space in the Eurasian region, we should take an innovative approach and jointly build an “economic belt along the Silk Road”’ (Xi, 2017, p. 324).

At the time, President Xi Jinping even outlined the five pillars of the future One Belt, One Road Initiative:

1. *‘First, we need to step up policy communication.*

Countries should have full discussions on development strategies and policy response, work out plans and measures for advancing regional cooperation through consultation in the spirit of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and give the policy and legal ‘green light’ to regional economic integration’ (Xi, 2017, p. 324).

2. *‘Second, we need to improve road connectivity.*

[...] We will actively discuss the best way to improve cross-border transportation infrastructure and work towards a transportation network connecting East Asia, West Asia, and South Asia to facilitate economic development and travel in the region’ (Xi, 2017, p. 324).

3. *‘Third, we need to promote unimpeded trade.*

The proposed “economic belt along the Silk Road” is inhabited by close to 3 billion people and represents the biggest market in the world with unparalleled potential. The potential for trade and investment cooperation between the relevant countries is enormous. We should discuss a proper arrangement for trade and investment facilitation, remove trade barriers, reduce trade and investment costs, increase the speed and quality of regional economic flows, and achieve win-win progress in the region’ (Xi, 2017, pp. 324-325).

4. *‘Fourth, we need to enhance monetary circulation.*

If our region can realise local currency convertibility and settlement under current and capital accounts, it will significantly lower circulation costs,



increase our ability to fend off financial risks, and make our region more economically competitive throughout the world' (Xi, 2015, p. 325).

5. 'Fifth, we need to increase understanding between our people' (Xi, 2017, p. 324).

'Amity between the people holds the key to good relations between states. To have productive cooperation in the above-mentioned areas, we need the support of our people. We should encourage more friendly exchanges between our people to enhance mutual understanding and traditional friendship and build strong public support and a solid social foundation for regional cooperation' (Xi, 2017, p. 325).

One month later, on October 3, 2013, President Xi Jinping paid an official visit to Indonesia to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. He also outlined the concept of the Maritime Silk Road in his speech to the People's Representative Council of Indonesia on *Building a China-ASEAN Shared Future Together* (携手建设中国-东盟命运共同体): 'Southeast Asia has since ancient times been an important hub along the ancient Maritime Silk Road. China will strengthen maritime cooperation with ASEAN countries to make good use of the China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund set up by the Chinese government and vigorously develop maritime partnerships in a joint effort to build the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st century' (Xi, 2017, pp. 327-328). He also proposed the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Bank.

In November 2013, the 3rd Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), elected at the 18th Congress of the CPC, adopted the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform*, which, among many other important decisions, stated that it would support and strengthen the construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road infrastructure. At the annual Central Economic Work Conference in December, Premier Xi Jinping again called for support for the two concepts and urged the preparation of strategic plans. In March 2014, Prime Minister Li Keqiang highlighted in his summary of the government's annual work that one of the government's most important tasks was to plan the Silk Road programmes (CICIR, 2018, p. 4).

## THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE AND A NEW WORLD ORDER

The Belt and Road Initiative, also known as the New Silk Road, was based on the ancient Silk Road, which in fact also changed the world order at the time. During that period, civilisations lived in isolation, but with the advent of silk roads, trade between countries began, and cultural and religious ideas and beliefs were “on the move”. Thus, the interconnection of the separate “world islands” and their merging into one world began.

The launch of the Belt and Road Initiative has also had a major impact on connecting the Eurasian countries. Eurasian connectivity has been initiated by other countries in the past, and the idea of building an infrastructure system is not far removed from the ideas of European countries, as the Trans-Asian Railway, a single freight rail network linking Europe and Asia over 14,000 kilometres, was established in 1960. The EU then launched the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) project in 1995, which serves to link the EU with China by bypassing Russia. TRACECA is a multilateral programme with 12 countries in addition to the EU Member States and has five working groups dealing with maritime transport, air transport, road and rail, transport security, and transport infrastructure.

However, as China has embarked on the largest economic multilateral cooperation of the 21st century with the One Belt, One Road Initiative, it is seen in Western eyes as a very serious, aggressive geopolitical aspiration, because in Western geopolitical thinking—as the “father” of geopolitics, Mackinder put it in his 1904 lecture—the political consolidation of the Eurasian continent (*continental consolidation*), i.e., the unification of the “core area” under the control of one power and the acquisition of control over the world’s resources, is a threat (Gaddis, 2018). The BRI, in the eyes of the West, is precisely the kind of “continental consolidation” that could challenge the Atlantic era, dominated by the maritime powers of the past 500 years.

The United States does not support or participate in the Chinese initiative for geopolitical reasons, as Eurasia is the main geopolitical space for the US, and its global primacy directly depends on how it can maintain its dominance in Eurasia as a whole (Brzeziński, 2017, p. 51). The concern of the United States is that China, by building its infrastructure network abroad, could gain geopolitical power in Eurasia similar to that held by the United States in North America vis-à-vis Canada and Mexico. China’s geopolitical isolation from the

mainland is disappearing. Moreover, in the second half of the 20th century, the motivation for US infrastructure investments was the construction of military bases, meaning that the US believes that China is preparing to gain geopolitical power and build military bases (Péti, 2017, pp. 23-24). Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary, described this attitude in his 2023 Tusványos speech as follows: ‘Experience shows that the dominant great power tends to see itself as more benevolent and better-intentioned than it really is, and attributes malice to its challenger more often than is—or should be—justified. Consequently, the starting point for each opposing party is not the intentions of the counterpart, but its capabilities: not what the counterpart wants to do, but what it is capable of doing’.

By the 21st century, China has become the second-strongest economy in the world, and as a result, it has established economic ties with almost every country in the world, and Chinese capital and trade are everywhere, similar to other major economic powers. However, with the Belt and Road Initiative, China has introduced a new *win-win* mentality into international politics instead of the Western zero-sum mentality.

In addition, the Belt and Road Initiative contains the ideas of former leaders of the People’s Republic of China on world order, such as the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, the “harmonious world”, etc. The five pillars of the Chinese initiative also present a framework for the development of a new international order, different from the current Western-dominated world order:

- *Political relations.* With the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese state did not create a unilateral Chinese policy but a common platform where participating states could discuss and negotiate as equals on the future development of countries, regions, and the world. To make this even more clear, a BRI Forum has also been held every two years since 2017, welcoming heads of state from participating countries to discuss opportunities together. China is also engaged in a number of multilateral and bilateral negotiations on cooperation with different countries and regions.
- According to official Chinese rhetoric, China does not want to impose a world order of its own devising and design on other countries but rather a system based on common discussion, *win-win* cooperation, and common development.

- *Infrastructural connectivity.* Throughout world history, we have often seen that building adequate infrastructure is the basis of trade and other economic cooperation. Ancient cities flourished with the development of trade routes and likewise disappeared with the decline thereof. The railways and ports built during the industrial revolution also gave a big boost to globalisation. In today's globalised world, it is even more striking that developed cities are located along trade routes. However, these routes were created at sea, and 90% of trade is still carried by sea. The Chinese initiative also involves the mainland countries of the Eurasian region in trade through new rail, highway, and other infrastructure investments, thus supporting and assisting in their economic strengthening and development.
- *Trade relations.* Free trade is one of the foundations of globalisation, with trade and investment being two of the most important elements of economic growth for countries. Free trade removes barriers to trade. In addition, investment in foreign countries also supports job creation for local populations, and trade also serves to raise living standards for people. Throughout history, there have been many Western examples of free-trade cooperation, the usefulness of which David Ricardo wrote about in his book *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* as early as the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, the Western world is already familiar with and supports the idea.
- *Financial integrity.* Strong financial cooperation between countries is needed to create a stable financial environment, support international trade by reducing costs, and deal with emerging economic crises. History has seen many examples of financial cooperation and the creation of international financial institutions, including the IMF, the World Bank, the EBRD, and the Asian Development Bank, among others, reflecting the importance of financial cooperation between countries. The European Union reached the highest level of financial integration in 1999 when it created a monetary union with a single currency, the euro. The Belt and Road Initiative has also created a new international financial institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to support infrastructure investment and connectivity under the Chinese initiative.
- *Cultural connectivity.* The basis of good international cooperation is that the countries involved understand each other's culture, way of thinking,

and value system. Without these, the parties cannot be expected to agree or compromise on certain issues. In diplomacy, too, more emphasis must be placed on cultural events and cultural diplomacy, through which international relations and international trade can be strengthened. Furthermore, the idea of a “harmonious world”, which is about cooperation and mutual respect between civilisations, is also reflected in the pillar of “cultural connectivity”.

### SUMMARY

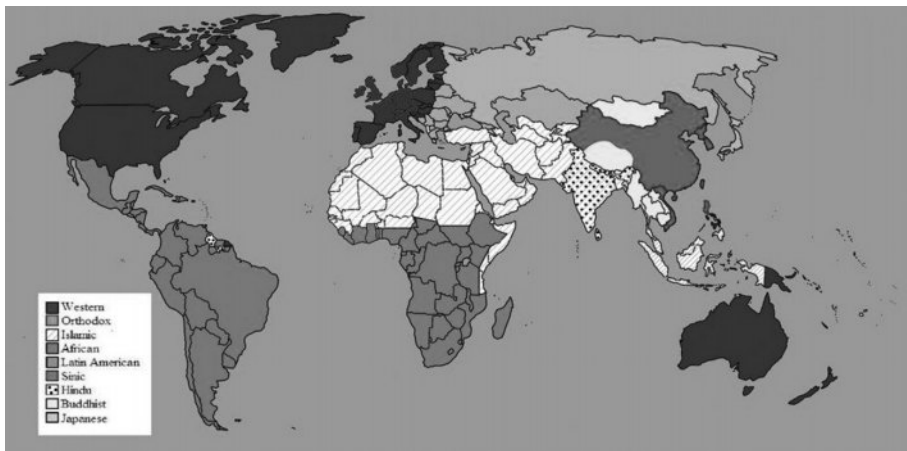
Although at the end of the 20th century, the Western world urged China to accept and adapt to the rules of the international order, today, with China’s rise to power, it is viewed differently, and the Belt and Road Initiative is perceived as a colonialist military operation, while China’s other multilateral relationships are seen as a threat.

The idea of China as the Middle Kingdom in Western thinking refers to China’s desire to be the hegemonic ruler of the world. Moreover, the Western mindset is that Chinese foreign economic and foreign policy actions are very similar to the instruments of past Western colonialism. Moreover, in Western tradition, especially in its left-wing post-Marxist tendency, hierarchy is in itself an immoral and harmful feature. According to the radical egalitarian view, which is often a feature of critical disciplines, hierarchies of all kinds are sharply opposed to equality, which has a positive and absolute value. In other words, in this view, hierarchical international relations, whether stable, peaceful, harmonious, or beneficial to many, are inherently illegitimate because of their hierarchical nature. By contrast, international relations based on equality, whatever their flaws in practice, are inherently legitimate because of their egalitarian underpinnings. The West judges Chinese thinking based on its own historical, social, and political development. However, this is not necessarily the right approach, as the Asian country has developed in a completely different environment over the past 5,000 years, and Western terminology cannot be applied to Chinese thinking one-to-one. To understand Chinese geopolitical thinking, we also need to understand China’s historical, cultural, and social development.

If we abandon the mindset of the past 500 years of the Atlantic era and look at the relations between civilisations from “above, from a distance”, if

we look at the foreign and domestic policies of different regions in perspective, if we leave the “Western glasses” through which we look at international politics, we can see that, in addition to Western civilisation, there are at least seven and, according to some researchers, as many as 13 other civilisations in the world, each with a history, social and cultural development, and religion completely different to that of the West, and each with a different vision of international relations, ideologies, and world order. The West, as the current leading civilisation, naturally insists on its autocracy; it cannot and will not give up its primacy. Other civilisations, however, have become economically empowered, have, in Huntington’s words, “rebelled”, and are calling for a new multipolar world order. The knowledge and study of civilisations is also important because, if we look at which countries could be the dominant players in the new multipolar world order (China, Russia, India, Iran, Brazil, etc.), we can see that each has a different civilisation (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Civilisations of the world*



Source: Huntington, 2019

So far, we have only read about proposals from different countries for a new world order, but not about the framework for a new world order itself. This is where China took a step forward by launching the Belt and Road Initiative 10 years ago in 2013, which could be the framework for a new world order. As we have seen in the study, it introduced alternative foreign-policy

thinking to that of the West, based on the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”. In addition, Western zero-sum cooperation has been replaced by cooperation based on mutual benefits. Demonstrating long-term Chinese thinking, a lengthy strategy has been used to build China’s international relations, consolidated in the current Belt and Road Initiative. Although the Chinese initiative does not have specific targets, i.e., how many investments, of what amount, how much trade, etc. should be achieved within the programme, it can provide an alternative framework for an appropriate world order for the world, but especially for non-Western civilisations or non-aligned countries. In international politics, we see with increasing frequency that the Chinese initiative, unlike the Western one, is better received by the various countries: an increasing number of nations are joining the BRICS cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative, and an increasing number of countries are saying that they do not want to take sides; they want to have good relations with both Western and Chinese countries. This thinking is supported by the Chinese initiative but rejected by the West, which is pushing for blocks.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, which is being established against a strong Western headwind—the US-China trade war, sanctions, etc. It has already made great strides in the past 10 years, but it will take many years or decades to determine whether or not it will actually be the framework for a new world order, because the transformation of the world order requires more than a year or two. In any case, it can be concluded that the Belt and Road Initiative can offer a suitable alternative to the framework of a new multipolar world order.

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# CHINA'S FOREIGN STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES DEMONSTRATED BY THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI)

Chaoting CHENG\*

**Abstract:** China is a rising great power that possesses the capacity to reshape the existing international order. However, theoretical analyses and empirical studies regarding China's foreign strategic capabilities remain insufficient. In addition, there is no consensus among academics on whether China's Leninist political system has the natural advantages of grand strategy or whether it is incapable of avoiding the inherent flaws of an authoritarian system. Furthermore, experts often put a greater emphasis on China's hard power while ignoring the soft aspects of how effectively and efficiently China uses its hard power. To address these issues, this paper presents a general analytical framework for evaluating foreign strategic capabilities, drawing on the theories of strategy and grand strategy. The framework is then applied in the case study of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to assess China's genuine foreign strategic capabilities. The findings are more complex than the previously mentioned oversimplified views of China's foreign strategic capabilities: First, the BRI is a coherent strategy that primarily relies on geo-economic means while also having geopolitical considerations and measures. Second, in its early stages, the BRI lacked meticulous and rational planning and spread too extensively, but China has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability by adjusting the implementation approach of the BRI in response to difficulties and challenges. Finally, the BRI has significantly enhanced China's foreign influence, particularly in the economic sphere, highlighting its strategic competitiveness. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that the BRI will continue to confront countermeasures from its rivals, thereby intensifying the Sino-American strategic competition.

**Keywords:** China, Strategy, Grand Strategy, Foreign Strategic Capabilities, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

## INTRODUCTION

China is a rising great power capable of reshaping the international order (The White House, 2022), and the strategic rivalry between the United States (US) and China has emerged as a new paradigm of contemporary international

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relations (Lippert and Perthes, 2020; Shambaugh, 2020, p. 241). It is thus essential for academics, strategists, and decision-makers from all over the world to evaluate China's genuine foreign strategic capabilities rather than being misled by ideologically motivated propaganda, whether coming from China or the West. However, the opaque nature of China's political system makes it difficult for outside observers to achieve this purpose. As a result, there is a lack of both theoretical and empirical research on this topic. Among the limited studies, some schools of thought see China's Leninist political system as having the advantage of formulating and implementing long-term grand strategies (Doshi, 2021, p. 26; Kroenig, 2020, p. 38), while others believe China's authoritarian system is inherently defective; for instance, there is an absence of open debate on policy alternatives (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2009), and autocratic leaders often change directions radically (Kroenig, 2020, p. 42). Overall, there is no consensus among academics regarding China's genuine foreign strategic capabilities. Experts also tend to evaluate China's foreign strategic capabilities based primarily on its tangible assets, such as its economic power, technological strength, and military might. However, they frequently disregard the fundamental factor that shapes and even determines a state's foreign strategic capabilities: how effectively and efficiently China utilises these resources and tools to achieve its national objectives.

This paper aims to address these research gaps. A general analytical framework for foreign strategic capabilities will be inspired by the theories of *strategy* and *grand strategy*. Based on this framework, this paper will assess the strategic performance of the BRI because it is widely acknowledged as one of China's most significant foreign policy initiatives over the past few decades (Cai, 2017; Maçães, 2018; Wang, 2017) and has already been enshrined in the constitution of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2017 (Yan, 2017). Through the evaluation of the BRI, a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of China's genuine strategic capabilities can be achieved, thus avoiding assessments that are influenced by ideologies.

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Foreign strategic capabilities are related to the concepts of *strategy* (Campbell, 2016, p. 135; Hart, 1967, p. 335; Lykke Jr., 2001; von Clausewitz et al., 1989, pp. 128-132), *grand strategy* (Balzacq and Krebs, 2021; Brands, 2014, p. 3; Collins, 1973, p. 14; Kennedy, 1991, p. 5), *geopolitics* (Blackwill

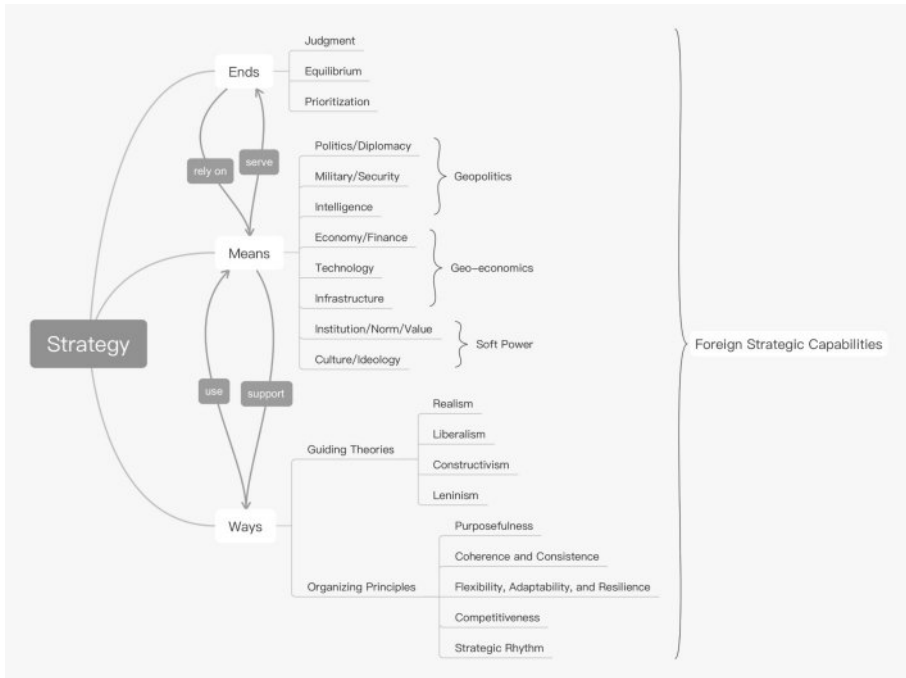
and Harris, 2016, p. 24; Evans and Newnham, 1998, p. 197; Flint, 2011), and *geo-economics* (Blackwill and Harris, 2016, p. 20; Luttwak, 1990; Mandelbaum, 2014, p. xvi). The definition of strategy is especially crucial, as it serves as the foundation of the general analytical framework for foreign strategic capabilities. There are numerous definitions of strategy, but they generally include three elements: *ends*, *means*, and *ways*. According to the American military, 'Strategy is fundamentally concerned with *ends*, *ways*, and *means*: certain fundamental interests (*ends*) are achieved when policymakers combine the resources and tools available to them (*means*) with a theory or ordering principle of how these resources can best be used (*ways*)' (Campbell, 2016, p. 135).

*Means* can be understood as objective factors that are not influenced by the subjective intentions of the strategist. As a result, the extent of a state's foreign strategic capabilities is mostly demonstrated through *ends* and *ways*, which are subject to the strategist's subjective control. *Ways* refer to the capacity to transform various means into desired ends. A competent strategist can play a poor hand well, while an incompetent strategist can play a strong hand poorly. Thus, a competent strategy should focus on how one's *ends* may be achieved (Krepinevich and Watts, 2009). In this sense, strategy is not only a science governed by objective laws but also an art requiring creativity.

There is no uniform definition of *grand strategy* in academia either. Balzacq and Krebs consider *grand strategy* as the highest form of statecraft, explaining how the state will utilise its diverse means to advance and achieve national ends (2021). Paul Kennedy believes the crux of *grand strategy* lies in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term, in wartime and peacetime, best interests (Kennedy, 1991, p. 5). Hal Brands defines *grand strategy* as the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy (Brands, 2014, p. 3). Overall, *grand strategy* is characterised by *purposefulness*, *coherence and consistency*, *flexibility*, *adaptability*, *resilience*, and *competitiveness* (Balzacq and Krebs, 2021; Brands, 2014; Collins, 1973; Kennedy, 1991).

Based on the theories of *strategy* and *grand strategy*, this paper proposes the following general analytical framework for foreign strategic capabilities (Figure 1):

Figure 1: General Analytical Framework of Foreign Strategic Capabilities



Source: author's own work.

Based on this framework, foreign strategic capabilities rely not solely on means but also on the establishment of realistic and achievable ends, as well as the adept utilisation of limited means to accomplish those ends. Given that means, both material and immaterial, are largely objective factors not controlled by the subjective will of the strategist, this paper focuses on the variable dimensions of foreign strategic capabilities: ends and ways, as shown in the following table.

Table 1: *Dimensions of Foreign Strategic Capabilities*

Category	Dimension	Description
Ends	Judgment	A good foreign strategy must accurately assess both the international environment and domestic situation and establish objectives that are neither excessively ambitious nor overly conservative.
	Equilibrium	There must be an appropriate balance between the means employed and the ends pursued that effectively mitigates the waste of resources or the excessive exertion of national power.
	Prioritisation	'Nations exist in a world of limited resources, where capabilities are never sufficient to exploit all opportunities and confront all threats; thus, grand strategy requires ruthless prioritisation' (Brands, 2014, p. 4).
Ways	Purposefulness	'A grand strategy is a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so' (Brands, 2014, p. 3).
	Coherence and Consistency	In order to effectively achieve its strategic objectives, a nation should employ a variety of instruments in a manner that is both coherent and consistent. <i>Coherence</i> refers to the idea that the various means employed in a strategy should work together well, while <i>consistency</i> means that a strategy should be continuous and can be adjusted if there are setbacks, but not abandoned halfway.
	Flexibility, Adaptability, and Resilience	'Grand strategy requires not just a capacity for systematic thinking but also flexibility and an ability to adapt' (Brands, 2014, p. 5). 'The end point of a grand strategy may remain constant, but the route between here and there will have to be adjusted as resistance accumulates, adversaries react, and new threats and opportunities arise' (Brands, 2014, pp. 13-14).
	Competitiveness	Strategy refers to the process of gaining a competitive edge over rivals, opponents, and situations involving conflict.
	Strategic Rhythm	The implementation of the strategy should be conducted at a suitable pace in accordance with the current circumstances, avoiding both excessive haste and undue delay.

Source: author's own work.

## CHINA'S FOREIGN STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES DEMONSTRATED BY THE BRI

China does not recognise the BRI as a *strategy* out of concern that the military and security implications of the *strategy* could be misinterpreted by outsiders. The official Xinhua News Agency even forbids labelling the BRI a strategy, instead referring to it as an 'initiative' (Xinhua Agency, 2016). However, a closer look at China's official narrative reveals that the BRI substantially aligns with the definition of a strategy, as it encompasses the three fundamental components of a strategy: *ends, means, and ways*. The primary *ends* of the BRI are to achieve a *global community of shared future* (人类命运共同体); the pursuit of this purpose primarily involves the utilisation of economic, cultural, and diplomatic *means*, which are commonly referred to as *five links* (五通), namely *policy coordination, facility connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bond*; among these, infrastructure, or *facility connectivity*, is of great significance; the BRI is implemented through collaborative *ways* that involve *consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits* (共商, 共建, 共享), as outlined by the Chinese government in 2015 (NDRC, MoFA, and MoC, 2015). As a matter of fact, the BRI represents China's overarching strategic approach, which has been formalised and institutionalized. In this context, it can be seen as an embodiment of China's national aspirations and determination. Hence, the design and implementation of the BRI may significantly demonstrate China's foreign strategic capabilities. Due to space constraints, this paper focuses predominantly on three of the five dimensions of the way, as these are the most significant and contentious in assessing the strategic performance of the BRI.

### Coherence and Consistency

Grand strategy offers an effective framework to understand and explain how and why a state interacts with other actors in a given way and how it combines various military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural instruments to achieve its ends in a largely coherent fashion (Balzacq and Corcoral, 2022). The American scholar of grand strategy Hal Brands also argues the challenges the US confronts require American policymakers to synergistically combine a range of tools: military might, multilateral diplomacy, economic and ideological influence, and others (Brands, 2014, p. 205). To what extent, then, does the BRI demonstrate strategic coherence? To answer this question, we

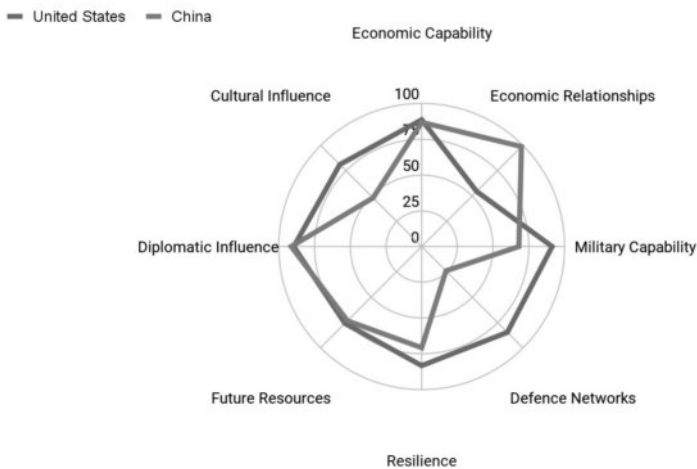
must examine how Beijing has used the means at its disposal to implement the BRI.

The BRI aligns more closely with the attributes of a geo-economic strategy than a conventional geopolitical strategy. This is because the BRI primarily utilises economic, diplomatic, and cultural means rather than classical geopolitical means such as military, security, and intelligence. Furthermore, the BRI's approach to implementation, characterised by *consultation, joint construction, and shared benefits*, deviates from the typical zero-sum game of geopolitical strategies. What factors have then influenced Beijing's decision to primarily employ a geo-economic strategy in pursuit of its political objectives? There are at least two reasons:

First, China is a rising economic superpower with formidable economic resources, but its political leadership, cultural influence, and military prowess remain constrained in both the Eurasian and Indo-Pacific regions. Figure 2 demonstrates that in the Asian region, the US significantly outperforms China in terms of military capability, defence networks, and cultural influence, while China's economic capability is comparable to that of the US.

Figure 2: Asia Power Index in 2023: US vs. China

Comprehensive Power in Asia in 2023: US vs. China



Source: Patton, Sato and Lemahieu, 2023



As a matter of fact, China has surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy since 2010. It has become the largest trading partner for over 120 countries and regions, including the United States, the European Union, and Japan. China possesses significant resources and a wealth of expertise in infrastructure development; its surplus production capacity necessitates the exploration of expansive international markets. In addition, China possesses considerable foreign exchange reserves and extraordinarily high resident savings rates, which provide both the impetus and capacity to export its substantial capital.

Second, China's political system is distinguished by Leninism, wherein the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sits above the state and penetrates every level of it as well. In this way, it serves as an instrument for coordinating grand strategy and gives policymakers relative autonomy from parochial interests in foreign policy matters so that they can pursue grand strategic ones (Doshi, 2021, p. 26). In contrast to the market-oriented and privately driven approach to overseas investment in the US, the CCP is able to effectively and efficiently mobilise all of its available resources, particularly the powerful state-owned banks and enterprises, to serve its strategic goals.

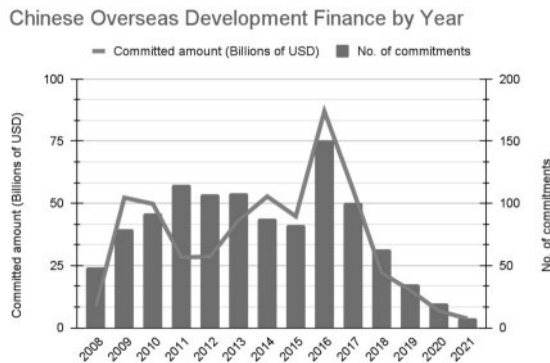
Despite Beijing's consistent emphasis on the BRI being just an economic cooperation initiative without any geopolitical motives, the international community maintains a cautious stance towards this idealistic narrative. Indeed, the BRI is not bereft of geopolitical considerations and measures. It is evident that several BRI projects have the vital strategic objective of reducing China's maritime vulnerability. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), for instance, facilitates the overland transportation of oil from the Middle East to China via Pakistan. The construction of ports, oil and gas pipelines, and other infrastructure projects in Myanmar facilitates China's access to the Indian Ocean from its Yunnan province. These efforts in Pakistan and Myanmar serve to alleviate China's perceived "Malacca dilemma" and thereby secure the supply of commodities. If sufficient oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf can reach China overland, or at least not via the South China Sea, China will be less vulnerable to US coercion. Therefore, the BRI, if successful, would provide China with a type of strategic depth that it presently lacks due to its reliance on maritime approaches to its east (Bisley, 2020, p. 7).

Military and security are essential elements of geopolitics, and the BRI does not completely exclude them. Two Chinese scholars from the University

of Macau, Xiangning Wu and You Ji, contended that the BRI’s inherent military-security ramifications contributed to the restructuring of the existing geopolitical order across the Eurasian continents and that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) would be logically tasked to protect the BRI through capability enhancement and overseas presence (Wu and Ji, 2020). Indeed, in addition to establishing its first overseas military base in Djibouti, northeastern Africa, China is currently developing a powerful blue-water navy to protect its expanding overseas interests, including the BRI. Moreover, some Chinese security experts with official backgrounds argued that the BRI required a pluralistic security system that includes diplomatic, consular, and law enforcement protection as well as the active participation of non-state actors such as private security companies (Liu, 2018; Zhang, 2017). However, it must be acknowledged that geopolitical means have always played a secondary role in the implementation of the BRI and that Beijing has relied predominantly on economic means, as they are China’s comparative advantage over the US. In this sense, the BRI can be considered a coherent and organic strategy.

Nevertheless, is the BRI a consistent strategy? This is a subject of debate and disagreement. Since its introduction in 2013, the BRI has been expanding not only in Asia but globally. However, according to the Boston University Global Development Policy (GDP) Centre, China’s overseas development finance has seen a downward trend after its zenith in 2016, ultimately reaching a significantly diminished state by 2021, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: *Chinese Overseas Development Finance by Year*



Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, 2023.

From 2000 to 2022, 39 Chinese lenders provided 1,243 loans amounting to \$170.08 billion to 49 African governments and seven regional institutions (Moses et al., 2023). In recent years, however, the levels of large-scale Chinese loan finance to Africa have waned (Moses et al., 2023). In 2021, seven loans totaling \$1.22 billion were signed, and in 2022, only nine loans amounting to \$994.48 million were signed (Moses et al., 2023). It appears that the BRI lacked meticulous and rational planning in its early stages and spread too widely, and that Beijing has been compelled to contract due to its *strategic overdraft*. Therefore, the viability of the BRI has been subject to scrutiny, as evidenced by Wolff (2017), Kynge and Wheatley (2020), and Brinză (2022). This indicates that China's genuine foreign strategic capabilities may be more complex than they appear in terms of consistency. Given China's well-earned reputation for formulating and implementing long-term strategies, this is especially puzzling. Is it time to proclaim the demise of the BRI? This will be further examined and analysed in the next section of this paper.

### **Flexibility, Adaptability, and Resilience**

Hal Brands, a prominent American scholar specialising in grand strategy, points out that 'the doing of grand strategy is a highly daunting task that requires flexibility, resilience, and a capacity for adaptation' (Brands, 2014, p. 13). Wang Yizhou, a prominent Chinese scholar specialising in the field of international relations, emphasises in his paper on diplomatic ability that no nation or institution can claim absolute immunity from errors; a well-functioning system possesses the capacity to promptly identify and rectify mistakes as they arise, whereas an ineffective system or government often lacks the necessary self-awareness to adequately assess and address its own errors (Wang, 2023). Wang Yizhou argues the efficacy of China's political system is attributed to the concentration of power for the purpose of accomplishing significant objectives; however, a notable drawback resides in the absence of transparency and bottom-up supervision, which hinders the resolution of issues that are not effectively addressed at higher levels of authority (Wang, 2023).

Wang Yizhou expresses apprehension about China's lack of strategic introspection. However, it is plausible to assert that this fear may be somewhat exaggerated. In fact, China has garnered global recognition for its

attributes of robust flexibility and adaptability. According to Andrew Nathan (2013), a prominent China expert in the US, the regime of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is more adaptive than other authoritarian regimes. He further argues that the leadership of the PRC demonstrates the ability to proactively address popular dissatisfaction (Nathan, 2013). Ian Johnson (2021), a prominent American journalist renowned for his extensive reporting on China, also posits that the CCP is the most adaptable party, although its official ideology, Marxism, is not inherently adaptive.

Regarding the BRI, it is evident that substantial criticisms have emerged on the global stage. These criticisms include state-driven and China-centric approaches, environmental damage, corruption, poor quality, debt traps, a lack of transparency, and noncompliance with international regulations, among others. Inside China, there are also growing doubts about the suitability of engaging in extensive outward investments while domestic development remains inadequate. Additionally, there are apprehensions that an excessive expansion of the BRI could result in a *strategic overdraft*. According to Xue Li, an influential researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) specialising in the BRI, it is imperative for China to allocate its resources strategically, taking into account its capacities, and identify critical regions and countries (Xue, 2018). In 2021, he published another paper advocating for the necessity of implementing additional modifications to the BRI. These adjustments involve reducing the scope of coverage and focusing on specific regions, particularly those developing countries in close proximity to China, which should be prioritised (Xue, 2021). In August 2023, Professor Wang Yiwei, a prominent scholar from the Renmin University of China, acknowledged the necessity of transitioning the BRI financing model from its current *engineering, procurement, and construction* (EPC) approach, which is primarily utilised for intricate industrial and infrastructure projects, to a more suitable *public-private partnership* (PPP) model (World Scientific, 2023). Additionally, Professor Wang emphasised the importance of shifting the focus from large-scale infrastructure developments to projects that are characterised as “small but beautiful” (小而美) (World Forum, 2023).

Beijing has demonstrated attentiveness and responsiveness to these complaints and concerns. The BRI Leading Group of the Chinese government published an official document titled *Building Belt and Road: Ideas, Practices, and China's Contribution* in May 2017. This document emphasised the

importance of enhancing collaboration in ecological and environmental preservation, establishing a “Green Silk Road”, and actively fulfilling China’s global obligations in tackling climate change (BRI Leading Group, 2017). This serves as a response to the prevailing perception in the global community that the BRI projects have damaged the environment. China’s supreme leader, Xi Jinping, who played a pivotal role in the establishment and advancement of the BRI, has acknowledged the necessity of modifying the approaches employed in the implementation of the BRI. During his keynote speech at the second BRI Summit Forum for International Cooperation in 2019, Xi Jinping emphasised the importance of adhering to the principles of openness, environmental sustainability, and integrity while also advocating for a zero-tolerance approach towards corruption (Xi, 2019). To this end, he introduced the *Beijing Initiative for a Clean Silk Road*. Furthermore, Xi underscored the need to pursue objectives of ‘high standards, sustainability, and improving people’s well-being’ (高标准, 可持续, 惠民生) (Xi, 2019). During the third BRI symposium on November 19, 2021, he reiterated the importance of adhering to the three principles and emphasised the necessity of “small but beautiful” projects (Zhang and An, 2021). Additionally, during the general debate of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 21, 2021, Xi Jinping pledged to stop the construction of new offshore coal power projects in order to actively assist developing nations in their pursuit of environmentally sustainable and low-carbon energy development (Xi, 2021).

These assurances indicate that Beijing effectively acknowledges and responds to international and domestic inputs regarding the BRI. It is evident that China has been attempting to reduce the size of BRI investments and modify its implementation approach. According to a report published by Fudan University in January 2023, the trend for the BRI projects was changing from government funding to private funding by Chinese businesses interested in outbound investment; in 2022, private sector enterprises like Alibaba and CATL, a Chinese battery manufacturer and technology company, even dominated BRI investments (Nedopil, 2023). Meanwhile, the Boston University Global Development Policy Centre released a study report that also partially substantiated the aforementioned promises made by the Chinese government and its leaders. According to this report, there was a peak in China’s overall overseas development finance (ODF) in 2016, followed by a subsequent fall in both the number of projects and their geographical scope

(Ray, 2023). In this report, although a significant proportion of the total 736 projects demonstrated overlap with socially or environmentally sensitive areas, two-thirds of the projects conducted between 2018 and 2021 avoided critical habitats, indigenous peoples' lands, or national protected areas (Ray, 2023). This indicates that China has placed greater importance on addressing concerns related to socially or environmentally sensitive areas.

In February 2023, two American scholars at the International Republican Institute (IRI) wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that 'as China is buffeted by growing economic and demographic headwinds, Beijing is confronting its limits and learning from its mistakes' (Schrader and Cole, 2023). They argued that: 'The BRI of the popular imagination—a dominant, globe-spanning infrastructure lending project aimed at cementing China's power—is effectively dead. In its place is a less flashy, less expensive model of engagement, predicated on cultivating ties more organically in fields such as trade, telecommunications, green energy, and academia' (Schrader and Cole, 2023). The study report from Boston University also anticipated that the BRI would not regain its peak level in 2016 (Ray, 2023). However, it is important to point out that the adjustments made by the Chinese government in the implementation of the BRI should not be interpreted as the termination of this program. The upcoming third BRI Summit on International Cooperation, which will be held in Beijing in October 2023, is evidence that Beijing remains committed to the long-term pursuit of the BRI, i.e., the use of economic means to achieve its political objectives. As a matter of fact, Beijing's adherence to the stated goals of the BRI, but in a more realistic, flexible, and sustainable manner, demonstrates its strong strategic adaptability and resilience.

### **Competitiveness**

Strategy, as an original military concept, possesses an inherently competitive and confrontational essence because wars are contests between opposing wills. According to Zhang Wenmu (2019), a prominent Chinese scholar in strategy and geopolitics, a strategy may be described as the 'philosophy on the tip of a knife' and as the discipline through which a state engages in competition with one another for the purpose of survival and development. Indeed, the formulation of strategy is not a top-level design of wishful thinking but rather necessitates careful consideration of the potential

countermeasures of other actors, such as resistance, opposition, and sabotage. Crisis and conflict are thus the natural domain of grand strategy (Freedman, 2021) due to the competitive nature of international politics (Brands, 2014, p. 8). A fundamental distinction between international and domestic politics lies in the absence of a central authority in the international arena, which actually operates within a state of anarchy. In a complex and treacherous international environment, any decision-maker who fails to acknowledge or underestimate the competitive nature of strategy will be punished and pay the price for his/her naivety or hubris.

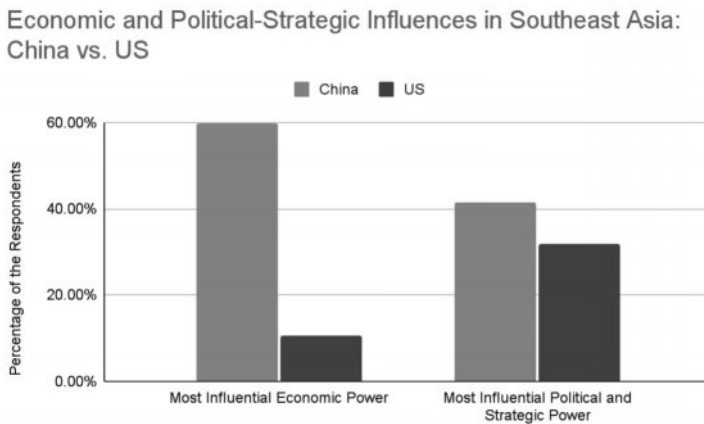
According to the official website of the Chinese government dedicated to the BRI, China has signed more than 200 cooperation agreements related to the BRI with 152 countries and 32 international organizations. Moreover, the BRI has effectively stimulated investments totaling nearly one trillion US dollars, resulting in the execution of over 3,000 collaborative projects (Xu, 2023). In the realm of facility connectivity, numerous notable projects have been undertaken, including the China-Laos Railway, Hungary-Serbia Railway, Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway (Indonesia), Gwadar Port in Pakistan, and Piraeus Port in Greece. In the domain of trade, up until the conclusion of August 2022, a grand total of 60,000 China-European liner trains had been initiated, amassing a cumulative value of nearly 300 billion US dollars. These trains have established a network of 82 transportation routes, extending to over 200 cities across 25 European countries. In terms of finance, as of July 2022, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) boasted a membership of 105 nations, having approved a total of 181 projects and providing financing amounting to \$35.7 billion. These endeavours have benefited 33 countries (Belt and Road Portal, 2022).

Developing countries in the Global South have traditionally relied on Western countries and Japan for the provision of technologies, know-how, and capital. However, China's BRI has emerged as a powerful alternative. Even Western research institutions do not refute the accomplishments of the BRI and its significant contributions to global development. In June 2023, Australia's Lowy Institute published its annual Asia Power Index, which quantifies the power of countries in the Asian region. According to this index, power is defined as the capacity of a state to direct or influence the behaviour of other states, non-state actors, and the course of international events (Patton, Sato and Lemahieu, 2023). In this report, the Lowy Institute outlines two specific economic dimensions: *economic capability* and *economic*

*relationships.* China and the US are comparable in terms of their overall economic capabilities, with China scoring 87 points and the US scoring 88 points; however, China significantly outperforms the US in terms of its economic relationships with the Asian region, with a score of 98.3 points compared to 53.7 points for the US (Patton, Sato and Lemahieu, 2023). Because the Asian region was the focal point of the BRI over the past decade, this finding highlights the significant progress made by the BRI.

The robust economic relationships between China and the BRI countries are destined to influence their perceptions in China’s favour and contribute to the expansion of China’s strategic influence. Southeast Asia is of significant strategic importance due to its geographical intersection between China’s BRI and the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US. Consequently, Southeast Asia emerges as a primary focal point for the BRI. The implementation of a significant number of BRI projects in this region has evident economic and strategic consequences. According to a report published by the Singapore-based ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute on February 9, 2023, more Southeast Asian respondents believe that China, not the US, is the most influential political and strategic power in the region, and even more believe that China is the most influential economic power, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: *Economic and Political-Strategic Influences in Southeast Asia: China vs. US*



Source: Seah et al., 2023.



Another report released by the US-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in August 2023 had a similar result: within Southeast Asia, there exists a prevailing perception among elites and the public in almost all countries, except for the Philippines, that China holds the position of the leading economic power as opposed to the US (Poling and Natalegawa, 2023). David Shambaugh, a prominent American scholar specialising in China, argues China's primary strengths in Southeast Asia are its geographic proximity and deep financial pocket (Shambaugh, 2020, p. 244). This financial prowess allows China to offer sufficient capital and undertake extensive infrastructure projects through its BRI (Shambaugh, 2020, p. 244). Moreover, Beijing's lack of criticism concerning human rights and governance is also appreciated by regional states (Shambaugh, 2020, p. 244). This is particularly notable in the cases of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, where authoritarian governments are in place. Indeed, China's investment of approximately one trillion dollars in the BRI has significantly increased its strategic influence abroad, whereas the US has wasted three trillion dollars on wars, as former US President Jimmy Carter told then-US President Donald Trump in 2019 (Hurt, 2019). Thus, the BRI demonstrates Beijing's strong strategic competitiveness vis-à-vis Washington. Due to the zero-sum nature of strategic competition, this must entail a corresponding decline in US strategic influence.

## CONCLUSION

This paper aims to evaluate China's genuine foreign strategic capabilities, which are often examined from two opposing perspectives. One viewpoint contends that China's Leninist political system has inherent advantages due to its high concentration of power and effective coordination. In contrast, an alternative viewpoint contends that China's authoritarian system possesses inherent flaws, such as the potential for leaders' personal will to trump scientific decision-making and a limited capacity for self-correction. This paper establishes a general analytical framework for foreign strategic capabilities based on the theories of strategy and grand strategy. This framework is then utilised to analyse the BRI, a very consequential foreign policy pursued by China over the past decade. Due to space constraints, this paper analyses only the three most important dimensions of foreign strategy capabilities: *coherence and consistency, flexibility, adaptability, resilience, and competitiveness*.

The findings demonstrate a degree of complexity that exceeds the two aforementioned oversimplified viewpoints. On the one hand, China has effectively employed a variety of means based on astute assessments of the international environment and the domestic situation to advance the BRI in a coherent manner. This strategy focuses predominantly on geo-economic means, with geopolitical measures as a supplement. On the other hand, the early decision-making process was characterised by a dearth of comprehensive research and studies, as well as an underestimation of the complexities and obstacles confronting the BRI. However, the Chinese government has shown considerable adaptability, promptly reducing the scale of investments and modifying the BRI's approach to execution. There is currently a greater emphasis on "high standards, sustainability, and improving people's well-being," resulting in a shift from *BRI 1.0*, which features large-scale infrastructure projects, to *BRI 2.0*, which prefers a "small but beautiful", or more sustainable approach. Nevertheless, this shift cannot conceal the fact that the BRI, after a decade of expansion in Asia and around the world, has substantially increased China's economic and strategic influence abroad.

Overall, the BRI can be regarded as a coherent and consistent foreign strategy that has demonstrated China's strong flexibility, adaptability, and resilience in its implementation, allowing Beijing to gain a strategic advantage over Washington. Due to the competitive nature of any foreign strategy, however, it is highly likely that the BRI will continue to confront countermeasures from its rivals, thereby intensifying the Sino-American strategic competition.

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# A DECADE OF THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE IN CENTRAL ASIA: GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** The main subject of the paper is an examination of the perspective of the Central Asian area through the consideration of the decade of existence of the Chinese initiative 'One Belt, One Road' (BRI) and the effect it left on this region. The analysis begins with an overview of what the BRI represents and its goals, then moves on to and moves on to Central Asia's historical (classic) and contemporary geopolitical positions. After that, the paper discusses the geopolitical and economic importance the BRI has for this region from the point of view of the Central Asian states. The aim of the work is to look at the geopolitical tendencies of the Central Asian region as a hub of the 'new' multipolar world and at the geopolitical implications that the expansion of the BRI will cause, with special reference to Russian-Chinese relations in this region.

**Keywords:** BRI, Central Asia, SCO, multipolarity, geopolitics, Russia, China.

## INTRODUCTION

In September 2013, during his visit to Kazakhstan, China's president Xi Jinping announced the launch of a new initiative that aims to create a modern equivalent of the original Silk Road established by imperial envoy Zhang Qian over 2000 years ago. It was named One Belt, One Road (OBOR) or the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The BRI was much more complex than the original Silk Road and directed on the creation of six main corridors that establish a network of land and maritime routes through (or around) the Eurasian mainland: 1) The New Eurasia Land Bridge, involving rail to Europe via Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, and Poland; 2) The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor; 3) The China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor, linking Kazakhstan,

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Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Turkey; 4) The China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, connecting Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Malaysia; 5) The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that links Kashgar city in landlocked Xinjiang province with the Pakistan port of Gwadar; and 6) The China-Bangladesh-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (OECD, 2018, p. 11). ‘The initiative is focused on ironing out regional gaps through a combination of economic measures and infrastructural works, including railways, roads, pipelines, ports, and logistic hubs, to streamline the flows of goods, people, money, ideas, and cultures transiting through Asia, China, Europe, and Africa’ (Cau, 2018, p. 39). It tends to invest in the creation or upgrade of complex infrastructure networks, including ports, highways, railways, and pipelines (for both oil and gas), spanning over more than 60 countries from the East Asia Pacific coast to Europe that are inhabited by around 70 percent of the world’s population. The BRI’s overall estimated costs are around 6 trillion US dollars (People’s Daily Online, 2011, 5), which is just a part of the investment that whole Asia needs in infrastructural investments in the next few decades that were estimated at around 26 trillion US dollars by the Asian Development Bank (OECD, 2018, 3). Therefore, China has established its own network for financial support of this gigantic task, consisting of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NDB) (formerly the BRICS Bank), the reformed China Development Bank, and the *ad hoc* Silk Road Fund (SRF).

The main China’s BRI document, “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road” from 2015 asserted that the BRI ‘is aimed at promoting the orderly and free flow of economic factors, highly efficient allocation of resources, and deep integration of markets; encouraging the countries along the Belt and Road to achieve economic policy coordination and carry out broader and more in-depth regional cooperation of higher standards; and jointly creating an open, inclusive, and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all’ (Aminjonov et. al., 2019, p. 1). However, the BRI also has its geopolitical and geoeconomic sides. Its geopolitical goals are to build up overland trade and infrastructure throughout the Old World that will serve as the axis of Larger Eurasia, namely to geoeconomically connect the East Asian part of Eurasian Rimland with its southern (Indian subcontinent) and Western parts (Europe) through Eurasian Hartland and, thus, to provide

the basis for the new multipolar world order whose main new centres of power are located in Eurasia.

This paper is structured as follows: In the first part of the paper, we will present a brief overview of the geopolitical significance of Central Asia. The central part of the paper will be dedicated to the importance of the Central Asia region for China and its BRI initiative and for the BRI build-up and changes in Central Asia's "hard" security, while the last part of the paper will be used to draw important conclusions.

### **ON GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CENTRAL ASIA**

In order to reach its goals, the BRI corridors need to cross through Central Asia ("land of five Stans"), a region traditionally part of the Russian sphere of influence, which, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, became a space of competition between the surrounding powers for the distribution of their influence. 'The region is rife with political and security problems, with some of the Stans engaged in complex hedging political strategies in order to maintain a sustainable balance between the need to maintain cordial relations with the United States and the EU, a key trade partner in the region, and the political and military influence of their neighbour, Russia' (Cau, 2018, p. 56). The main problems of the region are the incomplete democratisation of state structures (Tolipov, 2007, pp. 7-17), the treatment of ethnic minorities, undefined interstate borders, the collapse of the common security system, and the problem of religious extremism and terrorism (Gajić, 2009).

'Central Asia is, somehow, a strategic zone, which has been regaining undoubtedly structural cyclical extraordinary importance' (Guedes, 2011, p. 5). 'It forms a buffer zone between the Great Powers' (Huasheng, 2009, p. 475). The Central Asian region is, in the classic geopolitical sense, the southern peripheral part of the Heartland (Mackinder's 'Heart of the Earth'), which is both a strategic crossroads and a security-vital space for the entire Eurasian landmass. Sir Halford Mackinder considered this region pivotal for world politics, not only as an accumulation area of continental power but also as a vital trade hub: 'Whoever rules the Heartland rules the World Island. Who rules the World Island rules the World.' (Mackinder, 2009, p. 155). Accordingly, Chinese expert Xiaojie Xu notices that 'the

survival of the Central Asian Republics essentially depends on the maintenance of several corridors and links' (Xu, 1999, p. 36).

Undoubtedly, a single entity at the cultural, linguistic, and religious levels historically known as "Transoxiana", "Ma Wara'un-Nahr", or "Turkestan" ("land of the Turks") in Central Asia lacks a unique and visible geopolitical role. For most of history, it was a geostrategic area for competition between surrounding great powers who observed it in an offensive or defensive military strategic way. Essentially, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical role of this region remained unchanged. Within its global geopolitical vision (the Rimland-Heartland doctrine of Nicholas Spykman), US geopolitics is only the continuation of the geopolitics of Great Britain. The geopolitical strategy in this sector of contact between the Rimland and the Heartland was implemented by creating a series of alliances and treaties in Asia whose function was to prevent the Soviet-Chinese bloc from entering the open seas and thus challenging the Anglo-American role of the "Free World" leaders. During the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia became a strategic crossroads and an area of security vacuum around which the powers of the Heartland (Russia as the successor of the USSR), the Rimland (China, Turkey, and, to a lesser extent, Iran), and the power of the "World Sea" (US) began to compete (see Gajić, 2009). Nowadays, it is 'surrounded by some of the most dynamic economies in the world, among three of the so-called BRICS countries (Russia, India, and China)' (OECD, 2011, p. 10). Regardless of many regional issues and geopolitical competitions, 'Central Asia is a more stable region than Afghanistan, Iran, and the Middle East in general' (Bradbury, 2011, p. 4).

With a population of more than 70 million people and tremendous energy resources, Central Asia is a favourable destination for investment and trade (Competitiveness Outlook, 2011). 'For example, from 2000 to 2009, the flows of direct investment in the region increased nine times, while its gross domestic product grew on average 8.2% per year' (Akbar, 2012). After 9/11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan (while stationing its troops in nearby bases throughout the region), Russia and China have forged a strategic alliance to create some sort of condominium in Central Asia to prevent further spreading of American presence. Russia's main role was to handle "hard" security and military domains, while China (assisting

in anti-terrorist and intelligence operations through the SCO) was more focused on economic development and investments in the construction of the regional infrastructure network.

### **The importance of the CA region for the BRI and China**

Though the CA nations have abundant agricultural, energy, and mineral resources, the low level of intra-country and inter-country infrastructure connectivity combined with the disadvantage of being landlocked or double landlocked (like Uzbekistan) has led the CA states to react positively and not with neo imperial or sinophobic fears to the BRI investment in their countries. China is viewed as a much-needed source of foreign investment for improving the region's infrastructure connectivity. Numerous Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) infrastructure projects have been either completed or are under construction in the CA region, including highways, bridges, power plants, tunnels, airport upgrades, and even water management projects (Yu, 2023, p. 8).

Of course, while China is certainly interested in advancing its economy by trading with the CA states, it is also interested in CA energy resources that will enable further development of its economy. What is very important to acknowledge is that the CA states share a border of about 3000km with Xinjiang, a region that the Chinese government considers its most politically troubled region. Thus, stability inside the CA region and economic prosperity are another aspect of the BRI that China has in mind when taking the CA region into consideration, hoping that the positive effects of the BRI will “trickle down” to the Xinjiang region. For China, the hope is that prosperity emanating from the BRI investments will result in Xinjiang province rejecting the three evils defined in the core of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation—separatism, extremism, and terrorism—and binding itself more closely to China. Physical proximity to the CA states gives China an easy springboard into the region and also a strong interest in ensuring the region's prosperity and stability, through which Xinjiang would become the gateway into Eurasia (Pantucci, 2019, p. 9).

China has constructed several oil pipelines throughout the CA states, such as one that goes through Kazakhstan and a three-branch gas pipeline from Turkmenistan via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, thus offering an

alternative to Russian export routes and, doing so, replacing Russia as the number one player in the region. China has also invested heavily in transport infrastructure between Xinjiang and the CA states, including road and railway construction and a land port at the Sino-Kazakhstani border in Khorgos, establishing regular cargo connections with Europe (Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 11).

As for the engagement with the CA states, the Xi administration uses the SREB to define the components of its relationship with the CA states primarily through bilateral agreements. In this regard, there is an evident discrepancy between the benefits China gets from advancing the BRI and the SREB and what the CA states get. China very smartly uses the BRI *leitmotif* of non-interference in the internal questions of the CA states (and other states that have signed MOUs within the BRI framework) by offering loans and infrastructure development without caring whether that leads to huge debt for those states, such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. To be fair, such states had huge amounts of debt related to their GDP even before China came into the CA space, but that debt increased only during the decade of the BRI. Also, Kazakhstan is an example of a Central Asian state whose debt to China is small compared to other CA states. Anyway, with the CA states being landlocked and, sometimes, double landlocked, those states cannot afford much alternative but to hop on China's loan train and use the infrastructure China is building, which helps them get their resources sold elsewhere. It looks like some kind of paradox as those states, in the past, during the Soviet Union period, had been subverted to strong Russian influence and monopsony, and now, with the SREB offering a diversification of their economy, they are now indebted to China as their number one trading partner, often in loan-for-resources schemes (Pantucci and Lain, 2016, p. 9).

Going back to non-interference *leitmotif*, China, compared to the institutional arrangements Russia uses, such as the CSTO and the EEU, prefers to work on a bilateral basis, meaning China does not enforce certain types of political harmonisation if a CA state does not wish to do so (like Turkmenistan, which has been a permanent neutral state since 1995, with its security politics).

Having in mind how big of a shared border China has with Kazakhstan (1533km), Kyrgyzstan (858km), and Tajikistan (414km), which amounts to

about 2800km, President Xi identified the need to establish denser linkages between their economic, political, social, and security sectors through the SREB cooperation. In that sense, as soon as Xi Jinping announced the BRI (then OBOR) in Astana in 2013, China made sure to align Kazakhstan's economic development priorities with its own, and in 2015, two states agreed to align Kazakhstan's "Path of Light" Development Strategy with the SREB development priorities to ensure "win-win" bilateral ties (Reeves, 2018, p. 6).

Kyrgyzstan's leadership was an early proponent of the SREB, arguing that deeper ties with China would lead to prosperity for the state. It was only natural for Kyrgyzstan to align its economy, legislation, and security policies with China's to ensure that the SREB works to its benefit. Because of that, the Xi administration used the prospect of greater bilateral SREB engagement in 2014 as the primary rationale to revise and deepen the Sino-Kyrgyz 2013 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement (Reeves, 2018, p. 8).

Since Tajikistan is neighbouring both Pakistan and Afghanistan and taking into consideration the insecurity in those states, especially the latter one with the Taliban, the Xi administration identified Sino-Tajik relations as crucial for the SREB ultimate success and for wider CA integration and development, especially in terms of ensuring regional stability and security. Since 2014, when President Xi published a letter in Tajikistan's News Agency exhorting the need for deeper linkages, China has used the SREB framework to expand investment in and construction of energy-related projects and transportation routes in Tajikistan (Reeves, 2018, p. 10).

Respecting Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality policy, the SREB engagement has led to a series of bilateral agreements focused on economic development coordination and integration, whose primary hotspot is the linkage of the two states' energy and transport sectors. The Xi administration has also identified Uzbekistan as a key SREB partner and argued that its adherence to the SREB engagement is essential for the BRI's overall success in CA. Since the BRI came into power, China has used the SREB to establish denser linkages between the two states that would lead to greater economic and policy coordination. This led to the signing of the SREB MOU in 2015, through which both states committed to engagement



across their respective economic, political, cultural, and security sectors (Reeves, 2018, p. 14).

The Xi administration has also used the SREB to drive regional-level political consultation and alignment between China and its CA partners and to establish formal and informal mechanisms for policy integration packed into the language of multilateralism. Through this process, China has managed to accomplish some kind of CA unification around the Chinese economy and political leadership and to co-opt existing multilateral *fora*, such as the SCO and the BRICS, and, at least declaratively, the Russia-led EEU.

### **THE BRI BUILDUP AND CHANGES IN CENTRAL ASIA'S "HARD" SECURITY**

The BRI infrastructure investments have also determined a change in China's policy in Central Asia from a purely economic to an economic and security policy with visible geopolitical consequences. While Russia's prevailing strategy was to maintain regional hegemony in its Central Asian "near-neighbourhood" by establishing close ties with local pro-Russian regimes, primarily dealing with regional security issues with its own "hard" power (military and intelligence presence), China has increased its presence in the regional security domain by conducting exercises, training military professionals, selling advanced weapons, and building up its own military infrastructure. Besides, both Russia and China raised their level of cooperation with the Central Asian states through the SCO structures dealing with the fight against the "three evils" (terrorism, extremism, and separatism) that threaten this region.

The first changes in China's regional approach emerged in 2015 when Xi Jinping pointed out the importance of military diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument (China Power, 2019) and continued after the 2016 terrorist attack on the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (RFERL, 2016). Soon, China overtook Russia in arms exports to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan from 2015 to 2020, providing 18% of the region's weapons. It has also provided technologically advanced weapons for all countries in the region, including armed drones, communication equipment, and UAVs. Regarding military exercises, China has increased them both in bilateral and multilateral formats (within the SCO), mostly with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (the largest exercise was in 2016 and 2019). In 2016, China founded the

Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (QCCM), a multilateral organisation comprising China, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan that focuses on regional security issues (Zanini, 2022, p. 3). From 2019 onwards, China has conducted bilateral counterterrorism exercises called “Cooperation 2019”, in which the Chinese PAP (People’s Armed Police) participated with Kyrgyz National Guards and Uzbek police forces (Zanini, 2022, p. 3).

China also focuses on the education of Central Asian military personnel, mostly from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In 2014, China founded the National Institute for the SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation in Shanghai, which has trained 300 officers from the SCO countries in less than four years (2022, p. 4). In 2016, China helped Kazakhstan establish a Chinese Department at the Kazakh University of Defence. Uzbekistan Internal Security Academy and China’s People’s Security University have been official partners since May 2017. China has hosted 213 officers from Uzbekistan’s Interior Ministry to courses on counterterrorism and drug trafficking in its training institutes (Zanini, 2022, p. 4).

China has increased its interest in developing security services and police force relations, mostly under the format “Cooperation 2019” between its own and the region’s police forces. The Chinese police have trained police officers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in counterterrorism operations. Andrea Zanini (2022, p. 4) noted that:

China’s military presence is most noticeable in Tajikistan, where China’s main concerns appear to be in the security and counterterrorism domains. In October 2016, China and Tajikistan agreed to build 11 border outposts and a training centre for border guards. Under this agreement, a Chinese outpost was established in the Murghab district of Gorno-Badakshan...Tajikistan has concluded an agreement with China for the construction of another base in Gorno-Badakshan close to the Wakhan corridor for Tajikistan’s special forces.

China also uses private security companies to secure its BRI infrastructure investments. For instance, the China Railway Group, which is building up the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Rail project, relies on the security services of the Zhongjun Junhong Security Company (China Power, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

After examining the decade of the BRI in Central Asia, we can conclude that Russia could not contain the BRI project in the region, which it considers its own backyard, even if it wanted to. Russia certainly had a lot of doubts about it but was forced to put them aside after 2014 and the sanctions coming from the West after the annexation of Crimea. By turning its focus to China, the Kremlin secured a market for its energy resources and greater access to Chinese credits and technology while, at the same time, selling military technology to China and the CA states (Gabuev, 2016, p. 9).

Looking at how Russia and China perceive the CA space, there are visible differences that seemingly help avoid any conflict between them. While Russia prefers to establish comprehensive institutional arrangements and develop a legal framework for regional cooperation, China does so by intensifying economic cooperation on the ground without (or after the seed has already been planted) creating institutional or legal structures. In that sense, Russia prefers a top-down approach, while China uses the BRI to arrange a network of bilateral ties loosely connected within the BRI framework and then weave it into the multilateralism regional cooperation agenda. That is how Russia aspires to keep its great power status and project influence over the post-Soviet or Central Asian space. In this context, Russia *measures* its success in terms of states joining the EEU and the CSTO, while China is focused on tangible economic outcomes, working on increasing economic cooperation and deepening ties with the CA states. In this sense, Beijing has not attempted political domination of Central Asia as being especially wary of Russia's pride in being the main security player in the region, also incorporating Russia inside the BRI by making it part of transit corridors leading to Europe.

Besides, the Sino-Russian relationship thrived on mutual interests in the CA region. Beijing recognised that Moscow's deeper ties to the region, with the stakes in regional stability this brought with it, could be used to China's advantage if it played the right cards. In this sense, China has seemingly correctly calculated that as long as it respected Russia's dominant role in the security arena, Russia would also respect its economic engagement in the region as a net benefit (Freeman, 2017, p. 9).

China did increase military aid to the CA states, but at a modest level, providing primarily technological assistance and equipment, while Moscow security ties remained strong, with Russia having several military bases in the region. In this way, both states appear to be very aware of the possibility of conflict and actively work to prevent it. China maintains a relatively passive attitude regarding Central Asian security and keeps its practical engagement at a low level. Bilateral security and defence ties are limited. China does not express any ambitions to deploy its troops in the region or to lease any military facilities. The main channel for Chinese military and security engagement with the Central Asian countries has been through SCO activities, such as political dialogue and participation in joint military exercises. Chinese analysts underline that China has no intention of interfering with Russia's interests in the region (Kaczmarek, 2017, p. 12).

Further on this note, not only are both states aware of the possible conflict between them, but they also have a strong shared interest in a geopolitical sense, having concerns about the US strategic agenda and fears of colour revolutions. Thus, having a common interest in regional stability helps them to avoid possible conflict by focusing their efforts on suppressing the influx of US interests in the region.

Though China has become the largest trading partner and an important source of foreign investment for the Central Asian countries, Russia's political and security clout remains dominant in the region. The five Central Asian countries still have strong historical connections to Moscow, and Russia will continue to be their dominant military partner and security guarantor for the foreseeable future (Yu, 2023, p. 7). Sinophobia and fear of possible takeover of CA land by China are alleviated by Russia's political clout, which serves as a guarantor of China's intentions in the region.

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# BRI INVESTMENTS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY: OUTCOMES AND PERSPECTIVES

Katarina ZAKIĆ\*

**Abstract:** The Belt and Road Initiative is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023, and it presents an opportunity to examine the achieved results within this format and see its strengths and weaknesses while at the same time evaluating potential prospects. Given the current political, economic, and environmental circumstances, this analysis focuses on investments in renewable energy within the BRI since its importance is increasing rapidly. The author used quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis to study data from 2014-2022, and the database China Global Investment Tracker (American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation) was used as the primary source of investment values. So far, through the BRI, China has invested the most in the energy sector and transportation projects. Investments in the traditional energy sector that uses coal, oil, and natural gas are significantly higher than those in renewable energy, and the main reason for that was the preferences of the involved countries. Renewable energy investments during the ten years followed the trend of other investments within the BRI. The highest volume of FDI and loans in clean energy was registered in 2017, while the lowest was in 2021 and 2022. The analysis showed that China invested the most in Sub-Saharan Africa and East and West Asia. Pakistan, Laos, and Argentina were the top recipient countries. The author concludes that the increasing awareness of the importance of renewable energy and the rising global political, security, and economic volatility make sustainability and self-sufficiency more necessary. Due to those trends, investments in renewable energy within the BRI will increase in the near future, but the traditional energy sector will still be the leading one.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road Initiative, China, renewable energy, investments, results, prospects.

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## CHINA AND RENEWABLE ENERGY – LESSONS TO LEARN

The Chinese economic development model, the so-called *socialist market economy*, established in the late seventies, was based on extensive development of heavy and light industry, traditional energy, and metallurgy. Those sectors, combined with other institutional reforms, helped enormously in achieving great economic results, leading China to become one of the most successful economies in the world. However, with such development, usually there is some cost associated with it, and in the case of China, it came in the form of environmental pollution (Yuan et al., 2020; Wang and Feng, 2021).

This situation was not something out of the ordinary or something that other countries did not experience. In Europe, for example, ever since coal prevailed over wood as a fuel, there was numerous evidence that extensive use of coal was negatively affecting human life. Even in historical documents, we can find evidence for such situations. Halliday wrote that such was the case in the early 1300s in London. Due to the use of coal, the air was so polluted that a royal decree banned coal usage in this city (1961, p. 13). Even though the public recognised that coal had a harmful impact on the environment, especially during the industrial revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, serious actions were not imposed until the late 1950s. Since then, scientists and the public have worked together to understand the causes of pollution, identify the most dangerous pollutants, and find ways to neutralise them (Ibid.).

In the early years after World War II, there was a general agreement that the rehabilitation of economies destroyed by war should be encouraged by faster industrial development, which eventually led to higher levels of environmental pollution. In that sense, China was no different from other developed or developing countries that pursued their development based on those already-known facts. However, since Chinese economic development lagged almost several decades behind Europe, the real consequences of extensive economic development, such as environmental pollution, could be found in China in the 1990s. Still, the recognition of those problems on the governmental level did not start until early 2000 (Yuan et al., 2020).

The first institutional steps in the right direction regarding sustainable development happened in China in 1992. That year, China signed and adopted UN Agenda 21, the UN climate resolution from Rio de Janeiro. The second important event was the adoption and implementation of the 10<sup>th</sup> (2001-

2005) and 11<sup>th</sup> (2006-2010) Five-Year Development Plans (Curran et al., 2017). In those documents, it was clearly stated that China recognises to what extent traditional sources of energy pollute the environment and how much industrial development is also increasing pollution. Those two Plans were among the first institutional documents used as a jumping-start for all subsequent environmental reforms in China. These reforms were primarily related to environmental laws and regulations, taxes and contributions that polluting companies have to pay, and a whole series of stimulus measures for the production of all forms of RE. Since then, all levels of government have had the ongoing task of developing a better and more environmentally friendly environment in China. China has also supported and signed the latest climate agreements in Paris in 2016 and Glasgow in 2021, demonstrating its support for international efforts to improve sustainable development.

Sustainable development is also highly prioritised in the latest 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Development Plan. That is compatible with China's pledge to become carbon neutral until 2060. It should also be emphasised that, so far, China has been able to exceed renewable energy goals previously formulated in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> FYPs (Mei et al., 2023, p. 8). Additionally, if everything goes according to plan and current dynamics, China will probably reach its goal of having installed 1,200 GW of solar and wind capacity five years ahead of schedule, which will be in 2025 (Ibid., p. 8).

One of the main reasons for such rapid and extensive support for RE<sup>1</sup> in China can be found in the fact that China is the largest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub> in the world, with almost 30% of global emissions (Lu et al., 2021). Therefore, its efforts to reduce pollution on its territory impact the entire planet. Because of that, for the last three decades, China has worked to develop renewable energy sources, first on its territory and then internationally. According to the announcement of China's National Energy Administration (NEA), in 2021, the installed capacity of renewable energy sources in China amounted to 1,063 GW, which accounts for 44.8% of the country's total energy production capacity (S&P Global Commodity Insights, 2022). According to a new report issued by Global Energy Monitor, China is rapidly pursuing its clean energy

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Renewable (clean) energy in this analysis consists of all sources of energy that can be replenished, such as wind, sunlight, water, biomass, or geothermal heat.

development, and it is currently working on upscaling its solar and wind energy with a combined capacity of 750 GW (Mei et al., 2023, p. 4).

There is ample evidence of the rapid development of the solar industry in China. Today, China is the largest producer of solar panels in the world, and almost 80% of the world's production comes from China. Not only does China produce so many solar panels and sell them internationally, but it also installs them on its territory. Currently, China's solar operating capacity is around 230 GW, and the plan is to have an additional 380 GW by 2030 (Mei et al., 2023, p. 9).

When it comes to wind energy, China also performs well. China's onshore and offshore capacities are currently around 310 GW, which equals the capacity of the top seven countries worldwide (Mei et al., 2023, p. 5). The capacity of offshore wind turbines reached 31.4 GW, which is slightly less than 36 GW in the US (Ibid., p. 5). In 2022, China produced 46% more wind energy than all European countries combined, and Europe is the second largest producer of wind energy globally (Bocca, 2022).

Besides solar energy, China is the world leader in hydropower energy. Hydropower plants in China produce about 16% of China's total electric power capacity (IHA, 2022). According to the 2022 report of the International Hydropower Association, the total hydropower capacity in China in 2021 was 391 GW (IHA, 2022), and hydropower ranks second in China's electricity generation, just after power generation in thermal power plants (Duan, 2021). Besides the construction of conventional hydropower plants, China also invests a lot in the construction of reversible hydropower plants. The plan is to increase their capacity to 120 GW in the period from 2021 to 2035 (Ibid.). China has not used all of its hydro potential and has opportunities for additional capacity expansion.

Biomass occupies a small part of green energy production in China, since appropriate technical solutions have not yet been found that would enable lower costs of biomass processing and subsequent energy production. Despite obstacles, China is also trying to achieve better results in this area. Even though China currently produces over 900 million metric tonnes of agricultural and forest biomass each year, which is equal to nearly 400 million metric tonnes of coal, it only uses 90 million metric tonnes for power generation on a yearly basis (Zheng, 2022). However, China is making plans to improve this situation.

Thanks to a targeted and responsible policy in the field of RE, China is today a world leader both in terms of investment in these energy sources on its territory and abroad, as well as in the production and sale of solar panels, wind turbines, electric vehicles, and batteries. Due to all the afore-mentioned facts, it is obvious that there are many lessons that other countries can learn from China's example in developing its economy while, at the same time, strongly investing in renewable energy and sustainable development.

China used its experience in RE to assist countries within the Belt and Road Initiative in pursuing sustainable development. Because of this, the main goal of this research was to see if the Belt and Road investments in RE changed the energy landscape globally and what their impact was. In order to do that, descriptive statistical analysis was applied to analyse RE investments within the BRI framework. The global database China Global Investment Tracker was used as a main source of information regarding the value of Chinese investments in RE. Although this database is not without imperfections, it is still one of a kind, and it can be used as a solidly accurate measure for analysis on a global scale.

## **BRI AND ENERGY PROJECTS**

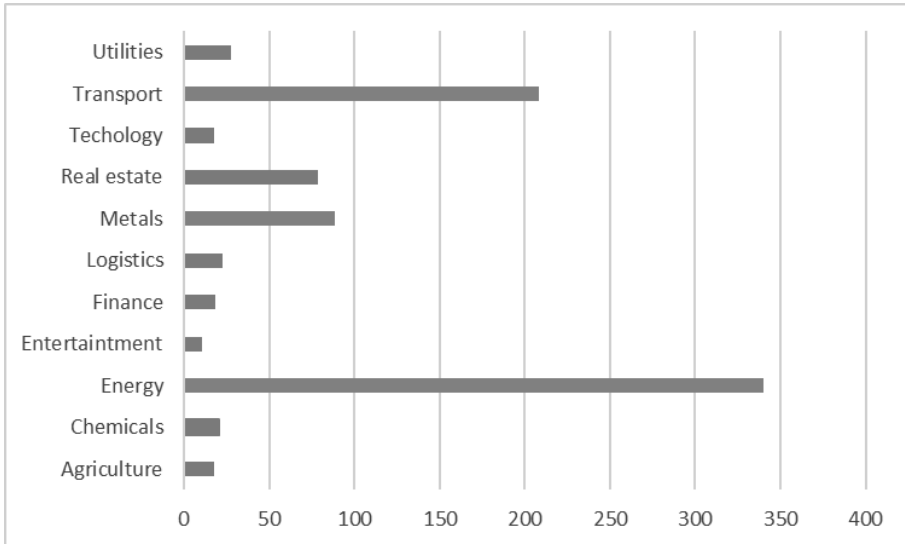
In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the Belt and Road Initiative during his visit to Kazakhstan. The essence of the BRI is that it serves as a platform dedicated to the improvement of economic, political, cultural, and people-to-people connections with countries that are part of this initiative with China while, at the same time, achieving win-win cooperation, sustainable development, and common prosperity. Through this format, China is improving its relations with countries, institutions, and associations around the world, supporting the global fight against poverty, discrimination, and unequal development.

Since the beginning of the BRI, China has pledged to cooperate with each country that wants to be part of this initiative to develop projects that are their own priorities. Therefore, it was up to the involved countries to nominate projects. In some cases, China was proposing them, but in most cases, the countries themselves initiated collaboration. The nature of cooperation varied among developed and developing countries as their needs differed. Moreover, due to those differences, countries had different priorities.

Developed countries lacked finances in mostly industrial or service fields, while developing countries lacked finances in transportation infrastructure. The first group of countries did not prioritise RE projects, as they were already working on them. For the second group, building basic transportation infrastructure was of greater importance, so sustainable development and RE were not a priority. Additionally, their needs in the energy field were mainly focused on traditional energy sources (coal, gas, and oil) in order to achieve two goals: energy security and undisturbed economic development. Recent events, such as the pandemic, the economic crisis, and the crisis in Ukraine, additionally highlighted those problems and goals. On the other hand, developing countries needs for more stable development based on extensive energy production and consumption were going hand in hand with China's own agenda (Zakić and Šekarić, 2021). Namely, China's need to have a stable energy supply for its purposes has also pushed energy projects on top of the BRI agenda, and the following data support those conclusions.

When examining China's investments within the BRI in last nine years, the energy sector had by far the highest volume of investment and construction compared to all other sectors (Figure 1). Overall, the energy sector received funding of 340.3 billion US\$, followed by the transportation sector with 208.3 billion and metallurgy sector with 88.48 billion US\$.

Figure 1. Sector structure of the BRI investments and construction, 2014-2022 (billions of \$US)



Source: Author's calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

In the energy sector, the traditional energy projects (fossil fuels) were the leading ones, as shown in Table 1. It shows the values of finances put into RE and energy as a whole while at the same time providing the percentage of renewable energy investments in relation to total energy investments. The findings show that investments in traditional energy, to this day, have higher values per year and in total, while renewable energy investments have fluctuated over the years. The lowest percentage of renewables within total energy investments was recorded in 2015 at 18.33%, while the most successful years were 2020 and 2017, with renewables accounting for 40.8% and 40.6%, respectively. In terms of absolute values, China invested the most in renewable energy in 2017, allocating 16.86 billion US dollars towards RE projects. Due to the pandemic and the conflicts in Ukraine, renewable energy investments decreased, hitting an all-time low in 2021 and 2022.

Table 1. BRI renewable energy investments and construction within total energy investments, 2014-2022 (billions of \$US, %)

Year	Renewable Energy	Total Energy	% of RE within Total Energy
2014	8.48	43.78	19.37
2015	10.37	<b>56.57</b>	<b>18.33</b>
2016	9.34	44.07	21.20
2017	<b>16.86</b>	41.51	40.60
2018	10.81	38.52	28.06
2019	11.52	39.83	28.90
2020	10.31	25.27	<b>40.80</b>
2021	7.75	27.07	28.63
2022	7.74	23.71	32.65
TOTAL	93.18	340.33	Average 27.38%

Source: Author's calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

In total, from 2014 until 2022, China invested in RE projects 93.18 billion US dollars within the BRI, out of which 28.55 billion was in the form of investment and 64.63 billion US dollars in the form of construction (Table 2). This ratio between investments and construction is not uncommon compared to other sectors in which China has invested. In addition, since most costs in construction were associated with hydropower projects, which were mainly funded by loans (Graph 6), and they cost more than solar or wind energy projects, these results were expected.

Table 2. BRI renewable energy investments and construction, 2014-2022 (billions of \$US)

Year	Investments	Construction	Total Value
2014	2.72	5.76	8.48
2015	1.96	8.41	10.37
2016	5.34	4.00	9.34
2017	3.23	13.63	<b>16.86</b>
2018	4.28	6.53	10.81
2019	2.70	8.82	11.52
2020	2.59	7.72	10.31
2021	2.98	4.77	<b>7.75</b>
2022	2.75	4.99	<b>7.74</b>
TOTAL	28.55	64.63	93.18

Source: Authors calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

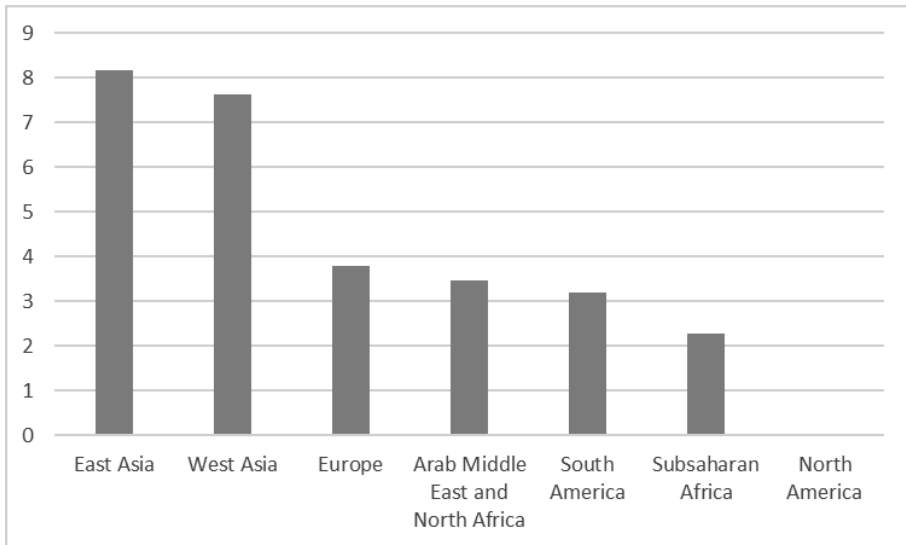
## **BRI AND RENEWABLES- RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Renewable energy development within the BRI will be further analysed in the following section. That includes analysing the distribution of finances across different regions, identifying the countries that used the most BRI resources for funding RE projects, and determining the most prominent types of RE projects.

In an effort to show how many regions received direct investments vs. loans, two separate figures are shown (2 and 3). Figure 2 displays the amount of RE investments within different regions, and we can see that East Asia is the leading region in those regards, with 8.18 billion US dollars. In the second place is West Asia with 7.63 billion dollars, and in the third place are countries in Europe that are part of the BRI, in which China invested 3.8 billion US dollars.



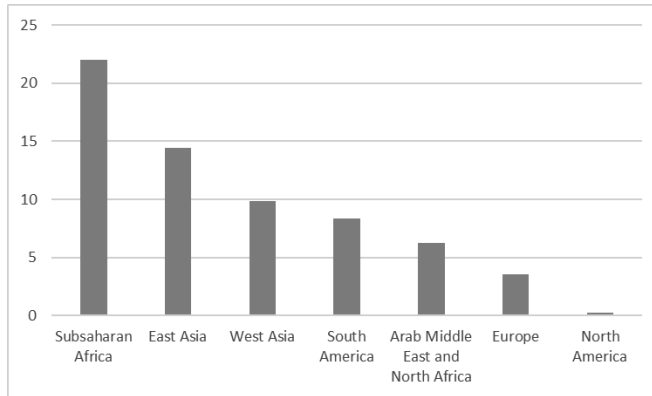
Figure 2. BRI investments in renewable energy, in 2014-2021, regions (billions of \$US)



Source: Author's calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

Figure 3 shows that the regional distribution of loans directed towards RE projects was different from investments. In this case, the Sub-Saharan region was the leader with 22.04 billion, followed by East Asia with 14.4 billion and West Asia with 9.82 billion.

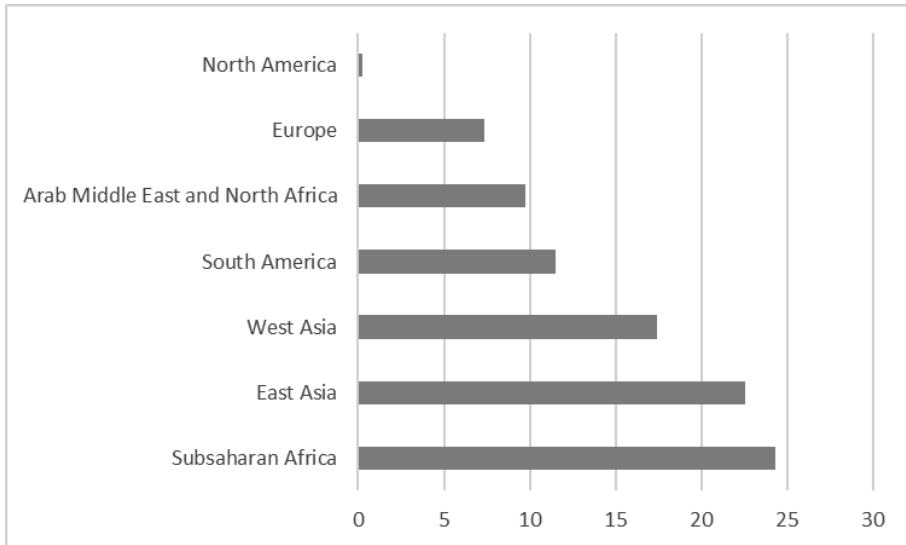
Figure 3. BRI construction in renewable energy, in 2014-2021, regions (billions of \$US)



Source: Author's calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

In total (Figure 4), Sub-Saharan, East, and West Asia were the regions leading in pursuing RE projects, while North America and Europe were the least interested in this kind of cooperation. Of course, in the case of North America and Western Europe, those results were expected since they are not part of the initiative, and, on the other hand, as previously mentioned, they have enough resources to fund RE development solely.

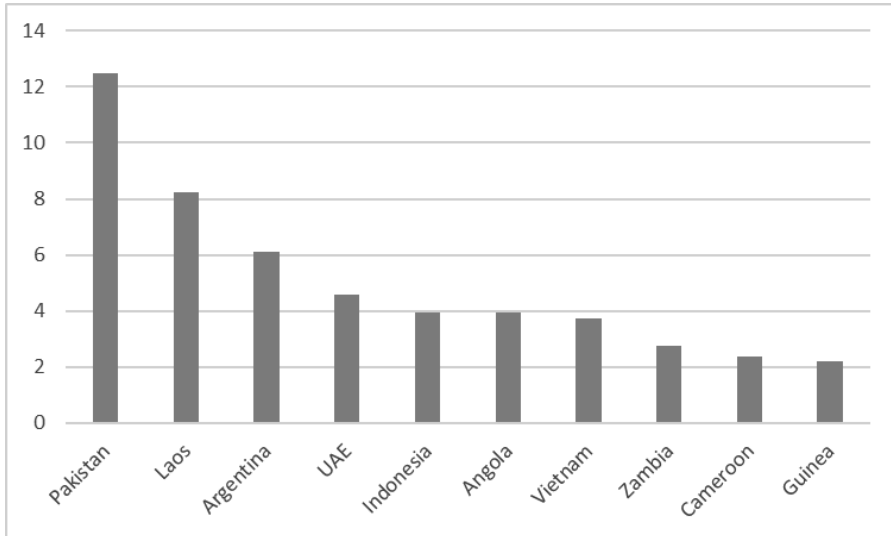
Figure 4. BRI construction and investments in renewable energy, in 2014-2021, regions (billions of US\$)



Source: Author's calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

The top ten recipient countries in the RE field within the BRI countries were Pakistan (12.47 billion), Laos (8.22 billion), Argentina (6.11), the UAE (4.59), Indonesia (3.96), Angola (3.96), Vietnam (3.74), Zambia (2.75), Cameroon (2.36), and Guinea (2.19) (Figure 5). Pakistan is the absolute leader in this group, which achieved this position by pursuing the construction of hydropower plants, and wind energy, and, in recent times, solar energy (Jillani, 2022).

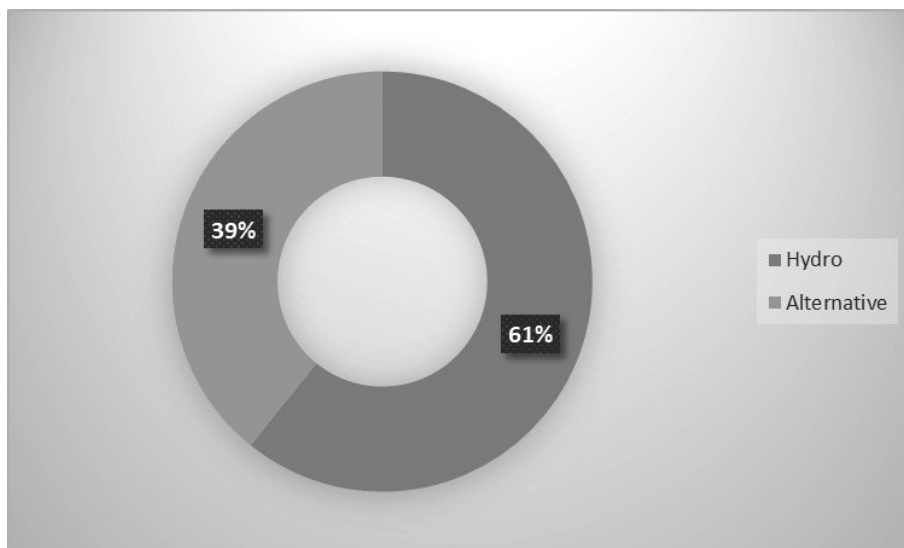
Figure 5. Top ten recipient countries within BRI in terms of investments and construction in renewable energy, 2014-2021 (billions of US\$)



Source: Author's calculation according to China Global Investment Tracker. 2023. Global dataset. American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation

Due to the costs of construction/acquisition/FDI of hydropower plants, it was expected to see that hydro energy investments were leading among other renewables, which is shown in Figure 6. Solar, wind, geothermal, and biomass energy participated with 39%. In absolute value, green energy projects were worth 36.56 billion US dollars, which is a very promising result considering that mostly developing countries participated in them. Knowledge about renewables is increasing, and these data are a testament that everyone is doing their best to decrease the level of environmental pollution.

Figure 6. Structure of RE investments within the BRI, 2014-2022 (%)



Investments in RE fluctuated over the years as they depended on the demand from the BRI countries and global economic, political, and energy circumstances. Additionally, those countries have various geographic and energy situations that also affect the number and value of RE projects. However, it is worth noting that China has made significant contributions to improving the global energy structure through its substantial resources and finances dedicated to increasing renewable energy production and consumption. That is important to know since developing countries require 1.7 trillion US dollars annually to achieve global climate goals by 2030, according to UNCTAD analysis (UNCTAD, 2023). The same report claims that investments in clean energy are constantly decreasing due to current political and economic challenges. In this context, more developed nations must assist those in need, which will benefit the entire planet. In practice, that is not always the case. According to a previously mentioned UNCTAD report, 30 developed countries have never invested in outward clean energy projects. Even though the report does not provide a list of those who are not investing, it does have a list of countries that are leaders in this field, and China is one of them, among the US, Japan, Germany, and the UK.

Nevertheless, there were concerns and negative assessments regarding overall Chinese international investments in the energy sector, including traditional (coal) and green energy. The list of reasons for those views varies. Most of the criticism derives from the fact that China funded the construction of many thermal power plants, which are the biggest polluters compared to other energy producers, while at the same time the world is facing the highest pollution levels. Additionally, the matter of the national security of different countries and Chinese investments in their energy sector was pointed out in Turcsanyi's research as one of the potential problems (2017, p. 719). Others observed that in the case of green energy, China is funding those projects internationally because they are helping them with domestic overcapacity since companies in this field have high governmental support (Gippner and Tourney, 2017). At the same time, countries should be aware of China's unfair competition in the green energy field that Europe has already witnessed, both in terms of antidumping prices and in terms of trade barriers that China has imposed on European companies interested in working in China (Curran et al., 2017). Even though these views gained a lot of attention and provided different types of facts, we should be aware that energy and climate problems did not arise just from China, and many other actors are involved in this problem.

The energy transition is an integral part of the global environmental agenda dedicated to achieving climate goals and decreasing levels of pollution and world average temperatures. As an emerging economic power, China cannot be overlooked in those regards, and we should carefully assess its place and dedication to those climate goals, especially regarding its energy investments within the Belt and Road Initiative. Over the past nine years, China has invested, in the form of loans or investments, 53.7 billion dollars in different kinds of coal projects within the BRI (CGTI, 2023). However, the number and volume of investments in coal started to decrease after 2020. Just two coal projects were financed after that year—one in 2021 and one in 2022. The main reason lies in Xi Jinping's "aggressive promise" in 2021 not to invest in coal-related projects within the BRI (Wang and Lin, 2022) and China's dedication to providing more environmentally friendly development. The only exception to this promise was made in the case of Indonesia, which received 310 million dollars in 2022 to invest in a thermal power plant project (CGTI, 2023).

If we compare investments in coal versus renewable energy, we will see that from 2014 to 2022, within the BRI, China invested 53.7 billion versus

93.18 billion US dollars. While investments in traditional energy related to coal usage are decreasing, renewable investments are increasing. Judging by those trends, we can conclude that China is shifting its interest regarding energy investments and is becoming even more involved in the energy transition in developing countries.

## CONCLUSION

China, which bases its development model on extensive industrial and energy development, is nearing achieving two main goals: becoming a developed economy and eradicating poverty. However, achieving those goals came at a high cost. For generations, Chinese people worked tirelessly to achieve a developed economy in the shortest possible period, which was an incredibly challenging mission. Additionally, achieving sustainable development was another crucial and daunting task, which came later in China's development. China was aware of environmental problems caused by intensive development, but it had to prioritise tasks. Once China stabilised its economy, it embarked on environmental reforms. Since 2000, China has undertaken many legal reforms, enabling the country to focus more on sustainability while providing many benefits for those involved in sustainable development. Renewable energy was one of the most significant questions and problems that China was solving during this time, and it put substantial financial, technical, and human resources into improving the situation regarding clean energy. Today, China is undoubtedly one of the world leaders in this field.

China used its knowledge regarding renewables to assist other countries in their pursuit of sustainable development and energy security through its flagship project, the Belt and Road. Developing countries that are part of this initiative were prioritising projects and sectors they wanted to improve, so clean energy was not on the top of their agenda as much as fossil fuels were. This situation is slowly changing, and more countries are investing in renewables. Over a period of nine years, China invested a total of 93 billion US dollars in renewables within the BRI, which is a great accomplishment. Sub-Saharan countries and countries in East and West Asia were the leading regions investing in renewables. Bearing in mind that most countries in those regions are lower-income countries, this is a serious achievement. Pakistan,

Laos, and Argentina had the highest volume of investments and loans in RE projects. Green energy projects comprised almost 40% of all financed projects, while hydro energy accounted for 60%. The BRI has helped participating countries realise their potential in renewable energy and provided them with resources to achieve their goals. Due to those efforts, the level and volume of installed clean energy capacity are increasing, helping on a global level to achieve climate goals. Without the BRI, the number and volume of projects would, for sure, be much lower. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the investments within the BRI in fossil fuels (gas and oil) will decrease.

However, there is still enough room to improve renewable energy cooperation. China has resources to fund and help BRI countries, but they need to take a more active role in the initiative. Some countries are doing more, others less. However, it is hopeful that times are changing and people are becoming more aware of the need for sustainable development. Working together globally is crucial to achieving positive climate change. Without joint effort, our planet and people will continue to suffer.

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# CHINESE PORT INVESTMENTS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON BILATERAL TRADE

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**Abstract:** Although the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was announced by the People's Republic of China in 2013, its foundation has been under development for over 15 years. The Go Out Policy, officially introduced in 1999, paved the way for relationships that would later become the BRI. The initiative has two primary components: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). We examine completed port projects and an extended MSR, composed of all ports that are owned or operated by Chinese firms, to determine the effect of these institutional arrangements using a structural gravity model. Although both port contracts and completed port projects have a recognisable influence on bilateral trade with China, the agreements do not have the same persistent effects on trade flows. We find that the operation of foreign port terminals by Chinese SAEs modifies trade for host countries towards China, such that trade is diverted away from alternative trade partners.

**Keywords:** Bilateral Trade, Maritime Trade, Ports, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China, Gravity Model.

## INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) comprises two parts: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The Chinese government has communicated that their aim for these projects is to promote the connectivity of continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries, set up multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realise diversified, independent, balanced, and sustainable development (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Additional claims include the capacity to enhance cultural exchanges

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and mutual learning among the peoples of relevant countries. In addition to these features, the MSR has also been sold domestically as an initiative that will help to ensure the security of transport via sea routes (Fallon, 2015; Swaine, 2015). Although this project cannot demonstrate the validity of these claims, it does provide evidence of changes to world trade flows as a result of these agreements.

In this paper, we analyse the effects of completed infrastructure projects and varying port contracts on exports, imports, and total trade volumes with China, other network members, and the Rest of the World (RoW). Specifically, we concentrate on an extended MSR (which includes non-memorandum countries where Chinese SAEs own ports or have terminal contracts) and variations in levels of control. The analysis has been developed to determine whether China's growing influence over ports is recognisable in the trade flows of host economies. We also identify how this growing influence of ports affects global trade with China. In particular, we implement a newly developed bilateral dataset (BLOCS) to separately identify the effects of port acquisitions and operating agreements on bilateral trade using four measures of trade (Wu et al., 2022). Controlling for country-specific unobservables, we find large positive effects of the Chinese SAE port operation on bilateral trade with China. Estimates also suggest operating port terminals may also improve the strategic position of China in these trade relationships by diverting trade from other trade partners.

This paper contributes to the literature on trade regimes and trade costs by identifying the economic effects of China's growing influence over ports on bilateral trade flows. We do this by separately identifying whether ownership, terminal operating contracts, and infrastructure projects are different in terms of their global trade effects. The model is specified with respect to varying degrees of port control to estimate the effects of assumed reductions in transportation and other transaction costs on bilateral trade before and after such investment is made. Using a structural gravity model and incorporating a new and unique database, we find that the varying degrees of port control have different outcomes with respect to bilateral trade with China and that completed port projects, as defined below, temporarily increase trade with the RoW.

Our project employs a novel dataset of 60 port contracts and infrastructure project investments to estimate the effects of these interventions on bilateral trade flows over a 20-year period using four

measures of trade for robustness. The database also contains comprehensive observations on trade between all partners during the period of analysis (1999-2019). We separately identify the effects of a preferential trade agreement and the extended MSR trade network to evaluate similarities and test for interdependencies. We then separately identify the effects of terminal operating contracts and infrastructure investment to investigate their differences and look for evidence of their complementary nature.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is an applied analysis of the assumed effects of reduced trade costs that controls for various prior estimation biases associated with gravity models. The contemporary structural gravity model accounts for prior estimation challenges and is underpinned by the fundamentals of international trade theory (e.g., Yotov (2022) for a more complete overview). With respect to the BRI, there have only been a few examples of empirical investigations using gravity models. To complement and contribute to this literature, we apply a structural gravity model to better understand the effects of this maritime trade network and how it might increase or decrease trade with China as well as with other trade partners.

We therefore hypothesise that port terminal contracts indirectly reduce trade costs between China and its trade partners when their international ports have operating agreements with CSAEs. The assumption is that the transaction costs of trade diminish when operating a foreign port terminal in such a manner that it increases trade with the operator. Further research is necessary to identify the specific mechanisms of transmission; however, whether the agreements result in trade creation or diversion is identifiable in our empirical analysis. We also expected investment in port infrastructure to reduce more traditional trade costs, as defined in the micro-economic literature, and that these differences would be reflected in trade with other members and the RoW. The evidence for this is not convincing.

### **Motivation**

With respect to this paper, focus has been placed on the interpretation of transaction costs as the hard costs that expand productive capabilities

rather than assumptions about human behaviour. The behaviour of the Chinese government is framed as an actor with incentives to reduce costs of contract development, management, and enforcement along preferred shipping routes. The assumption is that Chinese SAEs are indirectly reducing costs for domestic producers of all kinds amid increasing export competition and are less interested in reducing costs for their trade partners via technology transfer. Given these assumptions, it would be surprising if the extended MSR did not lead to more cross-border transactions between China and their host countries as the amount of control increased.

Baniya et al. (2019) use a gravity model to estimate the improvement in bilateral time savings on trade patterns. They find that the potential effects of reducing trade times along the BRI are large, increasing trade flows between participating countries between 2.8 percent and 11 percent. They also find that deeper trade agreements would magnify this impact and result in an increase in total exports of around 12 percent. This result highlights the potential complementary nature of trade cooperation and infrastructure cooperation.

Kohl (2019) uses the structural gravity approach to compare the impact of infrastructure investment in the BRI to that of FTA formation on supply-chain trade. The author identifies asymmetric benefits from infrastructure development; however, he estimates larger reductions in trade costs from the BRI when compared to the creation of traditional FTAs. More recently, Saeed et al. (2021) have used a gravity model to examine the potential effects of Chinese maritime networks on bilateral trade movements. Using 128 trading partners, they show that maritime network connectivity brought about by the BRI reduces the number of required transshipments, which enhances efficiency, thus reducing trade costs for the member countries. The research design has been developed to identify whether these trade cost reductions can be observed in both short-run and long-run changes to bilateral trade flows with China, other members of the maritime network, and the RoW.

## METHODOLOGY

The identification strategy estimates the effects of varying institutional conditions between Chinese SAEs and large international ports on in- and out-

of-network trade flows. Our expectation is that the network of port contracts and infrastructure projects is insufficient as a replacement for broader and deeper institutional collaboration and that the effects of the extended MSR will favour Chinese interests. An increase in trade throughput in countries with a greater saturation of network partners would be evidence that trade costs were somehow reduced. The network is assessed in the standard Vinerian sense of a policy instrument capable of generating trade creation or trade diversion (Krugman et al., 2022; Viner, 1950). Our hypothesis is that the effects of membership in this trade network will differ from the effects of membership in a preferential trade agreement and, moreover, that the predicted effects will vary depending on the nature of the contractual agreement. In addition, the characteristics of trade agreements matter (Wu, 2006).

The type of contract and level of institutional control are also predicted to be a determinative factor in whether being a member of the trade network leads to trade creation or diversion. As the level of control increases, the resulting reduction in the transaction costs of doing business with Chinese firms should lead to an increase in trade with China, whereas investments in port construction should increase trade with the RoW. Using the structural gravity model as a foundation for analysis controls for size and distance between trading pairs while providing reliable estimates on the effect of policy changes. The flexible structure allows for the integration of BLOCS data to estimate the predicted effects of Chinese SAE port contracts and completed infrastructure development projects on bilateral trade between members of the extended MSR, with China, and with the RoW.

### **Data**

The agreements are first divided into two categories: 1) port contracts; and 2) port projects. These are not mutually exclusive categories, as many operating agreements include construction projects and Chinese SAEs can own and operate the same port; however, each country has its own unique constellation of contracts and construction agreements. This paper then identifies three types of Chinese SAE port contracts, with increasing magnitudes of control: 1) ownership (partial ownership of the port itself); 2) partial operation (partial ownership of a company or companies that have acquired terminal operating agreements in the country); and 3) all terminals



(partial ownership of a company or companies that operate all terminals in a host country). According to the research design, ownership and operating agreements are considered forms of controlling interest, whereas port projects are considered infrastructure investments. This distinction makes it possible to separately identify the effect of an infrastructure project and compare it to that of controlling interest. Additionally, it makes it possible to investigate whether there are complementary effects.

An infrastructure project dummy, indicating the year a port project ( $MSR\_pro_{ij}$ ) was developed, and the logged value of investment ( $MSR\_inv_{ij}$ ) are used to determine if infrastructure projects have a measurable effect on bilateral trade flows with China and whether or not the size of that project matters. Both lead and lagged variables were generated to check for reverse causality as well as anticipatory and long-run effects.

This study employs bilateral observations that begin in 1999 and end in 2019. As recommended by Yotov et al. (2016), the 20-year period was lagged to analyse bilateral country pairs in non-consecutive years. The BLOCS database provided exports (FOB) and imports (CIF) from the Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS) data as well as aggregate trade data from both the World Trade Flows (WTF) and Bilateral Product Trade Flows (BACI) databases. Traditional Gravity Characteristics data from CEPII were also included in robustness checks that estimate less constrained models (Wu et al., 2022). The Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) dummy from Mario Larch's Regional Trade Agreements Database (Egger and Larch, 2008) was introduced to separately identify and control for the joint effects of port influence and membership in PTA. Using four measures of international trade for the analysis provides contextual analysis on relationships with imports, exports, and total trade between pairs. Employing both the WTF and BACI estimates of total trade offers an additional level of robustness to the findings.

## Model

A generic structural gravity model has been modified to assess the effects of port influence on trade. In this model,  $X_{ijt}$  denotes nominal trade flows at non-consecutive year  $t$ ; the term  $\pi_{it}$  denotes the set of time-varying source-country dummies;  $X_{jt}$  denotes the set of destination-country dummies; and

$\mu_{ij}$  denotes the set of country-pair fixed effects. These variables control for outward resistances, inward resistances, and unobservables.

$$X_{ij,t} = \exp [\pi_{i,t} + \chi_{j,t} + \mu_{ij} + \beta_1 MSR\_n_{ij,t}] \times \varepsilon_{ij,t} \quad (1)$$

In this specification, all internal trade costs are set to one, and all international fixed effects ( $\mu_{ij}$ ,  $j \neq i$ ) are estimated relative to the intra-national fixed effect ( $\mu_{ij}$ ) (Anderson and van Wincoop, 2003; Yotov et al., 2022). The specification is estimated using a pseudo-poisson maximum likelihood (PPML) estimator and uses country-pair fixed effects to absorb trade costs. The coefficient  $\beta_1$  identifies the predicted effects of varying Chinese port contracts and completed infrastructure projects on trade with China, partners in the trade network, and the RoW by changing the sample of trade partners.

To determine whether the observed effects complement existing trade agreements and to account for the partial effects of such agreements on total trade, we separately identify their effects and estimate whether they are jointly significant. We also estimate the total and partial effects of port control and a completed port project. This is denoted by the interaction between  $\beta_1 MSR\_n_{ij}$  and  $\beta_1 MSR\_m_{ij}$  in equation 3.

$$X_{ij,t} = \exp [\pi_{i,t} + \chi_{j,t} + \mu_{ij} + \beta_1 MSR\_n_{ij,t} + \beta_2 PTA_{ij,t} + \beta_3 (MSR\_n_{ij,t} * PTA_{ij,t})] \times \varepsilon_{ij,t} \quad (2)$$

$$X_{ij,t} = \exp [\pi_{i,t} + \chi_{j,t} + \mu_{ij} + \beta_1 MSR\_n_{ij,t} + \beta_2 MSR\_m_{ij,t} + \beta_3 (MSR\_n_{ij,t} * MSR\_m_{ij,t})] \times \varepsilon_{ij,t} \quad (3)$$

The robustness of these results is then tested with lead and lagged variables to account for the possibility of reverse causality as well as anticipatory, long-run, and non-linear effects. If port control or investment is exogenous to trade flows in the years prior to the agreement,  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  will be insignificant in equation 4, or otherwise signify a pre-existing relationship.

$$X_{ij,t} = \exp [\pi_{i,t} + \chi_{j,t} + \mu_{ij} + \beta_1 MSR_{ij,t} + \beta_2 MSR_{ij,t+4} + \beta_3 MSR_{ij,t+6}] \times \varepsilon_{ij,t} \quad (4)$$

To control for non-linear effects and identify whether these effects remain significant in the long run, lagged variables are included on non-consecutive years up to 12 years (see equation 5). A linear combination of the coefficients is then estimated and tested for significance to predict the overall total effect

of Chinese port control during the period of analysis while controlling for other unobservables.

$$X_{ij,t} = \exp [\pi_{i,t} + \chi_{i,t} + \mu_{ij} + \beta_1 \text{MSR}_{ij,t} + \beta_2 \text{MSR}_{ij,t-4} + \beta_3 \text{MSR}_{ij,t-6} + \beta_6 \text{MSR}_{ij,t-12}] \times \varepsilon_{ij,t} \quad (5)$$

Did Chinese SAEs target partners that already had higher trade volumes with China? Or were projects completed at ports where Chinese firms were already doing a lot of business? Using this procedure properly accounts for possible reverse causality between existing trade with China to assess the exogeneity of project contracts or completed projects. Are there non-linear effects? Or do the effects change over time? The lagged variable experiment can identify non-monotonic relationships and phasing-in effects, and the linear combination of estimates can assess whether the overall effect is persistent and significant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our research indicates that investment projects, property acquisitions, and operating agreements for port terminals by Chinese SAEs are not equivalent events. This indicates that not all participation in the trade network is created equal. As the level of control increases, as shown by contractual agreements, trade increases with China and away from the RoW (including other members of the trade network). This differs from the effects of completed port projects, where, as the level of investment increases, so does trade with the rest of the world (excluding other members of the trade network) and with China (at least temporarily). Thus, the level of investment and institutional cooperation negotiated by China within the MSR and its network make a difference in bilateral trade between partners.

### Comparing Trade Agreements to Trade Networks

Do countries along the MSR trade network with port contracts trade more among themselves in the same way members of a trade agreement do when total economic costs are reduced? The short answer is no; we find that a port contract does not predict an increase in trade between other members of the network. Table 1.A indicates that there are no increases in trade between network partners that have ownership or operating contracts with Chinese

SAEs; this implies that there is no significant reduction in costs between these partners. Next, Table 2.B answers the question of whether or not overall trade increases for members with port contracts. There is no measurable effect on overall trade for members of the trade network, regardless of whether or not China is included in the estimation.

Table 1- Trade Between Countries with Port Contract and Trade with China<sup>1</sup>  
**Trade among PTA Members and Trade between Countries with Port Contracts (1.A)**

	<b>EXPORTS DOTS</b>	<b>IMPORTS DOTS</b>	<b>WTF TRADE</b>	<b>BACI TRADE</b>	<b>EXPORTS DOTS</b>	<b>IMPORTS DOTS</b>	<b>WTF TRADE</b>	<b>BACI TRADE</b>
PTA Dummy	0.064**	0.063*	0.046	0.057**				
MSR Dummy					-0.009	-0.021	-0.020	0.014
<b>All Trade after Signing a Port Contract (Including and Excluding China) (1.B)</b>								
MSR All Trade	0.015	0.032	-0.004	0.020				
All No China					-0.024	-0.005	-0.020	-0.031
<b>All Trade after Completing a Port Project (Including and Excluding China) (1.C)</b>								
Project All Trade	0.058	0.124***	0.078**	0.120*				
All No China					0.018	0.035	0.031	-0.061
<b>Trade with China among Countries with Completed Port Projects (1.D)</b>								
Project Only China	0.009	0.026	-0.003	0.103**				
<b>Log Investment</b>					-0.003	0.005	-0.002	0.014*

<sup>1</sup> Tables 1-4 report the “Total Effect” as a linear combination of estimates from lagged dummies over a 12-year period. The lag and lead variables are created from the variables of interest in bold. Each sub-table (A – E) represents a single experiment that compares two unique specifications. All models are specified using a PPML estimator, and estimations are generated with export and import data from DOTS and total trade data from WTF and BACI. Results are not estimated in consideration of intra-national trade effects as domestic trade data is not available for all countries during the period of analysis. This implies there may be a slight upward bias in the estimations due to globalisation.

Trade with China after Completing a Port Project (Log Investment in Millions)								(1.E)
<b>Log Investment</b>	0.003	0.017	0.004	0.033***	-0.000	0.008	-0.002	0.016**
INV_LEAD.4	0.004	0.008*	0.006	0.017**				
INV_LEAD.6	0.009	0.019***	0.009	0.029***				
INV_LAG.4					-0.012	-0.011	0.000	-0.016*
INV_LAG.6					0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
INV_LAG.8					0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
INV_LAG.10					0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
INV_LAG.12					0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<b>Total Effect</b>	-	-	-	-	-0.012	-0.003	-0.002	0.001
Rmse	0.238	0.244	0.242	0.285	0.238	0.245	0.242	0.285
N	232702	260392	238918	207563	232702	260392	238918	207563

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Tables 1.C–1.E show the expected effects of a completed infrastructure project on trade with all countries and on trade with China, using dummies in the year of completion. The lagged model then estimates the expected increase in total trade with China using the log of investment in millions. Results of the lead and lag analysis suggest that the increases in trade with China may be due to project requirements rather than a reduction in trade costs, as the effects are significant prior to completion and turn negative four years after completion. The linear combination of estimates is insignificant, meaning there is little evidence of persistence, and the marginal increase in trade from project investment does not continue after the project is completed. This is an unexpected result, as gains from trade are considered to be a primary motivation for large maritime infrastructure projects. Despite this unfavourable outcome, there is evidence of temporary increases in total trade during the time of construction, and this has the potential to generate a positive economic shock in host economies.

### Comparing Varying Levels of Control

Table 2.A illustrates that operating control of a port terminal is significant while controlling interest in the port itself is not. This is an indication that trade cost reduction is being facilitated by operational control rather than the control of operating costs by port owners. The results of Table 2.A indicate that the expected effect of an agreement that gives controlling interest to a Chinese SAE is an increase in total trade with China of about 21% and that exports to China are expected to increase at a greater rate than imports. Table 2.B indicates that indeed, controlling interest in all port operations is likely to be more significant and result in higher levels of trade with China.

**Table 2- Trade with China after Ownership and Operating Agreements**

<b>Trade with China after Ownership Contract and Terminal Operation Contract (2.A)</b>								
	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORT S DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORT S DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE
Ownership	0.019	0.041	0.030	0.038				
Operation					0.176***	0.113**	0.053	0.194***
<b>Trade with China after Terminal Operation Contract (Partial and All Terminals) (2.B)</b>								
<b>Partial Operation</b>	0.119**	0.029	0.009	0.131**				
<b>All Terminals</b>					0.223***	0.198***	0.128***	0.195***
<b>Trade with China after Signing a Terminal Operating Contract (2.C)</b>								
<b>Partial Operation</b>	0.131***	0.042	0.021	0.129**	0.119***	0.056	0.032	0.091
PART_LEAD.4	0.047**	0.054***	0.020	-0.031				
PART_LEAD.6	0.017	0.025	0.049	0.008				
PART_LAG.4					0.038	-0.008	-0.002	0.096
PART_LAG.6					-0.029	0.001	-0.039	0.003
PART_LAG.8					-0.017	-0.054**	-0.030	-0.037
PART_LAG.10					-0.022	-0.025	-0.021	0.002
PART_LAG.12					-0.045	-0.066	-0.090	-0.026
<b>Total Effect</b>					0.043	-0.096	-0.150	0.130

**Trade with China after a Terminal Operating Contract in All Terminals (2.D)**

<b>All Terminals</b>	0.247***	0.241***	0.171***	0.226***	0.221***	0.198***	0.129***	0.198***
ALL_LEAD.4	0.112**	0.094***	0.120***	0.097***				
ALL_LEAD.6	-0.037	0.033	0.027	-0.000				
ALL_LAG.4					0.074*	0.019	-0.021	-0.012
ALL_LAG.6					-0.048	-0.020	0.005	-0.054
ALL_LAG.8					0.124***	0.020	0.063**	0.101***
ALL_LAG.10					0.068**	0.059*	0.068*	0.057*
ALL_LAG.12					0.126	0.034	-0.014	0.007
<b>Total Effect</b>	-	-	-	-	0.566***	0.311***	0.230*	0.298**
Rmse	0.238	0.244	0.242	0.285	0.238	0.245	0.242	0.285
N	232702	260392	238918	207563	232702	260392	238918	207563

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Both exports and imports to and from China will increase after a contract has been signed, although the total effect on exports to China is expected to be much higher during the period of analysis—76% for exports compared to 36% for imports (Table 2.D). This implies that Chinese firms bring in more goods than they send to the host countries after the operating agreements are signed and is evidence that a large extent of the cost savings will be experienced by the Chinese.

Table 2.D reports the estimated effects of having all port terminals operated by firms in which a Chinese SAE has a controlling interest. The absence of significance six years prior indicates that the contracts were exogenous to existing trade flows prior to the commencement of contract negotiations. This phasing in analysis offers details into the lead time on agreements. In the case of all terminal controls, the total effect on bilateral trade is positive and significant. The similarity in coefficients between the unlabeled estimates implies that the findings are robust.

### Comparing Port Contracts to Port Projects

What happens to trade with countries that are not China or other countries that are also within the trade network? Although pricing data would be necessary to confirm whether China was shifting trade away from low-cost providers, we can assess in-network trade flows and trade with the RoW to get an idea of how being a part of the trade network is affecting trade with other partners. As reported in Table 1, trade among members with port contracts, *including* China, is unaffected, and the same is true overall for trade for host countries, whereas port projects significantly increase all trade, *including* China, but not when China is *excluded*. Restricting the analysis to investigate the effects of being a part of the tradework, excluding China, provides a clearer picture of how port contracts and port projects affect trade between the network members.

**Table 3- Trade with Between Network Partners**

**Trade between Countries with Port Contracts or Completed Projects (Excluding China) (3.A)**

	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORTS DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORTS DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE
<b>MSR No China</b>	-0.057***	-0.067***	-0.042**	-0.050*				
<b>Project No China</b>					-0.081**	-0.112***	-0.063**	-0.037
<b>Trade between Countries with Port Contracts (Excluding China)</b>					<b>(3.4.B)</b>			
<b>MSR No China</b>	-0.076***	-0.070***	-0.050**	-0.053	-0.055***	-0.057***	-0.039**	-0.051*
noCN_LEAD.4	-0.023	-0.042***	-0.032**	-0.044*				
noCN_LEAD.6	-0.026	-0.030*	-0.016	-0.024				
noCN_LAG.4					-0.016	-0.023	-0.028	-0.011
noCN_LAG.6					-0.016	-0.044***	0.009	-0.017
noCN_LAG.8					0.001	0.025*	0.001	-0.009
noCN_LAG.10					-0.022	-0.025*	-0.008	-0.051**
noCN_LAG.12					-0.018	0.000	-0.031	0.007
<b>Total Effect</b>	-	-	-	-	-0.127***	-0.123***	-0.095*	-0.13**



**Trade between Countries with Completed Port Projects (Excluding China) (3.4.C)**

<b>Project No</b>									
<b>China</b>	0.111***	0.074*	0.062	0.060	-0.087***	-0.113***	-0.076***	-0.074**	
noCN_LEAD.4	-0.053**	-0.079***	-0.065***	-0.031					
noCN_LEAD.6	-0.049*	-0.035	-0.051**	-0.070**					
noCN_LAG.4					0.009	-0.009	0.186***	0.222***	
noCN_LAG.6					0.120**	0.128***	-0.032	-0.092	
noCN_LAG.8					-0.091**	-0.084*	-0.068	-0.110**	
noCN_LAG.10					0.035	0.037	0.000	-0.020	
noCN_LAG.12					0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
<b>Total Effect</b>	-	-	-	-	-0.015	-0.041	0.009	-0.074	
Rmse	0.238	0.244	0.242	0.285	0.238	0.245	0.242	0.285	
N	232702	260392	238918	207563	232702	260392	238918	207563	

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Although the results for port projects are also somewhat unreliable, they offer more evidence that gains from trade may be related to project requirements. The negative sign on the lead variables can be interpreted as low trade between network partners prior to completing the project, with a sudden burst of activity in the years surrounding the completion of the project. There are positive effects among trade partners in the 4 years after completion, but they eventually turn negative, and the total effects are insignificant. This is further evidence that the trade created from the port projects was temporary in nature during the period of this analysis.

The final step in this procedure is to estimate the effects of a port contract and project contract on trade with the RoW. A member of the MSR trade network that allows Chinese SAEs to operate terminals in all of its ports is expected to see a 19% ( $[\exp(0.175) - 1] \times 100$ ) reduction of its exports to the rest of the world over the 12-year period (see Table 4). On the contrary, there are no significant long-term effects of completed infrastructure projects. This is further evidence that Chinese trade thus increases at the expense of trade

diversion; additionally, the magnitude of exports being higher and more consistently significant means that these effects are being driven more by China buying than by China selling.

**Table 4 – Trade with Rest of World Excluding China**

**Trade with the RoW (Excluding China) after All Terminals Contract and Port Project (3.5.A)**

	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORTS DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORT S DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE
<b>All Terminals RoW</b>	-0.110***	-0.131***	-0.082***	-0.080**				
Project RoW			0.050**	0.074***	0.050**	-0.013		

**Trade with RoW (Excluding China) after and Before a Port Contract (3.5.B)**

<b>All Terminals RoW</b>	-0.079	-0.097**	-0.089**	0.000	-0.106***	-0.134***	-0.084***	-0.091**
RoW_LEAD.4	-0.079***	-0.024	-0.065**	-0.054*				
RoW_LEAD.6	0.054	-0.028	-0.017	0.020				
RoW_LAG.4					0.004	0.020	0.067*	0.081*
RoW_LAG.6					0.074	0.025	0.006	0.072*
RoW_LAG.8					-0.078**	-0.018	-0.018	-0.042
RoW_LAG.10					-0.034	-0.030	-0.038	-0.025
RoW_LAG.12					-0.034	0.040	0.007	0.041
Total Effect	-	-	-	-	-0.175*	-0.097	-0.062	0.036

**Trade with RoW (Excluding China) after and Before a Port Project (3.5.C)**

<b>Project RoW</b>	-0.131***	-0.095***	-0.094***	-0.055	0.051**	0.066***	0.059***	0.003
RoW_LEAD.4	0.012	0.035*	0.035*	-0.011				
RoW_LEAD.6	0.002	-0.016	0.001	-0.058*				
RoW_LAG.4					0.012	0.042*	-0.152***	-0.131***
RoW_LAG.6					-0.126***	-0.118**	0.043	0.064

RoW_LAG.8					0.063*	0.058	0.040	0.078*
RoW_LAG.10					-0.019	-0.032	0.000	0.030
RoW_LAG.12					0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Total Effect	-	-	-	-	-0.019	0.016	-0.010	0.044
Rmse	0.238	0.244	0.242	0.285	0.238	0.245	0.242	0.285
N	232702	260392	238918	207563	232702	260392	238918	207563

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Agreeing to and completing an infrastructure development project predicts a temporary increase in all trade, including trade with the RoW and trade with China. Inconsistent signs on coefficient values in the lag and lead analyses reveal a steadily decreasing effect during project duration. The absence of lagged or total effects during the 12 years after project completion indicates these effects are temporary. This is evidence that increases in trade are not a result of sustainable reductions in trade costs and could be the result of project requirements or anticipatory effects. To better understand the robustness of this outcome, future analysis can estimate the variation in completed infrastructure projects.

Tables 1–4 outline a series of experiments designed to identify the unique effects of varying participation in the extended MSR trade network, controlling for a variety of fixed effects assumptions. These results indicate that signing an operating contract for terminal control predicts an increase in trade with China and a decrease in trade with the RoW.

### Complementarity of Preferential Trade Agreements and Trade Networks

When including China in the trade network and controlling for membership in the same PTA, the BACI data predicts an increase in total trade; however, when both partners are members of the extended MSR and the same PTA, these trade gains are lost and the net effect is slightly negative (Table 5.A). This brings into question the propositions from several authors that the BRI has the

capacity to act as a regional trade agreement (e.g., Baniya et al., 2019) and is further evidence that cost savings tend to be on the side of China.

The results reported in Tables 5.B and 5.E indicate that the total effect of the interaction between an operating contract and a completed construction project is expected to be negative, if significant at all. Table 5.G provides evidence that this is even the case when estimating bilateral trade with China. The only relationship where the combined net effect does not turn negative is in those ports where operating contracts have been secured for all terminals. This is further evidence that trade increases from port contracts and completed projects originate from different mechanisms and are separate, non-complementary events.

**Table 5 – Joint Effects of PTAs and Agreements<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Joint Effects of Trade among PTA and Trade between Countries with Port Contracts (5.A)</b>				
	EXPORTS DOTS	IMPORTS DOTS	WTF TRADE	BACI TRADE
MSR Dummy	0.007	-0.001	-0.011	0.056*
PTA Dummy	0.069***	0.070**	0.049	0.062**
<b>MSR<sub>ij</sub>*PTA<sub>ij</sub></b>	-0.034	-0.042	-0.021	-0.071*
<b>Joint Effects of Trade between Countries with Port Contracts and Completed Projects (5.B)</b>				
MSR Dummy	-0.005	-0.014	-0.016	0.016
Project Dummy	-0.023	-0.005	-0.01	0.051
<b>MSR<sub>ij</sub>*MSR_pro<sub>ij</sub></b>	-0.046	-0.088*	-0.051	-0.042
<b>Joint Effects of Trade among PTA and Trade between Countries with Completed Projects (5.C)</b>				
Project Dummy	-0.059*	-0.066**	-0.058**	0.079**
PTA Dummy	0.062**	0.062*	0.044	0.058**
<b>MSR_pro<sub>ij</sub>*PTA<sub>ij</sub></b>	0.020	0.005	0.050	-0.080

<sup>2</sup> Table 5 reports the partial and total partial effects of varying interactions. Each sub-table (A-G) represents a single estimation of joint effects, controlling for all additional fixed effects from prior estimations. All models are specified using a PPML estimator, and estimations are generated with export and import data from DOTS and total trade data from WTF and BACI. Results are not estimated in consideration of intra-national trade effects as domestic trade data is not available for all countries during the period of analysis. This implies there may be a slight upward bias in the estimations due to globalisation.

**Joint Effects of Trade among PTA and Trade between Countries with All Terminal Contracts (5.D)**

All Terminals	-0.241**	-0.179	-0.236*	-0.249*
PTA Dummy	0.063**	0.063*	0.045	0.056**
<b>MSR_atc<sub>ij</sub>*PTA<sub>ij</sub></b>	0.158	0.192	0.249	0.188

**Joint Effects of Trade between Countries with All Terminal Contracts and Completed Projects (5.E)**

All Terminals	-0.105	-0.039	-0.037	-0.053
Project Dummy	-0.055*	-0.068**	-0.049*	0.043
<b>MSR_atc<sub>ij</sub>*MSR_pro<sub>ij</sub></b>	-0.025	0.105	0.064	-0.188**

**Joint Effects of Trade among PTA and Trade with China After an All Terminals Contract (5.F)**

All Terminals only China	0.261***	0.237***	0.109***	0.226***
PTA Dummy	0.056**	0.056	0.042	0.047*
<b>MSR_atc<sub>ij</sub>*PTA<sub>ij</sub></b>	-0.093	-0.098	0.017	-0.077

**Joint Effects of Trade with China After an All Terminals Contract and a Completed Project (5.G)**

All Terminals only China	0.233***	0.219***	0.119***	0.225***
Project Dummy only China	0.007	0.026	-0.008	0.135**
<b>MSR_atc<sub>ij</sub>*MSR_pro<sub>ij</sub></b>	-0.041	-0.078	0.052	-0.209***
Rmse	0.238	0.244	0.242	0.285
N	232702	260392	238918	207563

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01

The results in Table 5 can be interpreted as an absence of evidence for a number of claims regarding the complementary nature of increased interconnectivity and infrastructure development with preferential trade agreements and other network agreements. This means that being a part of the same PTA has little to no effect on expected increases in bilateral trade with China after allowing Chinese SAEs to run your port. It also means that allowing Chinese SAEs to complete a maritime infrastructure development project may provide a positive temporary economic shock from increased trade with China

and the RoW, but the effects on gains in bilateral trade with China from terminal control are non-complementary and will reduce the overall effect.

## CONCLUSION

There are still a number of open questions concerning how an economy can benefit from participating in this maritime trade network and what risks might be involved. It appears the most plausible answer is that joining China's maritime trade network makes it easier to do business with Chinese SAEs and Chinese firms in general. Host economies are expected to see positive effects from these relationships in terms of welfare gains from greater trade, increased commerce, and cheaper goods, but it appears to be at the expense of institutional lock-in and a loss of diversity in trade partners.

The results seem to indicate that prior to signing an operating agreement, there is anticipatory trade with China and that there are lasting effects on total trade with China after the contract has been signed. From these results, one can infer that participation in a port contract with China will reduce the total economic costs of trade with China. As predicted by accepted trade literature, this increases total trade with China and can have positive economic effects; however, the length and nature of these agreements may also improve the strategic position of China in these trade relationships and come with long-term consequences.

The log of investment in millions provides evidence that the larger the investment, the greater the increase in trade with China. As the level of investment increases, so does trade with China; however, these results appear to be temporary, whereas the effects of terminal operating contracts appear to be persistent. Trade gains from infrastructure projects come from either the RoW or China and fade away or turn negative over time. If these agreements were to reduce average trade costs to all trade partners or trade between network partners, the standard trade effect should be reflected, and thus, trade should increase for all partners after the project is completed.

In this context, the operation of a country's port terminals by firms with Chinese SAE interests does not appear to create new trade with China; rather, trade is modified. The negative and significant coefficients on trade among network partners, excluding China, are evidence that trade is being diverted from other countries in the network towards China. These partners trade less

with each other than prior to the agreement. This can have adverse economic effects if the trade is diverted away from low-cost providers.

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# ASSESSING SINO-CROATIAN RELATIONS: FROM “DIAMOND” TO CAUTIOUS ENGAGEMENT

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**Abstract:** This paper provides a review of Sino-Croatian relations since the inception of the China-CEE cooperation mechanism (known as the 16+1 Initiative). Focused on NATO and EU accession, Croatia did not seek opportunities for political and even economic cooperation much beyond the Euro-Atlantic sphere through the 2000s. As China launched the 16+1 Initiative in 2012, Croatia hesitated to join and resisted active engagement until 2016. A change in interest to establish stronger ties with China was demonstrated in a contract to build the Pelješac Bridge in the south of Croatia. Despite some reservations raised by the EU and the US, in the period 2017-2020, Croatia pursued a policy of building stronger economic ties with China and hosted the last 16+1 Initiative in 2019. A number of projects were announced during this period, a few of which materialised. This paper looks at a short period of strengthening economic cooperation between China and Croatia, its effects on domestic and EU politics, the rationale for enhancing economic cooperation, and the reasons why it slowed down and is not being revived since the world came out of the global pandemic.

**Keywords:** China, Croatia, Pelješac Bridge, EU, diamond stage, bilateral relations.

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the People’s Republic of China (further in text China) recognised the independence of Croatia and the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992, Sino-Croatian relations were maintained to bear the epithet

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of 'being friendly' (Baković, 2000, pp. 53-55; Baković, 2005, pp. 149-151).<sup>1</sup> A rather distant and declarative friendship did not lead to engaged cooperation requiring in-depth consultations and exchanges. Maintaining a distance, bilateral relations between the two countries were also never endangered in any serious way.

In their 30-year-long relationship, both sides always appeared courteous to one another, carefully balancing opportunities for achieving a deeper level of cooperation. Notwithstanding the contacts Croatian diplomats had maintained with Chinese counterparts on the UN floor and constructive communication with China as a UNSC member, Croatia focused on Euro-Atlantic integration processes and kept off the radar development of bilateral relations with non-European and non-Western countries, including China, India, countries of Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, etc. However, unlike some other post-communist countries in Southeast Europe, Croatia did not seek to establish relations with countries that would antagonise China.<sup>2</sup>

Croatia's diplomacy was among the strict adherents to the principles of "Establishing Communique"<sup>3</sup> and accommodated China's expanding international and regional role.

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<sup>1</sup> See also the Croatian Parliament's official website ("15 January – Day of the International Recognition of the Republic of Croatia and the Day of Peaceful Reintegration of the Croatian Danube Region") on which China's recognition is mentioned among other 'important dates' for Croatia.

<sup>2</sup> For example, FYR Macedonia's switch to recognising the Republic of China in 1998 (Nikolić, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Establishing Communique is a shorthand term for "Joint Communique on the Establishment of Bilateral Relations", a document PR China signs with every country before the start of diplomatic relations. Establishing Communique typically includes clauses on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and adhering to the "One China principle" as *sine qua non* to establish and maintain relations with the PR China. China is usually referring to this document whenever a certain country ostentatiously violates the Establishing Communique, either by diplomatic approaches towards Taiwan, interfering into China's internal affairs, or in any sense denying China's sovereignty.

## LIMITED COOPERATION BECOMES A “DIAMOND STAGE” PARTNERSHIP

Since the early 2000s, Croatia has focused on acceding to NATO (2009) and the EU (2013). In the advent of the Chinese regional cooperation initiative with Central and Eastern Europe (the 16+1 cooperation mechanism), the Croatian government largely ignored the investment and infrastructure opportunities announced by this framework. Several reports tracking the progress of the 16+1 mechanism in the first few years have placed Croatia’s “cooperation intensity” among “laggards” or, at best, “followers” among the CEE block (see for example: European Parliament, 2018). One possible explanation for the Croatian lack of interest in exploring the potential of economic cooperation with China may lie in the publicly unspoken stance of the Croatian governing elite that its place lies in the West and not in the East, and certainly not with countries that have established stronger cooperation ties with China, such as Serbia.

It is thus more surprising that Croatia “discovered” China quite late in the 16+1 process and that this change of sentiment and policy was made by a centre-right government led by the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) that came to power in 2016. A dynamic switch marked the start of the Pelješac Bridge construction project. As a new member of the EU, Croatia was granted 357 million euros in 2017 from EU cohesion funds to build a bridge that connects the city of Dubrovnik, its southernmost exclave surrounded by non-EU territory, with the Croatian mainland. This has been a long-time desired project that Croatia has not had the funds to finance. Once in the EU and with access to EU cohesion and structural funds, a problem of financing was resolved. The EU granted funds in the amount of 85% of the total cost of the bridge construction. In a public tender published in 2017, the Croatian government chose a Chinese company, China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), to build this bridge in 2018. Two other bidders, an Austrian company and an Italian-Turkish consortium, submitted complaints that were rejected by the court.

The contract for the construction of the Pelješac Bridge was signed in Dubrovnik in 2018 by the President of the Board of the Croatian Roads, Josip Škorić, and an authorised representative of the CRBC, Zhang Xiaoyuan. The signing ceremony was overseen by Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Damir Krstičević, and Minister of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure Oleg Butković (Ministry of the Sea,

Transport and Infrastructure, 2018). The first phase of the bridge construction was officially marked in April 2019 on the occasion of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Croatia to attend the 16+1 summit in Dubrovnik. Prime Minister Andrej Plenković explained that the Pelješac Bridge is a project that: 1) solves the issue of connectivity between the Croatian south and the rest of the country; 2) is 'a symbol of the added value of the first seven years of Croatia's membership in the EU' since it was predominantly funded by the EU; and 3) will 'enable a new strategic partnership between Croatia and China' (Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, 2018). The bridge being a symbol of 'triple beneficial' China-Croatia-EU cooperation was earlier expressed during Plenković's visit to China in November 2018 and again during Li Keqiang's visit to Croatia in 2018 (Croatian Chamber of Commerce, 2019; Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2018a, 2018b, 2019).

The Pelješac Bridge was the first significant infrastructure project financed almost entirely by the EU. Stressing the value of finally having a bridge that connects the Croatian territory, the HDZ-led government also underlined its good connections in Brussels and diplomatic competences in utilising EU funds for national sake. Media coverage of the bridge construction during 2018 and 2019 reflected the Croatian Prime Minister's messages and was dominantly positive. The bridge construction was portrayed as a springboard for other projects that might be realised in the future. Positive experiences of cooperation with China spilled into discussions, initiatives, and expectations of cooperation in other sectors. Headlines in Croatian media suggested that China has "discovered" potential in Croatia's tourism, agriculture, and sport industries.

A positive economic outlook encouraged optimistic expectations. Until 2019, Croatia experienced a tourist boom with a streak of record-breaking seasons, and the success of Croatia's football team in the 2018 World Cup built confidence in exporting a sport's *know-how*. These, presumably, were of interest to China, the world's largest tourist market with a national plan for modernising its football industry. Among several state-owned companies interested in doing business in Croatia, some Chinese private investors also made headlines with statements about untapped potential in bilateral cooperation (see for example: Zagorje.info, 2019). Croatian state, provincial, or municipal-level officials made statements supportive of exchanges, twinning with Chinese cities, and promoting other sub-state-level or sectoral cooperation with Chinese counterparts. The Croatian government relayed

optimism about these developments and the rationale for sustaining triply-beneficial cooperation. In the last pre-pandemic year, from a cooperation laggard, Croatia advanced into a promoter of China-EU and China-CEE cooperation. At the 16+1 Dubrovnik Summit in 2019, Sino-Croatian relations were touted by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang as entering a ‘diamond stage’ (Bakota, 2020, p. 156; Stopić, 2020, pp. 141-143).

### **COOLING OFF OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE WEST AND CHINA**

The COVID-19 pandemic, US-China decoupling, and Russian aggression on Ukraine in February 2022 affected relations between the East and the West, EU-China trade relations, bilateral and multilateral partnerships, and the notion of global cooperation. In April 2019, just before the Dubrovnik 16+1 Summit took place, the EU-China Summit tried to overcome trade disagreements and focus on common interests, sending a message of defiance to the US Trump administration (Politico, 2019). The departure of Angela Merkel<sup>4</sup> as the German Chancellor in 2021 after 16 years in office, however, led to an increasing number of European policymakers starting to more vocally express concerns that China was not acting in good faith when dealing with European countries (Bruegel, 2020). Issues such as unequal access to the Chinese market of European companies in comparison to the access Chinese companies enjoy at the European market, cases of industrial espionage (European Parliament, 2021), and human rights violations in Chinese Xinyang province were among those raised (European Parliament, 2022). The fact that a change of leadership in Washington did not significantly

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<sup>4</sup> Angela Merkel has been recognised as a calm and patient leader who believed that a relationship with partners who do not share the values of liberal democracy would slowly converge towards liberal democratic values by maintaining fair and constructive relationships, primarily through trade. The concept of “Wandel durch Handel”, “a change through trade”, is associated with the Merkel era as the German leader. The same concept during her time in office was applied to the relationship with Russia. After her departure and due to the changes in the global geopolitical scene, this approach was tested. It finally led to the new German chancellor expressing the notion of the “Zeitenwende”, an ending of an era, a turning point in history. Without going too far into discussing Angela Merkel’s legacy, it suffices to say that even during her time in office, there were those who criticised her policy on the grounds that she put German business interests above issues such as human rights violations.

tone down disagreements between the US and China also contributed to European concerns. Finally, the Russian aggression on Ukraine, which China did not openly criticise but appears to be tacitly standing behind Russia, leaves an impression on European policymakers and citizens alike that China is indirectly interested in weakening the EU.

In such circumstances, Sino-Croatian relations came under more scrutiny and were retracted, like many other cooperation projects and trade exchanges between China and Europe. As a result, a “diamond stage” in bilateral relations was harshly tempered by changed geopolitical circumstances. Increased tensions between China and the US affected EU-China relations, leading a number of EU states to approach their relationship with China with more caution.

The pandemic-ridden regional cooperation mechanism (16+1), already diminished by frequent breakdowns of worldwide supply chains, was additionally dntrodden by the pandemic lockdowns in China. In such circumstances, the withdrawal of the Baltic states from the cooperation mechanism was only a politicised gesture trying to undermine a substantially inactive framework.

Croatian politicians carefully toned down their statements about their ascending relationship with China. First, projects that have been previously discussed, such as a Croatian offer to Chinese counterparts to consider investments in ageing shipyards, did not materialise. Croatia, under scrutiny and perhaps friendly nudging from some Western partners, re-considered a selection procedure for finding an investor for the Rijeka Port and annulled a published tender for which a Chinese bidder expressed interest. Security concerns raised with respect to the 5G network by many Western friends of Croatia also meant that any discussion on introducing 5G technology by a Chinese telecommunications company in Croatia was suspended. Not prohibited, but suspended indefinitely. Croatia does not appear to be a diplomatic warmonger. Croatia feels the safest if it is quiet.

Croatian officials, it appears, have shifted focus from economic cooperation with China to security and political considerations that are today permeating relationships between the West and China.

The year 2022 should have been a milestone year for Sino-Croatian relations. The completion of the Pelješac Bridge project represented a possibility to rekindle the “diamond stage” while the two countries celebrated

the 30-year anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Although many countries do not assign significant importance to such anniversaries, they are observed by Chinese diplomatic protocol. Attaching importance to such events is an element of demonstrating convergence on other issues of bilateral cooperation with China. Marking the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations with Croatia and the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the PR of China, the Chinese ambassador in Croatia, Qi Qianjin, held a reception in Zagreb in September 2022 (Dnevno.hr, 2022). In parallel, Croatian ambassador to China, Dario Mihelin, shared a lengthy opinion piece for China Global Television Network (CGTN) on the success China and Croatia had achieved until 2022 (CGTN, 2022). Both sides emphasised the unbroken continuation of friendship since 1992, the importance of the comprehensive cooperative partnership agreement signed in 2005, the 16+1 Dubrovnik Summit, as well as a recent competition of large cooperation infrastructure projects, most notably the Senj Wind Farm, built by the North China Industries Corporation (City of Senj, 2018; Đurić, 2021), and the Pelješac Bridge (Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Croatia, 2022).

However, although the event was well-prepared and marked the first post-pandemic event held by the Chinese Embassy in Zagreb, the celebration passed in a much less “festive” tone. Unlike during the “diamond stage”, when even Prime Minister Plenković, along with other state officials, attended receptions held by the Chinese Embassy, the 2022 celebration was missed by the highest officials. Not only the Prime Minister but none of the ministers attended; the highest-ranking Croatian guests were the deputy speakers of the Croatian Parliament, Željko Reiner, Furio Radin, and Davorko Vidović, and the State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Zdenko Lucić (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Croatia, 2022).

The celebration of the opening of the Pelješac Bridge also had a certain undertone in comparison to the events marking the beginning of the bridge construction. The impression was that the Chinese presence was somewhat put aside (China Radio International, 2022a). Although four years earlier, the project was lauded as a cooperation success story belonging equally to the EU, Croatia, and China, the celebration ceremony minimised the EU and almost completely eliminated China, leaving Croatia as the only true focus. The speaker of the Croatian parliament, Gordan Jandroković, and the Croatian

President, Zoran Milanović, spoke of the Homeland War, the defence of Dubrovnik, war veterans, Croatia's long struggle for freedom, and Croatian unity. Prime Minister Plenković described the project as 'national, strategic, all-Croatian, and, above all, supra-party', a project of which all Croats should be proud because the bridge finally connects the Croatian territory. The Prime Minister also remembered the war veterans and gave credit to the EU, namely the EU's 'principles of solidarity—solidarity that helps those who are less developed reach the level of development of those who are more developed'. Plenković was also the only one who acknowledged the Chinese side. After Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's video speech, in which Li praised the project as an example of win-win cooperation and called for stronger China-EU cooperation, Plenković stated that this project connects China and Croatia in 'a fascinating way', and that it is true, as Li previously stated, that the relations between China and Croatia will never be the same (Jutarnji list, 2022).

From the statements of the Croatian officials, it was clear that China and the CRBC were not in the focus, but domestic symbols were. Except for Plenković, who was the only one mentioning China, others only thanked all who participated in the project. When comparing this event with the Dubrovnik 16+1 Summit or the signing of the agreement on the construction of the bridge, the difference in the Croatian attitude is plainly visible.

## **A POSITION OF NEUTRALITY AND QUIETISM**

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout the world, slowing down investments and stopping plans for expansion of cooperation, combined with the ongoing political and economic pressure the administration of US President Trump was putting on China, the Croatian welcoming attitude towards China began to wane. During the following years, not many of the previously announced large infrastructure projects came to fruition.<sup>5</sup> After winning a tender for the Pelješac Bridge, Chinese companies competed in

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<sup>5</sup> In July 2023, the Croatian Roads (Hrvatske ceste) announced that Chinese CRBC won a public tender for the construction of the Kozjak tunnel and adjacent roads connecting Split with the A1 highway (total value estimated at around €82 million). This might be considered a rebuttal to an argument for the suspension of cooperation. However, except for this contract, there has been no indication of any other planned project. It also should be noted that the Croatian government was quite reserved about publicly announcing any news

around another ten tenders, losing all of them, including several ones in which Chinese companies offered the lowest bids (Bohutinski, 2022). In early 2021, possibly due to warnings from a few Western capitals, the Croatian government annulled a tender for the reconstruction of the Rijeka Port, for which a Chinese consortium offered the lowest bid (Šabić Šelo, 2022).

The overarching issue in broader EU-Chinese relations, however, has become a sense of Sino-scepticism and suspicion about the true intentions of China in Europe. At the abovementioned EU-China Summit in April 2019, the EU and China tried to maintain a level of cooperation and mutual understanding, with the EU demonstrating a certain level of distance from the rhetoric and approach of the US Trump administration towards China. A document adopted a few weeks before this meeting, in March 2019, laid out areas of disagreement and areas for cooperation between the EU and China and identified China for the first time as a 'systemic rival' (European Commission, 2019). A factsheet capturing relations between the EU and China by the EU External Action Service from April 2022 states that relations between the two sides 'have deteriorated' over the course of the last year (EEAS, 2022).

Croatian officials did not make any statements that would antagonise China, but they also did not attempt to expand or even maintain the level of communication that was established with China before 2020.<sup>6</sup> Probably the strongest demonstration of Croatia's new attitude was by Prime Minister Plenković in October 2020 in Dubrovnik, when he hosted US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. After public statements that, among others, involved important steps in improving US-Croatia relations, such as the double taxation avoidance agreement (concluded in December 2022)<sup>7</sup>, meeting the conditions for visa waiver for the US (achieved by September 2021)<sup>8</sup>, the construction of the LNG terminal on the island of Krk (completed by the end

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regarding this project. Short official statements following the bid procedure were only given by the Croatian Roads, local governments, and the Ministry of Infrastructure. Few news articles reported this news (for example: Bohutinski, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> On recognition of "sino-skepticism" in Croatia see: Biočina, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> See: US Embassy to Croatia, 2022.



of 2020)<sup>9</sup>, the “China question” was brought up by the journalists. In answering how he fares with Pompeo’s earlier statement that

‘China’s Belt and Road Initiative is a scheme to buy an empire’ and does he agree that ‘Beijing’s investment in this region is of a predatory nature’, Plenković replied that ‘China is a global actor. They were very smart to devise this format of relationship, political dialogue, and economic framework with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (...) Our objective is to have a level playing field when it comes to the relationship between Croatia or the other members of the EU and China and its market, as well as the Chinese presence here, in accordance with the rules of the open market that exist on a global level, which puts us in the same position’ (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2020).

While the Chinese press greeted Plenković’s reply as an act of defiance towards the US approach to China, Plenković’s answer demonstrated that Croatia has sought not to antagonise any side and keep a neutral profile amidst US-China tensions, at least while the construction of the Pelješac Bridge is not completed (Bai, 2021, p. 269).<sup>10</sup>

In a few years, the Croatian-Chinese “diamond stage” partnership retracted into a policy of neutrality and quietism. Quietism in the literature on foreign policy is described as an approach in which a state’s policy is to keep quiet on certain issues. This is, in particular, a frequent policy option for small states (Hill, 2003).

A policy of quietism was also demonstrated in August 2022 when US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, a visit that caused tension and raised concerns about its aftereffects across the world. In 2007, when certain political circles in Taiwan attempted to hold a referendum on joining the UN under the name of Taiwan, the Croatian government promptly issued a statement in which it reminded all interested parties that Croatia had ‘accepted the principle of one China, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the PR China, and the position of Taiwan as an integral part of the PR China’ (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, 2007). In 2022, no such statements were made. Croatia has remained silent

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<sup>9</sup> See: *LNG Hrvatska* website: <<https://lng.hr/o-nama/tijek-projekta/>>.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Xinhua.net, 2020.

on this or any other China-related issue. It took about four years for a relationship between China and Croatia to grow into a “diamond stage” and retract into a position of cautious and distant respect.

### **PUBLIC AND MEDIA PERCEPTION: FROM DIAMOND BACK AGAIN TO COAL?**

It is important to mention that, prior to 2017, news about China in Croatian media was scarce and sporadic. In-depth news and political or economic analysis were practically non-existent. An average Croatian reader would stumble on a politically neutral report on some curiosity from China occasionally, usually written by a journalist who visited China while accompanying some Croatian dignitaries’ visits (such as the media-covered official state visit of President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović in October 2015).

However, starting in 2017, Croatian media coverage of China started to grow. Most of the news was published during Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s visit to Croatia to attend the 16+1 Dubrovnik Summit in April 2019. During the few weeks that surrounded the event, numerous articles were published on Li, China, the 16+1 Summit, the Pelješac Bridge, etc., in which Croatian readers, many for the first time, could familiarise themselves with the 16+1 platform or the One Belt, One Road Initiative. News on these topics could be found earlier, but they were rare and brief. Most of the news published in spring 2019 was of positive character but did not last very long.<sup>11</sup>

The year 2020 showed the first signs of a less positive portrayal of China in the Croatian media. The COVID-19 pandemic cemented China as a regular topic in the Croatian media. News about the spread of the disease, China’s reactions, discussions on the source, lockdowns, the purchase of medical equipment, Chinese donations of medical equipment to the countries in the Western Balkans, and many other topics were covered by the media.

Even prior to the pandemic, China-related news started to appear in the Croatian media. Croatia’s daily newspaper *Jutarnji list* covered many topics, such as China and the South China Sea, China-US relations, trade wars, a rise

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<sup>11</sup> The assessment of the pre-2020 Croatian media coverage of China is observational, not a result of rigorous academic analysis. Further research on this period would be needed.

in Chinese military spending, various China-related security issues, China-EU relations, Taiwan, etc (see: Trkanjec, 2019, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). These articles often carried a critical angle, questioning China's intentions and actions not only in its neighbourhood but also globally.

Not all the news was critical of China. There were news and reports that could be described as pro-China and sometimes anti-US, such as a need for global community and multilateralism in fighting the pandemic (Plevnik, 2020a); criticism of the US approach against China in Southeast Europe and the EU (Plevnik, 2020b); the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative (Plevnik, 2021); support for the continuation of cooperation between 16 Central, East, and Southeast European countries and China (Nacional, 2021b); etc.

Two former Croatian Presidents, Stipe Mesić and Ivo Josipović, made occasional public or media appearances both in China and Croatia and spoke favourably of the need to continue bilateral cooperation. Stjepan Mesić had a consultant role during the execution of Norinco's Senj windmill project (Đurić, 2021)<sup>12</sup> and gave public support for other Chinese investments in Croatia (see for example: China Radio International, 2020; Nacional, 2021a; Osijekdanas, 2021). Ivo Josipović also supported the notion of cooperation between the two countries (China Radio International, 2022b). He was also seen among the guests at the Chinese Embassy's reception on the occasion of 30 years of diplomatic relations between China and Croatia.

The war in Ukraine has brought another angle of analysis in the Croatian media on China. Reports focused on the complexity of relations between Russia and China, US-China relations, the Taiwan issue, tensions between China and India, and the challenges of China-EU relations (see for example: Al Jazeera TV, 2022; Bakota, 2022; Petranović, 2022; Stošić, 2022a, 2022b).

## CONCLUSION

China and Croatia enjoy a 30-year-plus relationship, which for the most part of this period can be described as distant and friendly. A brief change in bilateral relations between the two countries occurred roughly in the period 2018-2022, when the construction of the Pelješac Bridge brought the two

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<sup>12</sup> See also the report from Mesić's webpage from 16 October 2020: <http://www.stjepanmesic.hr/en/node/1420>.

countries together. The project was used as a symbol and foundation for strengthening bilateral relations, which in 2019 reached a pinnacle and were described as a “diamond stage”.

The COVID-19 pandemic and a deterioration of relations between the West and China, as well as a sense of mutual suspicion and distrust, were further aggravated by the Russian aggression on Ukraine in February 2022. China’s positioning towards Russia is perceived in the West as accommodating the policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin. At the same time, frictions within the West are not a secret. And reverberations of the war in Ukraine are felt globally, not only in terms of food shortages and rising prices of energy but also politically. The Global South distances itself from the Western stance on Russia. Some interpret this distance as a tacit support for Russia, but distancing is often motivated by staying out of what is perceived as a European war, a war among white European nations that affects the livelihood of nations across the globe but whose dynamics they cannot change and whose complexity of interests and positions they do not want to go into.

The world faces an array of challenges and problems beyond the war in Ukraine. Climate change makes much of sub-Saharan Africa inhabitable. Migration caused by climate change is already a global reality. A green transition and the limitation of CO2 emissions are still debated while people experience the consequences of extreme weather conditions.

Croatia, as a member of NATO and the EU, will continue to align its foreign and security policies with those of its partners and allies. There is no surprise that the rising tensions between the West and China affected the Croatian will and capacity to build stronger bilateral relations with China.

Croatia could, however, contribute to broader debates on the future of the planet, on a new structure of the international system, and on the norms and principles it believes should guide international relations. There has been no sign that Croatia is willing to do any of these except reverberate the current atmosphere between the West and China. And stay quiet on most issues.

However, the world needs countries to communicate. Disagreements are known, but what is also known is a need for cooperation in finding solutions that affect nations across our planet. Powerful actors have a responsibility to try to mitigate their disagreements as further rifts threaten global peace. More powerful countries should strive to help countries most affected by extreme weather, diseases, poverty, and wars. International cooperation must

be pursued against the maximalist interests of individual states. The West and China, and the EU and China, need to find ways to talk about climate, trade, and security issues. All are important, and they all have to be on the agenda. In terms of bilateral relations between China and Croatia, they will be shaped within the framework of a broader Western-Chinese relationship.

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**CHINA GOES  
ASSERTIVE?  
BEIJING SHARES  
ITS VISION  
OF GLOBAL SECURITY**

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# THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION OF CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

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**Abstract:** China unveiled its Global Security Initiative (GSI) in a sensitive international context, only two months after the February 2022 start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine. Beijing garnered early international support for its initiative by promoting the concept bilaterally and at the leading multilateral fora. Yet, its main strategic communication effort occurred in February–March 2023. Beijing first reinvigorated the GSI with its *Concept Paper* on February 21 and then paired it, three days later, on the occasion of the first anniversary of Russia's operation, with its 12-point position paper on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis. Although the position paper received little support in the West, it boosted the prominence of the GSI, particularly among non-Western countries. Two weeks later, Beijing struck a remarkable strategic communication success for the GSI when it brokered a surprising deal between regional foes Iran and Saudi Arabia on the restoration of their diplomatic relations. Through this performance, Beijing succeeded in presenting the story not only about the existence of the GSI but also about its concrete potential as well as the important role it could play in the resolution of other conflicts. While support for the GSI has grown in the Global South, Western reactions have ranged from lukewarm to negative, accusing the initiative of spreading anti-NATO and anti-US aims and vying to become an 'alternative to the Western-led security order'. Nevertheless, an early assessment of China's strategic communication on the GSI shows timeliness, robustness, flexibility, attractiveness, communicative value of action, and coherence between words and deeds.

**Keywords:** China's Foreign Policy, Global Security Initiative, Belt and Road Initiative, Strategic Communication, Multipolarity.

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The paper presents the findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2023", financed by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia and conducted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, during the year 2023.



## INTRODUCTION

The unveiling of the Global Security Initiative (GSI) in April 2022 offered both an opportunity and a challenge for China's strategic communication. The opportunity arose from the fact that its core principles and objectives were congruent with the 2013 Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the 2021 Global Development Initiative (GDI), which had already gained traction both at the bilateral and multilateral levels. The announcement of the GSI by China's president Xi Jinping at the Boao conference was also a timely address of the causes and repercussions of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, which had started only two months earlier. Yet, the conflict in Ukraine also presented a challenge for Beijing's diplomacy and strategic communication as Western states put intensive pressure on China to break cooperation with Moscow and join sanctions against the Russian Federation. Furthermore, the announcement of the new initiative occurred at a moment during which China was still operating severe COVID-fighting measures, which had disrupted its full diplomatic capacity, particularly in terms of face-to-face meetings, visits, and summits with foreign counterparts.

Nevertheless, Beijing pursued the strategic communication of the GSI in several phases and formats. After receiving a particular boost from President Xi's all-out diplomatic offensive in the fall of 2022, the GSI *Concept Paper* was revealed on February 21, 2023. Three days later, on the first anniversary of Russia's military operation in Ukraine, China followed up with a 12-point position paper on the conflict, built on the principles of the *Concept Paper*, thus raising diplomatic and media interest in the GSI. Only two weeks later, China's surprising shuttle diplomacy, resulting in the restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, attracted undivided worldwide attention and became an important success for China's strategic communication.

This paper will look at how China performed its strategic communication of the GSI, how the initiative has been received in the West and in the Global South, and which challenges lay ahead. It will build on the key principles of effective strategic communication, strategic narratives, and frames.

## CHINA'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The context of growing great power rivalry and the transformation of world order puts a heightened focus on the importance of strategic communication,

which has become a regular feature of strategic documents, policy papers, and summit declarations from Washington to Brussels and Beijing.

Strategic communication, as a concept of organised persuasion, represents a ‘system of coordinated communication activities implemented by organisations in order to advance their missions by allowing for the understanding of target groups, finding channels and methods of communication with the public, and developing and implementing ideas and attitudes that, through these channels and methods, promote a certain type of behaviour or opinion’ (Mitić, 2016, p. 9). Strategic political communication, often geared at foreign publics, puts a particular accent on persuasion, engagement, the communicative value of action, and the coordination between words and deeds, while at the same time its effectiveness depends on adaptability and coordination (Mitić, 2016; Atlagić & Mitić, 2016). These principles provide a valuable framework for analysing the effectiveness of strategic communication operations, which provide a vehicle for strategic narratives, one of the key areas of today’s great power competition.

States and international organisations are creating directorates to set up and implement strategic communication policies. The US was an early adopter and proponent of the concept of strategic communication, setting up departments in institutions from the Pentagon to the State Department, home since 2009 to the Office of Strategic Communications and Outreach (US Department of State, 2023). The diplomatic service of the European Union, the European External Action Service (EEAS), has enlarged its East Stratcom Task Force, created in 2015 to monitor Russian information activities, into a full-fledged Directorate for Strategic Communication and Foresight. The Directorate has expanded the geographic scope of its task forces to the Western Balkans and the Middle East, with a mandate to ‘analyse the information environment in order to enable EU foreign policy implementation and protect its values and interests’ (European Union External Action, 2021). Faced with a Western strategic narrative about the rising “China threat”, China launched its own strategic communication ‘with Chinese characteristics’, thus promoting most prominently its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing framed the BRI as ‘win-win’, ‘mutually beneficial cooperation’, ‘sharing the fruits of development’, with the objective of building a ‘community of shared future for mankind’, encompassing ‘cooperative, collective, and common security’, respecting multilateralism,

the central role of the UN, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-interference in internal affairs, while opposing ‘zero-sum games’, unilateralism, the ‘law of the jungle’, and the ‘Cold War mentality’ in general (Xi, 2014, 2017). Thus, the BRI could be seen as a complex narrative: a system narrative (as it presents an alternative vision to the existing world order), an identity narrative (about the projection of China’s values and power), and an issue narrative (about specific infrastructure and investment objectives envisioned by the BRI) (Mitić, 2022).

The projection of China’s strategic communication and narrative has been incrementally opposed by Western actors in several phases, from worry and warning about the BRI implications to actions against concrete projects and against the BRI in general (Mitić, 2022). Yet, at the same time, the sheer expansion of the initiative, particularly in the Global South, with over 150 participant countries, and the strategic communication requirement of building up on established values and principles have led Beijing to continue to promote its initiatives with a strong grounding in BRI strategic communication. This was already present in a number of follow-up initiatives, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI), presented at the UN General Assembly in September 2021, and carrying out a number of BRI-related foundational principles (Centre for International Knowledge for Development, 2023).

## THE UNVEILING OF THE GLOBAL STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

The unveiling of the Global Security Initiative has been a four-step process, including (1) the introduction of the idea by President Xi Jinping in April 2022; (2) its first presentation to foreign partners in September 2022 at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit (including garnering early supporter countries); (3) the unpacking of the GSI *Concept Paper* in February 2023; and (4) the operationalization of GSI principles and policies.

### Introducing the idea of the GSI

President Xi first introduced the Global Security Initiative on April 21, 2022, during his keynote speech *Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation* at the opening of the Boao Forum for Asia

Annual Conference 2022 in Boao, Hainan Province. He laid out the reasons for the initiative, its underlying principles, and its objectives. President Xi set the context outright by underscoring that ‘changes of the world, of our times, and of history are unfolding in ways like never before’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China, 2022a). Although Xi certainly had in mind overall changes towards multipolarity, which had been underway for years now, as well as changes occurring due to digitalization, climate change, and the implications of the still ongoing fight against COVID-19, the more specific context was certainly the ramification of the Russian special operation in Ukraine, which had started two months earlier, on February 24.

Most of the principles laid out by Xi were in line with the 1955 Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the 2013 concept of ‘building a community with a shared future for mankind’, and the BRI – from respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty to the central role of the United Nations, common comprehensive cooperation, and sustainable security. Yet, the context of the conflict in Ukraine particularly highlighted principles such as the rejection of the Cold War mentality, bloc confrontation, unilateralism and unilateral sanctions, double standards, and pursuit of one’s own security at the cost of others’ security, as well as support for taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously, building a balanced security architecture, and resolving disputes through dialogue and joint work.

### **Garnering early international support**

In the aftermath of Xi’s speech, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi put the accent on ‘a new approach to eliminating the root causes of international conflicts and achieving durable stability and security in the world’, highlighting opposition to various elements of the ‘Cold War mentality’: bloc confrontation, zero-sum game, hegemonism, and power politics (Wang, 2022). At the SCO Foreign Ministers’ meeting in July in Tashkent, Wang Yi told Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov that the two countries should ‘strengthen strategic communication’ about international security, thus announcing a new phase in China’s presentation of the GSI, oriented towards its strategic partners (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China, 2022b).

During his premier trip abroad after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Xi Jinping participated at the Samarkand SCO summit in September

2022, when for the first time he presented the GSI in person. Xi underlined the need for a new kind of approach to international security and called on SCO partners ‘to get involved in implementing’ the GSI (Xinhua, 2022a). Following a series of bilateral meetings at the summit, six countries signalled by statement their readiness to answer Xi’s call: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, while India and Tajikistan did not indicate any formal support (Freeman & Stephenson, 2022).

President Xi followed up on the internationalisation of the GSI by associating it, a week after the SCO summit, with the UN International Day of Peace. In a letter, he underlined that ‘at this important historical juncture’, he put forward the GSI, calling ‘on all countries to uphold a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security’ and focusing on the centrality of the UN system (Cao, 2022). China thus brought its GSI proposal beyond its partner countries, inviting all countries and particularly attempting to integrate the initiative with the UN system, just as it did with the GDI a year earlier (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023). In November 2022, at the G20 summit in Bali, Xi reiterated the basic principles of the GSI, accentuating the UN Charter, the principle of indivisible security, and the negotiation of conflict through negotiation (Xinhua, 2022b). Throughout late 2022 and early 2023, the GSI continued to hold high on Beijing’s agenda of both bilateral and multilateral activities.

### Unpacking the GSI Concept Paper

The third phase of the GSI presentation had a noteworthy prelude. On February 20, 2023, the Xinhua News Agency published a report titled *US Hegemony and its Perils*, in which it accused the US of ‘abusing hegemony’, ‘instigating regional disputes’, ‘directly launching wars under the guise of promoting democracy, freedom, and human rights’, ‘clinging to the Cold War mentality’, ‘ramping up bloc politics’, ‘forcing unilateral sanctions upon others’, and ‘imposing rules that serve its own interests in the name of upholding a ‘rules-based international order’ (Xinhua 2023a). The following day, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the *GSI Concept Paper* with six core concepts and principles, 20 priorities of cooperation, and five platforms and mechanisms of cooperation. The six principles in the concept paper were in line with Xi’s earlier statements regarding the GSI: (1) the need for a new

vision of security—common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable; (2) respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; (3) deep commitment to the principles of the UN Charter and opposition to the Cold War mentality, hegemonism, and unilateralism; (4) commitment to indivisible security; (5) commitment to peaceful and negotiated solutions instead of war and unilateral sanctions; and (6) commitment to security in both traditional and non-traditional domains, which have become intertwined, particularly in the fields of terrorism, climate change, cybersecurity, and biosecurity. Furthermore, the *Concept Paper* outlined the “Priorities for Cooperation”, including conflict hotspots, as well as the “Mechanisms of Cooperation”, focusing largely on the UN and other multilateral initiatives and networks in which China had been participating (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China, 2023a).

### Operationalization of GSI principles and policies

These key principles of the GSI were applied as the core of China’s *Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, outlined on the first anniversary of Russia’s military operation on February 24, 2023. The first point of the plan pointed to respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, adding that ‘equal and uniform application of international law should be promoted, while double standards must be rejected’. The second is an argument against the ‘Cold War mentality’, against security at the ‘expense of others’, and particularly relevant, a reference that ‘the security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs’. Points three and four refer to negotiated and peaceful solutions, while point 10 refers to opposition to ‘the abuse of unilateral sanctions and ‘long-arm jurisdiction’ against other countries. The other points are more Ukraine-specific and include the need to reduce strategic risks, protect nuclear power plants, and facilitate grain exports (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China, 2023b). The timing of the anniversary of Russia’s military operation provided considerable attention to China’s proposal and thus to the core GSI principles.

Yet Beijing felt the need to go beyond words. Less than two weeks later, on March 6, Beijing hosted a meeting between Iran and Saudi Arabia, during which the two countries agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations. The meeting, prepared by Chinese shuttle diplomacy, stunned international

observers. Beijing, on its side, made sure to tie the diplomatic success to the GSI. Wang Yi, then director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee Comments, argued the outcome of the Saudi-Iranian agreement was ‘a successful application of the Global Security Initiative’ (Global Times, 2023a). The Global Times cited Chinese experts, commenting that ‘China’s mediation in the Saudi-Iran deal to restore ties (is) the best practice of the GSI, exerting far-reaching influence on other hotspot issues’ (Global Times, 2023b). Since then, Chinese officials and media have been underlying the success of Beijing’s diplomacy in the deal, tying it to the GSI, and particularly pointing out how the initiative would benefit other global hotspots and traditional and non-traditional security challenges (Mitra, 2023; Ma, 2023; CGTN, 2023).

### GLOBAL RECEPTION OF THE GSI

The strategic communication process of presenting the GSI, including the global context, document wording, dynamic of international support gathering, and concrete messaging, made it clear that the GSI would receive the attention of two key target groups. The first group is made up of strategic partners and potential adherents to the GSI principles. The second is made up of Western countries and potential Western allies in the containment of China’s rise.

#### Global South adherents

Just as with the GDI, China did not have to wait long to receive early support from a number of countries. Only a week after Xi’s inauguration speech, nine Caribbean states having diplomatic relations with China supported the GSI (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC of China, 2022c), followed by Laos, which emphasised ‘the importance of the legitimate security concerns of all countries’ (The Paper, 2022). Russia supported the SCO, followed by six members of the SCO at the Samarkand Summit (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan), as well as Mongolia, Cuba, Uruguay, Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Belarus. At the time of the unveiling of the GSI *Concept Paper*, a commentary in the *People’s Daily* argued that the initiative had received support ‘from more than 80 countries

and regional organisations around the world’ (People’s Daily, 2023). The *Concept Paper* and the Riyadh-Teheran deal gave further impetus. President Xi received support for the GSI from Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (Xinhua, 2023b), while Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang received support from his Malaysian (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China, 2023c) and Georgian counterparts (Xu, 2023). Media from countries of the Global South mostly reiterated key messaging of the GSI, including its timeliness, need for a balanced global security architecture, respect for security concerns of all countries, cooperative common security, opposition to double standards and unilateralism, as well as the fight against non-traditional threats and terrorism. Thus, in Zimbabwe, the media called for African acceptance of the GSI as an alternative to the ‘double standards’ and ‘unilateralism’ of the West, as well as in order to work jointly to fight terrorism (Chavhunduka, 2022). In Liberia, the GSI was seen as ‘upholding true multilateralism and stressing that we, humanity, are living in an indivisible security community’ (Dodoo, 2022). In Pakistan, the Riyadh-Teheran deal was hailed as ‘the result of the Chinese vision of global security in terms of GSI’ (Javed 2023).

Nevertheless, the GSI did not get unanimous support in the Global South. In particular, scepticism is present in India and a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific that are seen as potential supporters of Western plans for China’s containment.

### **Western opponents**

The GSI received more analytical attention in Western countries. The majority of the frames employed by Western officials, think tanks, and media portrayed the GSI as a threat to the liberal “rules-based international order”. The following key frames could be distinguished:

(1) *The GSI presents an alternative to the Western-led security order.* This frame argues that China is seeking to promote a ‘China-led alternative’ (Freeman & Stephenson, 2022); ‘challenging the US-led liberal international world order’ (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2023); ‘a manifesto for an alternative system of international affairs to the current “rules based” order led by the United States and its partners in Europe and the Indo-Pacific’ (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023); ‘a roadmap and



ideological framework for China's ambition to re-shape the international order' (Legarda & Stec, 2022); an attempt to 'build support among countries in the global south for a narrative that positions China as the logical successor to a US-led multilateralism that Beijing insists is failing to keep the peace' (Kine, 2022).

(2) *The GSI is aimed against the US and NATO.* This frame argues that the concepts criticised by the GSI, such as 'hegemonism', 'bloc politics', and the 'Cold War mentality', are 'frequently-used terms to denounce US attempts at containing growing Chinese power through economic sanctions and security alliances' (Abb, 2023). Thus, Beijing is 'using the GSI to discredit U.S. leadership as a source of sustainable security' (Freeman & Stephenson, 2022), and 'its core objective appears to be the degradation of U.S.-led alliances and partnerships' (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2023).

(3) *The GSI is promoting pro-Russian concepts.* This frame is particularly critical of the use of the concept of 'indivisible security', which is 'redolent of language Vladimir Putin used to justify Russia's invasion of Ukraine' (Freeman & Stephenson, 2022), through which Chinese leaders join Moscow 'in excusing the unlawful invasion of Ukraine by blaming the US-led NATO for committing the "original sin" that led to the war' (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023).

(4) *The GSI is exploiting the UN system.* This frame argues that, just as with the BRI and the GDI, Beijing will seek to incorporate the language of the GSI 'into UN statements and other materials' (Freeman & Stephenson, 2022) and that 'China is exploiting its growing influence at international organisations such as the UN system to promote its initiatives and their principles' (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023), with the 'underlying aim remaining to reform the UN from within' (Ekman, 2023).

(5) *The GSI is expanding its internal security approach to the global level.* This frame argues that GSI is being used as 'a framework for promoting and normalising China's expansive approach to domestic security globally' (Freeman & Stephenson, 2022), thus signifying an 'evolving Chinese worldview in which internal policies are externalised' (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023), with the GSI becoming 'Xi's favoured vehicle for externalising the comprehensive national security concept' (Greitens, 2023).

(6) *The GSI will not be able to close the gap between words and deeds.* This frame argues that the GSI will not succeed in addressing some of the discrepancies observed by Western analysts between the principles of the

initiative and the policies of Beijing. There is an ‘apparent gap between China’s rhetoric and its behaviour’ (Tiezzi, 2023). ‘The more deeply Beijing involves itself in international diplomacy, the more obvious the inconsistencies and biases of its approach become’ (Schuman, Fulton & Gering, 2023), and ‘it would be a hard sell for China to promote the GSI in any meaningful way across Southeast Asia while simultaneously engaging in grey zone operations through the maritime militia in the South China Sea’ (Fiala, 2022).

(7) *The GSI will (never the less) try to appeal to (some) European states.* This frame, present among European experts, argues that despite the GSI focus on the Global South, Beijing will ‘also try to secure buy-in from European countries’ and that, although the EU is not mentioned in the document, ‘this does not mean that China will not open some of the GSI initiatives to the EU and several of its Member States’ (Ekman, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Within a year, the GSI has gained considerable and growing interest, allowing for an early assessment of its strategic communication.

First, China presented the GSI not only at a timely moment, following Russia’s military operation in Ukraine, but also insisted that the unveiling of the initiative was due to the unprecedented changes and fallacies of the existing, albeit rusting, international security architecture and mechanisms. It was able to demonstrate the instability of the world security order and its rules/principles, thus making the case that the time was ripe for change. The length and escalation of the conflict in Ukraine accentuate these points.

Second, the GSI shows consistency and complementarity with Beijing’s previous and current strategies, from the earlier comprehensive national security strategy, the ‘community with a shared future for mankind’, and the BRI, up to the new GDI and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). Despite Western attempts to derail Beijing’s strategic narrative, the wording and concepts employed show robustness and coordination, which are necessary for effective strategic communication.

Third, the robustness of the initiative nevertheless does not preclude flexibility in its implementation. The GSI presented a wide range of possible fields and mechanisms, which gives Beijing multiple possibilities to choose

when and how to strike diplomatic successes in the security field and tie them to the initiative, just as it was done with the Saudi-Iranian deal.

Fourth, the Saudi-Iranian deal marked an outstanding success not only for Beijing's diplomacy in general but also for the strategic communication of its GSI. Through the deal, China was able to demonstrate the communicative value of action and coherence between words and deeds, two of the key but also most difficult aspects of strategic communication. The success of the deal and its tie to the GSI gave not only more prominence to the initiative but also attracted heightened interest in its immense possibilities.

Fifth, strategic communication is persuasive, and its aim is to expand the attractiveness of arguments, ideas, and concepts. The sheer number of countries that have supported the GSI since its inception is thus an indicator of the success of its strategic communication. The target group of GSI's strategic communication is mostly countries of the Global South, where the GSI has indeed gained the most traction.

Nevertheless, the GSI faces, and will continue to face, numerous challenges.

First, the Western negative framing of the GSI, while fully expected, is also an indicator of the main lines of criticism of the initiative, as it is portrayed as an attempt to dislodge the Western rules-based liberal democratic order with a global export of "authoritarian-made" sets of "undemocratic" or "illiberal" measures. If the path of the critical framing of the BRI is followed, this means more attacks not only on the foundational concepts but also on specific aspects/achievements, as well as the GSI as a whole.

Second, the initiative will have to confront the harsh limitations of its global reach, as the majority of Western stakeholders are likely to maintain negative attitudes towards the GSI. Most of the US/EU frames on the GSI are similar or identical. However, some EU think tanks mention that China intends to appeal to European states with the GSI. They also attempt to look at some of the GSI mechanisms and instruments less ideologically. The US stakeholders do not mention any possible compatibility with the GSI, and they are more focused on the challenge the initiative is presenting for the United States. These differences should be noted, although they should not be overestimated.

The growing US-China strategic rivalry in the Asia-Pacific, the continuing conflict in Ukraine, and the overall geopolitical chessboard will continue to pose formidable obstacles but also opportunities for the GSI. The transformation of the world order and the speeding up of the process of multipolarity are opening possibilities for the expansion of the concepts embodied in the GSI as well as for its worldwide legitimacy. As a whole, the GSI success story could contribute to further legitimization of the BRI and the early acknowledgment of “sister initiatives”—the GDI and the GCI.

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# THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE AND AFRICA

Gökhan TEKİR\*

**Abstract:** In April 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Global Security Initiative (GSI), which outlines China's security cooperation with the Global South. The GSI commits to upholding comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. Respecting state sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs are the main pillars of the GSI. While envisioning a China-led global security environment, the GSI is also a way for China to boost its security ties with African countries. Within the Belt and Road Initiative framework, China has participated in constructing ports, railways, highways, and dams in Africa. This required Chinese involvement in security affairs on the continent to protect its investments and citizens. The concept paper supports African states' efforts to resolve regional conflicts. China has already proposed and promoted China-Africa and Security Cooperation Fund projects. Yet, these projects mainly cover supporting African peacekeeping forces. The GSI's stated goals also mainly focus on resolving interstate conflicts. However, the conflicts in Africa emanate from ethnic problems, cross-border skirmishes, and terrorism. These are the areas in which the GSI refrains from intervening. China's prioritisation of interstate security relations carries a risk that China would lose contacts with ethnic groups and non-state actors in African security architecture, marginalising the effects of the GSI on African security. In order for the GSI to become more effective, a bolder approach to dealing with the security problems that plague the continent is necessary. As a power that wants to acquire norm-setting authority in global security, China should manage security relations with ethnic and religious groups in Africa besides state-to-state relations.

**Keywords:** GSI, China, Africa, security, ethnic conflicts.

## INTRODUCTION

There is a new reality in global politics characterised by China's emergence as a global security actor. The Belt and Road Initiative, announced by the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, is a truly global initiative. It encompasses 151 countries and 32 international organisations. Between 2013

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and 2020, China's investments within the Belt and Road Initiative reached US\$130 billion (China Daily, 2023). China's increasing investments across the world compel the Chinese state to formulate a security approach. China's perception of regional and global security architecture could be considered an effort to shape a new world system with Chinese characteristics.

President Xi Jinping announced the Global Security Initiative (GSI) on April 21, 2022, at the Boao Forum for Asia. The timing of this initiative is critical because it was put forward after the Russia-Ukraine War and the global economic crisis emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides reflecting China's security aspirations on a global level, the GSI also articulates China's regional commitments. As China's investments in Africa have grown, it has taken measures to protect its interests. Yet, this paper argues that China's GSI fell short in addressing Africa's security problems. The GSI's goals are to resolve inter-state conflicts in Africa. However, the main security issues in Africa emanate from intra-state conflicts involving ethnic groups and tribes. This impedes the effectiveness of the GSI in Africa. In order to evaluate its effect, the structure of the GSI will be further explained.

## THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

The GSI starts with six commitments: 1) The GSI commits itself to providing common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security; 2) The GSI respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries; 3) The GSI abides by the Charter of the United Nations (UN); 4) The GSI adheres to taking into consideration the security concerns of all countries equally; 5) The GSI prefers to resolve differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation; and 6) The GSI adopts a balanced approach to maintaining security in traditional and non-traditional spheres (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). These six commitments reflect China's long-term foreign policy understanding. They are especially related to the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence put forward by Premier Zhou Enlai. These principles are: 'mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence' (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2014). The GSI is a continuation of other security documents, such as the Comprehensive

National Security (CNS) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). The CNS articulated by President Xi aims to realise the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. For this purpose, according to President Xi, China needs to establish a centralised, unified, efficient, and authoritative national security system and strengthen leadership in national security affairs (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014). The GDI was announced by President Xi to implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. China offers to help developing countries in areas such as climate change, poverty elimination, food security, and health cooperation (Chinese Embassy in Seychelles, 2022). The GSI and the GDI are interconnected because of the Marxist belief that 'security is a prerequisite for development, and development is a guarantee for security' (Schuman et al., 2023).

China prioritises adherence to UN efforts to prevent conflicts and to assist UN peace-building attempts in post-conflict states. China supports cooperation with other countries in providing peaceful coexistence. It negates the use of nuclear weapons (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The GSI is the materialisation of China's endeavours to shape the global security system according to its interests. President Xi's speech at the Boao Forum and its subsequent comments place China as a responsible actor that advocates multilateralism and 'a new type of security path of dialogue rather than conflict, forming partnerships rather than alliances, and win-win rather than zero-sum outcomes' (Ha, 2023).

The document addresses cyber threats, biosecurity, food security, artificial intelligence, and climate change-related security concerns. The document also lists the main regions that the GSI focuses on. These regions include South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean countries, and the Pacific Islands countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023). This initiative offers to articulate the Chinese point of view on fixing security problems. Beijing externalises its internal Chinese worldview. This paper deals with this initiative's implications for Africa. Before discussing this, the next section offers a brief overview of the African security architecture.

## **CONFLICTS AND SECURITY IN AFRICA**

Africa is ranked at the bottom of the UN's development classification. 19 of the 20 countries classified as having the lowest human development index

in the world are in Africa (Taylor, 2019, p. 4). In 2023, Freedom House ranked 29 countries as not free, 20 as partly free, and only five as free. Thus, 49 out of 54 African countries lack freedom (Freedom House, 2023).

In addition to the lack of human development and freedom, security is a central predicament for Africa. Africa has been a conflict zone throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The continent experienced the highest number of armed conflicts between 2015 and 2016. While conventional conflicts between states continue unabated, new forms of conflict have become predominant on the continent. In many conflicts, non-state actors have clashed with other non-state actors, and armed groups have fought other armed groups. Religious terrorism and conflict among ethnic groups are other forms of conflict in Africa (Akinola & Liaga, 2023, pp. 1-2).

Intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts constitute major parts of African conflicts. Africa is the most ethnically diverse continent in the world. It has 3,315 different ethnic groups (Taylor, 2019, p. 29). Evidence points out that ethnic conflicts in Africa predate colonialism. For example, the Kiriji war between the Yorubas occurred in the precolonial era. Similarly, inter-ethnic conflicts between the Yoruba and Nupe, Yoruba and Fulani, Shonna versus Ndebele, and Zulu against other ethnic groups existed in the precolonial period. In the colonial era, the colonial masters mainly preferred to rule Africa indirectly by collaborating with a particular ethnic group to manage the affairs of other ethnic groups. That exacerbated the tension among ethnic groups in Africa as the colonial masters promoted inequality and nepotism with their preferential treatment. Sharp divergences between ethnic groups prevented the consolidation of nation-state projects across the continent, which was not the case for Tanzania and Ethiopia. After the colonial era, during the Cold War, the major powers supported leaders to promote objectives that were not beneficial to the nation-building projects in Africa (Quadri & Oladejo, 2020, pp. 137-138). The ethnic groups in Africa have been further divided as 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' or 'favoured' or 'disfavoured', depending on the different levels of Westernisation of 'colonial evaluations of imputed group character' (Horowitz, 1985, p. 160).

The high ethnic consciousness and lack of material sources prevent the formation of a strong nation-state identity. Thus, the state structures in Africa are generally weak. By Weber's definition, the basic feature of a state is to maintain a monopoly over the use of force in the territory under its

jurisdiction (Weber, 1964, p. 156). The state monopoly over the use of force in Africa is challenged in two ways: first, the coercive apparatus of African countries may be viewed as untrustworthy and predatory. Second, local militias and armed ethnic groups challenge states' monopolies. Vigilante groups could also be active. For example, Bakassi Boys in southern Nigeria patrol their neighbourhood by superseding Nigerian state authority (Kirwin & Cho, 2009). According to the Failed State Index (FSI), 13 out of 20 countries in a highly risky group for state collapse exist in Africa (The Fund for Peace, 2023). This political vacuum creates a suitable environment for ethnic conflicts and terrorism.

As a result of ethnic division and weak state structures, ethnic conflicts and civil wars are prevalent on the continent. African countries such as Burundi, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, the Niger Republic, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, the Sudan, and Uganda have experienced ethnic conflicts and civil wars in the post-colonial era (Jinadu, 2007).

Besides ethnic conflicts and civil wars, the centre of global terrorism has shifted to Africa. According to the Global Terrorism Index, in 2022, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 48% of global terrorism deaths. Four of nine countries that experienced the largest increases in deaths emanating from terrorism are located in Sub-Saharan Africa: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Global Terrorism Index, 2023). In the first six months of 2023, only in West Africa, over 1,800 terrorist attacks caused the deaths of approximately 5,000 people (Bonny, 2023).

The diverse ethnic composition of African countries and weak state structures are breeding civil wars and terrorism on the continent. China, as the biggest investor in Africa, could not remain aloof about the security developments in Africa. It started to follow an active security policy towards the continent before the start of the GSI.

## **CHINA'S SECURITY PROJECTION IN AFRICA**

China is Africa's largest trade partner and its fourth source of foreign direct investment. In 2022, the volume of trade between China and Africa totaled US\$282 billion. Since 2000, China's investments in the continent have

increased more than 20 times (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2023). The Belt and Road Initiative gave momentum to China's penetration in Africa. 49 of 54 African countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that signified their participation in the Belt and Road Initiative. China, in particular, focuses on the construction of ports along the African coastline. These ports include Djibouti Port (Djibouti), Port Sudan (Sudan), Port Said-Port Tewfik (Egypt), Port Ain Sokhna (Egypt), Zarzis Port (Tunisia), and El Hamdania Port (Algeria). Besides building ports, China also engages in road, railroad, and energy infrastructure projects (Lokanathan, 2020). The number of loans that China extended to African countries reached 1,189, with a value of US\$160 billion (Global Development Policy Centre, 2023). These statistics demonstrate the increasing Chinese influence in Africa. The security problems listed in the previous section pose threats to China's presence in Africa, as the obvious targets of terrorist groups could be infrastructure that China has built. The security of Africa is crucial for China to protect its investment projects and clout in the region.

Since 2015, China has increasingly engaged in the African security architecture. In 2015, in the UN speech, President Xi offered US\$100 million in the African Union's (AU) peace and security endeavours. In 2018, President Xi pledged to contribute to the China-Africa Peace and Security Fund, military assistance, and 50 programmes for law and order, peacekeeping, anti-piracy, and counterterrorism. China also provides more personnel than any other member of the Security Council for peacekeeping forces in Africa (Kovrig, 2018).

China built its first overseas base in Djibouti in 2017 following the construction of the Doraleh Multipurpose Port. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is reported to have exclusive use of at least one of the port's berths. Thus, the PLAN is able to supervise the maritime checkpoint located in the Gulf of Aden. This indicates that China amalgamates commercial and military interests in projecting power abroad, although officially, China commits to non-interference (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). China also seeks to build a naval base in Equatorial Guinea. If this project is realised, China will have a naval base on the Atlantic coast (Tanchum, 2021). Both countries are heavily indebted to China. When Djibouti could not pay its loans to China received to build the infrastructure, it rented its coastal territory to China under very favourable conditions for the construction of a logistics centre (Tomic et al., 2022, p. 371). China's practice of using debt to gain

military bases on the continent is in danger of being labelled as new colonialism.

### **THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE FOR AFRICA**

Africa is one of the regions that the GSI includes. The eighth article of the third section mentions that the GSI:

Supports the efforts of African countries, the AU, and sub-regional organisations to resolve regional conflicts, fight terrorism, and safeguard maritime security; calls on the international community to provide financial and technical support to Africa-led counter-terrorism operations; and supports African countries in strengthening their ability to safeguard peace independently. Support means addressing African problems in an African way and promoting peaceful settlement of hotspots in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, the Great Lakes region, and other areas. Actively implements the Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa, promotes the institutionalisation of the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference, and works actively to launch pilot projects of cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

The wording of the article aims to present China as a benevolent power that wants to help African countries strengthen their security. By doing so, it emphasises that it does not seek to dominate these states. Instead, China declares that it respects the independence and sovereignty of African countries. It wants to aid African states in finding a solution to African security problems in African ways.

In the GSI, another important reference is made to the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference. The Horn of Africa is characterised by difficult security problems. Ethiopia and Sudan are in dispute due to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which Ethiopia has been building on the Blue Nile. Ethiopia and Eritrea's relations were very hostile, as Eritrea's emergence as an independent state blocked Ethiopia's access to the sea. They signed a peace deal in 2018. On the other hand, Ethiopia descended into a civil war with the Tigray region. After the overthrow of Sudanese ruler Omar al-Bashir, the ruling coalition



fought with each other, starting another civil war in April 2023 (Holmquist & Rock, 2023). The region has also been experiencing a severe drought, which has led approximately 19 million people to experience acute food security threats (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2022).

Amid these crises, China prominently promotes itself as a mediator. It presented itself as a mediator during the 2014 Sudan conflict (Mishra, 2022). The China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference was held in June 2022 in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Ministers and senior government officials of the Horn of Africa (HOA) countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Uganda, Djibouti, and Xue Bing, Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Affairs of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, participated in the conference. The joint statement declared participants engaged in in-depth discussions on regional peace, development, and governance in an atmosphere of unity, candour, pragmatism, and mutual respect. They emphasised the peaceful settlement of disputes and dialogue in resolving security problems (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2022).

Despite the positive remarks articulated in the conference, this conference achieved nothing in resolving regional conflicts. Even Xue Bing acknowledged that conference discussions 'did not touch upon the mediation efforts, and nobody raised this issue' (Mishra, 2022). This demonstrates hesitance on China's side in intervening in the complex security problems of the region. Preparing acceptable solutions to these problems is a daunting task.

The joint statement commends China for initiating an outlook for the region. The regional countries commit themselves to implementing the GDI and the GSI (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2022). Although the official statement praises China's participation in the security problems of the Horn of Africa, it does not necessarily reflect the truth. As a new participant in Africa, China's solutions may not reflect the region's needs. Moreover, it is not certain that the regional countries demand China's mediation.

Instead of addressing immediate security challenges, China seems to be more focused on development projects. The joint statement reflects this attitude:

China reaffirmed its resolve to deepen cooperation in areas such as health, illegal migration, agricultural development for poverty reduction, trade, investment, infrastructure, green development, and support efforts for building a development framework featuring "Two

Axes plus two Coasts”, such as the Addis Ababa-Djibouti and Mombasa-Nairobi development corridors, and any other similar projects that enable achieving regional integration (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2022).

Addressing the economic reasons for the conflicts is laudable, yet that does not certainly eliminate conflicts among various ethnic groups. Although the literature generally views ethnic conflicts as related to economic competition over finite resources, there are studies that show that when ethnic groups are concentrated in different sectors of the economy, the differentiated impact will exacerbate ethnic tensions (Storey, 1999, pp. 43-4). Thus, economic development is not necessarily a panacea for resolving ethnic conflicts.

The China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference is a significant event, but it did not move beyond rhetorical commitments. The GSI’s referral to this conference for resolving African security problems reflects that China persists in maintaining its mediator role in Africa. The GSI and the GDI aim to address the root causes of the conflicts. However, the continent has pressing security problems that need immediate external military assistance. China does not commit its military resources to participating in *ad hoc* coalitions formed to combat terrorism in Africa, unlike Western countries such as the United States of America (the US) and France. Besides these countries, Russia also stepped up its security presence in Africa with its Wagner Group. Despite lagging behind among these contenders, China is unwilling to expand the PLA’s footprint in Africa besides securing its important investments.

## CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

The GSI is an indication of China’s desire to reshape the global security architecture according to its worldview. It is the continuation of previous security doctrines. Beijing promotes a series of diplomatic initiatives involving multilateral coalitions. Its principal aim is to rival the US security architecture and institutions. This document addresses several newly emerged security problems in the global world, such as cybersecurity, biosecurity, and climate change-related problems. Yet, it also includes regional security issues.

Africa is one of the most troublesome regions in the world. The continent is characterised by many inter-state and intra-state conflicts. Furthermore, the ethnic diversity and weak state structure provide a suitable environment for terrorist groups. The dire economic situation also contributes to insecurity in Africa.

China's investments in Africa have gradually increased since the 2000s. The Belt and Road Initiative accelerated China's penetration into the African infrastructure sector. As China's investments increase in Africa, so does its vulnerability. The infrastructure projects that China has constructed are suitable targets for terrorist groups. There is also a danger that Chinese workers in Africa could be targeted. The insecurity and ethnic conflicts also threaten Chinese investment. Therefore, China established its first overseas base in Djibouti and officially proclaimed it a logistics center. Yet China's focus is limited to protecting its own investments.

Regarding Africa, the GSI follows a cautionary tone not to be seen as another colonial power. It suggests African solutions to African security problems. The GSI also emphasises collaboration with regional security institutions. Yet, the level of Chinese participation is not stated in the document. The GSI also referred to the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance, and Development Conference, which was held in June 2022. This conference signified increasing Chinese mediation efforts. Yet, this conference did not produce tangible results for resolving the security problems in the Horn of Africa. Similarly, the GSI is too ambiguous in addressing immediate security problems in Africa. It actually reflects China's adherence to the non-interference foreign policy doctrine. However, other countries, such as the US and France, contribute troops to African countries' endeavours to combat terrorism and other security challenges.

The Wagner Group provided some degree of protection to foreign companies operating in Africa, including Chinese ones. Last summer, Wagner officials announced that they rescued a group of Chinese miners in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Bartlett, 2023). Since its coup attempt failed, it would be expected that Wagner's activities would be limited in Africa. It is likely that while China is refraining from using the PLA in Africa, Chinese companies will turn into other private mercenary groups in Africa. Thus, China will continue to outsource security on the continent, as the GSI does not outline a concrete plan for the security of Chinese companies operating in Africa.

The GSI's other deficiency is that China still views security affairs as state-centric in Africa. The various ethnic groups and tribes are not considered actors. However, the main conflicts in Africa are among non-state armed groups. If China neglects to establish security ties with the ethnic groups in Africa, its clout in security will remain limited.

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# THE APPLICATION OF THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE: CHINA'S MEDIATION DIPLOMACY IN THE GULF

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**Abstract:** In 2022, China announced the Global Security Initiative (全球安全倡议—GSI) to support the global dialogue and enhance cooperation on international security. Similar to the previously launched initiatives, the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路—BRI), the Global Development Initiative (全球发展倡议—GDI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (全球文明倡议—GCI), observers question what the GSI entails and how it could be applied to resolve global security issues. The GSI was met with scepticism by some analysts, who described it as another vague concept. Others made simple comparisons of the GSI with the United States-led security order and thus argued that it catered to Chinese global needs. This paper aims to understand the GSI and its application from a Chinese perspective. It borrows from the Slogan Politics theoretical framework of looking at Chinese foreign policies/initiatives, developed by Ze Jinghan, a professor of international relations. The framework provides a relevant understanding of Chinese policies as multifunctional slogans for international engagement. In order to examine the application of the GSI, the paper evaluates how Beijing puts the GSI in motion when mediating between the Gulf rivals. In March 2023, China succeeded in restoring diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran after a seven-year rift. Reaching the peace deal enables researchers to further their understanding of the GSI and its trajectory. When exemplified by the peace deal, the GSI brings an alternative and new approach to the security of the Gulf and the Middle East to the traditional American style. The GSI has backed the geopolitical arrangement between the two regional powers and also the Gulf's security settlement. Beijing established a new perception that the geopolitical and ideological differences should not prevent the Gulf powers from stabilising the region.

**Keywords:** Global Security, regions, diplomacy mediation, peace deal, global governance.

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## INTRODUCTION

China's apparent role as a global mediator has attracted recent academic attention. Enhancing national interests, securing energy supplies, and pursuing an active role in global governance are key motives behind China's recent adoption of diplomatic mediation in its foreign policy. Yet, the fine line between China's new approach to global affairs and its profound base of non-interference in other sovereignties remains critical to Chinese policymakers. Recent Chinese mediation efforts have been reshaped to be undergirded by key global initiatives that the Chinese Communist Party launched. This new approach enabled China to navigate new opportunities for global governance of key international issues while minimising the risk of involvement in complicated interstate geopolitical issues. Chinese officials have been espousing key slogans in their official international appearances and speeches.

China's vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, the path of peaceful development, the Global Security Initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative, and other key universal principles and initiatives reflect China's twenty-first century's diplomacy and global interaction. Many scholars and researchers outside China viewed these initiatives as abstract and vague. At face value, Aluf and Berman (2023) believe that Chinese global initiatives appear universal and neutral, which subsequently contradict Chinese global actions. In their view, the widely assumed simple understanding of these principles and initiatives is not necessarily compatible with China's recent posture towards the international architecture designed by the West (Aluf & Berman, 2023). Therefore, this paper offers a close examination of a Chinese abstract principle/initiative in relation to a recent material stance taken on a key issue.

In April 2022, China's Communist Party's Secretary General, President Xi Jinping, announced the launch of China's Global Security Initiative (GSI). According to a concept paper published by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the paper identifies the key principles behind the GSI. Maintaining the global commitment to comprehensive and sustainable global security is a fundamental pillar of achieving the aimed security at the systemic level. At the same time, the GSI considers regional and interstate differences and cleavages. It emphasises the legitimate security concerns of countries and "resolving differences and disputes between countries" (Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). These elements of the GSI require a further understanding of the normative rationale behind it and the degree to which such an abstract initiative could be implemented in international affairs. Another question to look at is the extent to which behaviour is flexible enough to be aligned with these principles and the materialistic crisis management in which China mediates between the disputed parties. To answer these questions, the paper evaluates the GSI in relation to China's recent mediation effort between Saudi Arabia and Iran that resulted in the restoration of their diplomatic relations.

### **THEORETICAL APPROACH, SLOGAN POLITICS**

The paper borrows from the work of the Slogan Politics Theory, developed by Jinghan Zeng (曾敬涵), a professor at Lancaster University, to understand the conceptualization of the GSI. When evaluating key Chinese foreign initiatives and strategies, one expects a well-defined strategy similar to the classic Western strategies. Yet, analysis of Chinese policy papers and initiatives requires adopting a different approach to understanding Chinese official statements and academic literature. Zeng (2020) argues that Chinese initiatives and grand concepts should be viewed as multifunctional slogans for internal political communication and international relations. The Chinese grand strategies and initiatives are meant to state intent, power, gain internal and external support, and foster state propaganda. On the one hand, these initiatives remain abstract and general because Chinese scholars, businessmen, policymakers, and other local actors contribute to the development of these initiatives and grand principles. On the other hand, the Communist Party leaves some room for other states and external stakeholders to relate to these general initiatives so that China later provides better and more precise frameworks through which China as a nation-state and external actors can be accommodated within these initiatives. These initiatives are continuously shaped by the voices and influence of domestic and international actors, leading to the gradual development of a unified narrative and supporting policies.

Zeng exemplifies the Slogan Politics Theory with three key slogans adopted under the Xi Jinping leadership between 2012 and 2019. His book studies the most significant and relevant slogans to the theory: the New

Type of Great Power Relations, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Community of a Shared Future for Mankind. To develop the conceptualization of the slogans, they follow two patterns: the dependence path and the soft opening. Although these concepts were introduced by Xi Jinping, they were historically rooted in his predecessors' thinking (Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin). This approach envisions the new initiatives introduced in the twenty-first century as the revised visions of the previous ones. For instance, the Belt and Road Initiative, as viewed by Zeng, was originally inspired and designed by Jiang's "Go West" concept (pp. 134-135). The conceptualization methodology of Chinese initiatives remains open for new branding and recycling, which explains the dependence path of Chinese slogans. Therefore, these initiatives tend to be slogans to assert power and declare intention rather than clear strategies with well-defined frameworks announced by Chinese leadership.

When the Belt and Road Initiative was introduced in 2013, it was not clearly defined and thus raised global scepticism. The gradual increase in the number of member countries and international organisations subsequently gave this initiative meaning and better shape. The soft opening of the initiative, as described by Zeng (2020), projected the BRI as less defined. However, the soft-opening approach that China adopts when introducing new initiatives and principles to the nation-state and the world keeps the delivery of the initiatives vague and abstract. Through this approach, China houses the needs and interests of internal and external stakeholders, which contributes to the maturity and geographic expansion of the initiatives (pp. 136-137). Therefore, the soft opening of the Belt and Road Initiative allowed its members to play a role in the testing and development process, which makes the initiative more flexible and relevant to them.

When the Slogan Politics Theory was applied to the Global Security Initiative, the abstract nature of this initiative opened the floor for the international community and other states to provide feedback. Based on the feedback received, the GSI has been modified and redefined. As the GSI gradually developed, one may observe the recent and frequent references made by Chinese leadership and politicians in their statements regarding the initiative. That is besides making linkages to particular Chinese foreign policies and actions and the GSI, such as China's mediation efforts

to restore diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. When first introduced, there was clear reluctance from other states to join and acknowledge the GSI, as many questions arose about its rationale and intention. However, Chinese policymakers used the initiative as an umbrella to increase the domestic and international propaganda win by supporting it with different bilateral and multilateral practical agreements. This approach enables them to introduce the needed adjustments and modifications based on the changeable international geopolitical and security dynamics, resulting in a gradual acceptance of the GSI worldwide.

### **THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE**

The Global Security Initiative, introduced by President Xi Jinping on April 21, 2022, calls on countries to adapt to the dynamic and changing international reality as explained in the Chinese official statements. With the growing global instability due to the newly emerging forms of disorder, security challenges have become interconnected and transnational. The growing traditional and non-traditional threats have caused an increasing deficit in peace and prosperity between countries. In collaboration with other countries, China seeks to eliminate the causes and roots of global security disorder and introduce joint security governance efforts under the umbrella of the GSI. It touches upon key security issues such as weapons of mass distraction proliferation, with special emphasis on nuclear weapons proliferation. China expresses its readiness to utilise its bilateral and multilateral relations with the parties to the disputes to reach a resolution of these international issues. The concept stresses the need for a constructive political settlement of international security issues rather than managing these issues alone. However, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries remains critical to China's implementation of the GSI, as it still regulates its foreign behaviour. Therefore, China takes the stance of the mediator or peace dialogue facilitator to bring fairness, feasibility, and practicality to the table between the disputing parties/states.

From the point of view of the Chinese government and its foreign policymakers, the Global Security Initiative is not a new foreign policy for China's diplomacy. China's involvement in the political settlement and

conflict management nuclear deal, the Ukrainian crisis, and, previously, in the Korean Peninsula crisis are key manifestations of the GSI practice. Through the initiative, China aims to facilitate the resolution of security/geopolitical conflicts by resolving differences and disputes to neighbourhood. From the Chinese perspective, the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement is a significant regional practice of the GSI, emphasising the feasibility of applying the GSI model worldwide. The initiative underlines that in order to advance the international and regional security dialogue, it is essential for the disputing parties to reach a common ground on regional peace. Nevertheless, the process of implementing the GSI is not limited to conflict resolution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Rather, it is extended to the governance of regional and global security that is intertwined with the level of development achieved. China illustrates this approach in two recent cases: the Horn of Africa and the Middle East.

The abstract characterisation of Chinese global initiatives and strategies has been criticised widely; the Global Security Initiative is no exception. Some analysts, such as Gabriel Wildau (2023), the Managing Director of Teneo, find that the GSI is ill-defined and re-introducing the existing alliances and blocs that China established and/or has a membership with. It is widely assumed that the GSI is meant to hinder US-led global security initiatives as a result of the growing US-China competition. Despite the fact that the GSI concept identifies a few platforms and mechanisms of cooperation to implement the initiative, the process of addressing global issues remains vague and lacks the policy outcomes that China aims to achieve. However, it is undeniable that vague Chinese initiatives that few years to develop contribute to cultivating a global network of international cooperative. That said, it is significant for this discussion to examine China's ability to initiate diplomatic and political dialogues and be an active international mediator as a constituent of the GSI.

### **THE APPLICATION OF THE GSI: CHINA'S MEDIATION DIPLOMACY IN THE GULF**

On March 10, 2023, in Beijing, the Chinese government announced the successful mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran that resulted in

restoring diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Tehran. Beijing projected the rapprochement as a clear manifestation of the need for applying the GSI worldwide. It attracted huge international attention, especially at a time of increasing global turbulence from the Ukrainian crisis. China's Foreign Ministry traces the success of the mediation effort between the Gulf rivals to the equal-footed dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran. On the one hand, the Chinese approach ensures reaching mutually acceptable solutions from within the region without taking sides as a mediator in favour of any party to the dispute. On the other hand, the good faith of Saudi Arabia and Iran in China's role as a mediator has contributed to the ease of fulfilling the rapprochement. Despite the geopolitical and security complications of the situation in the Gulf, the press release issued by the Chinese government points to the common ground to which China brought both regional powers to enhance their mutual understanding, with minimal Chinese intervention in the internal affairs of the Gulf (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines, 2023).

China established the linkage between the GSI and its mediation diplomacy in the Gulf based on its understanding of regional hotspots. Beijing regards the regional hotspots as a region with a high likelihood of a continued escalation of tension. Regional hotspots, such as the Middle East, necessitate addressing their challenges through their regional powers. Beijing justifies reaching the Gulf rapprochement, as the resolution was rooted in and reached out to by the Middle East powers. Subsequently, the Saudi-Irani peace deal injected new momentum and opportunities for reconciliation in the Middle East. Addressing the internal geopolitical cleavages between these two powers had a regional domino effect on moving forward towards resolving other regional geopolitical issues. The mobility of the effect is apparent in Syria, Palestine/Israel, and Yemen, where the tension notably deescalated following the rapprochement (Long, 2023).

The de-Westernisation of the world has also contributed to the success of Chinese mediation diplomacy and the feasibility of applying the GSI in the Gulf. China has built strategic partnerships with key regional powers in the Gulf. Whether through bilateral cooperation or regional engagement on different multilateral platforms, China was able to leverage its partnerships to build trust in its new broker. Restoring diplomatic relations between two regional rivals marks the 'beginning of a multi-faceted de-

Westernisation process in the region' (Yazdanshenas & Saleh, 2023). The post-Western era in the Middle East opened the floor for a new form of great power-regional power relations. That does not necessarily imply that China has to fill in the political/security vacuum, but to introduce different variables of great powers' involvement in addressing regional issues not characterised by ideology. China values the mediation and engagement in the Middle East at peacetime to leverage this engagement during war/crises. This methodology projects the GSI as a security and development package away from the Western classical approach.

When it comes to the Gulf powers, their willingness to overcome the regional security challenges and benefit from the emerging external great powers has also enabled the application of the GSI. The Arab Spring and its post-reconstruction period in the Middle East provided the regional powers with the impetus to diversify external powers by looking for alternatives, such as China, India, and Russia. Whether this diversification trend within the Gulf is part of the global "Pivot to East" or "Asianization" or not, there is an unmistakable tendency in the Gulf to promote internal and regional security and start a new chapter of geopolitical alignments. Subsequently, the GSI application in the case of the Gulf contributes to shaping this global initiative. Part of the feasibility of applying the GSI is focused on the agreement on the willingness for conflict resolution rather than the agreement on the proposed actual solutions. density of how Riyadh and Tehran would manage their security and geopolitical arrangements, their intention to resolve their hostility with the support of China has also fostered the success of the GSI.

The regional trust in China's guarantee of Iranian good will and continuity of engagement adds to the feasible success of the GSI in the Gulf. Prior to China's lead in the negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Oman and Iraq mediated between the Gulf rivals. Oman and Iraq enjoy friendly relations with both parties to the peace deal. They succeeded in bringing the Saudi and Iranian officials to the table and initiating the discussions. However, China, as a great power, strategic partner, and neutral friend to both Saudi and Iran, has the influence to guarantee both sides' commitment reached agreement. Saudi Arabia relied on China to ensure Iranian engagement, as per the Iranian promises made to China (Farouk, 2023). This dual trust marked the success of China's first diplomatic exercise

of the GSI in the Gulf and promoted China's image as a new reliable sponsor of international negotiations.

The development and prosperity aspects China offers within the Global Security Initiative package have supported reaching a mutual agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. China's mediation enabled the further activation of two interconnected pillars of the GSI: a balance between regional security and economic prosperity. These two elements are core to Saudi Arabia's future vision and to the Iranian recovery from international economic sanctions. Maintaining Iranian stable behaviour in the region and ensuring the support of Saudi Arabia's growing investments in its neighbours appeared to be an ideal situation for China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to proceed with the deal.

The Western element of applying the GSI in the Gulf is also critical to this discussion. Regardless of the evident shift to the East, the Western allies ( States) remain key for Saudi Arabia in balancing its regional power and managing some of Middle East issues. At the same time, maintaining the American presence in the region serves the basket diversification objective in different security, geopolitical, and development aspects. The Western element highlights the fact that Chinese policymakers have to consider Western variable when applying the GSI in other regions. China has to coexist with other great powers in the region. When applied to Iran, the process of turning the new page on Saudi-Iranian relations may not go without regional complications. The Western economic sanctions and pressure practiced on Iran in many regional topics may cause some fluctuations in maintaining the peace arrangements, even if they are determined to keep the reached promises under Chinese sponsorship.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Global Security Initiative (GSI), launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2022, has attracted international attention and raised scepticism. The abstract nature of the GSI, similar to other Chinese global initiatives and principles, led to a global reluctance to join the initiative when it was first introduced. In order to understand the abstract Chinese initiatives, including the GSI, one must comprehend the Slogan Politics Theory. The soft opening and the dependence path suggested by the Slogan Politics



Theory help analyse Chinese initiatives and link them to actual Chinese foreign policies. The initiatives are vague to accommodate the interests and needs of internal and external stakeholders, including states. Subsequently, the soft opening of the GSI increased its relevance to other states as it reflected common global principles. The dependence path allows testing of the GSI, thus developing it in relation to other regions. When it comes to the GSI application in the Gulf, China's mediation diplomacy was an exercise that helped further characterise the GSI. In part because the of Saudi-Iranian relations contributes to altering the GSI and its feasibility in other regions. The following key elements in the case of GSI application in the Gulf should be taken into consideration: the regional rivalry, the Middle East crises, the Western variable, and the trilateral relations between China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

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# PROSPECTS FOR SECURITY STRATEGY IN CEE COUNTRIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

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**Abstract:** Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February 2022, Central and Eastern Europe have become hotspots for geopolitical conflicts in Europe. Countries in this region are facing intense turbulence in their security environment, leading to a significant shift in their security strategies. Overall, most countries in Central and Eastern Europe have taken the stance of supporting Ukraine, strongly opposing Russia, and adopting corresponding policies. They have become more reliant on the US-led NATO for security while expressing scepticism towards the “European strategic autonomy” advocated by the EU and countries like France and Germany. They have increased defence spending and accelerated the modernization of their military and defence capabilities. They are also implementing a variety of measures to address hybrid warfare and strengthen cyber security.

**Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine conflict, Central and Eastern Europe, security, strategy.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the geopolitical security environment in Central and Eastern European countries (hereinafter referred to as CEE countries) has undergone significant changes. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 during the Ukrainian crisis further heightened the sense of insecurity among CEE countries, particularly in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They have been continuously criticising Russia’s actions in Ukraine and calling for sanctions and other measures to exert pressure on Russia. In terms of geopolitical security mechanisms, the Bucharest Nine (B9) group was established in November 2015.<sup>1</sup> It consists of nine CEE countries and aims to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in the defence and security fields within the framework of NATO. In the field of cyber security, several CEE

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<sup>1</sup> The nine countries are Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary, all of which are NATO member states.

countries have accused Russia of conducting cyber attacks and information warfare against them.

Russia is one of the key factors in the geopolitical security of Central and Eastern Europe. The diplomatic strategies and related policies of CEE countries towards Russia vary due to differences in their history, geography, ethnicity, religion, and sides of the political spectrum. Prior to the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, there was not a complete consensus among CEE countries regarding strategies and policies towards Russia. Poland and the Baltic states strongly criticised Russia's actions in Ukraine and consistently called for strengthening sanctions and other measures towards Russia, while countries like Hungary and Serbia, based on their own economic interests and on the grounds of historical and cultural ties, sought to develop relationships with Russia and explore cooperation in trade and cultural exchanges as well as other areas of mutual benefit.

In February 2022, immediately after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, countries in Central and Eastern Europe issued statements condemning Russia for violating the fundamental rights of Ukraine to independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Most of them promptly joined the EU in a series of sanctions against Russia. Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, and the Czech Republic, among others, provided military assistance to Ukraine under the NATO mechanism while also accepting a large number of refugees from Ukraine. Over the past year since the outbreak of the conflict, there have been significant changes in the security strategies of CEE countries.

### **STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND DEFENCE COOPERATION WITH NATO AND THE US**

After the end of the Cold War, countries in Central and Eastern Europe transitioned to a “return to the West” policy, aligning themselves with the EU in terms of politics, economy, and society and relying more on NATO for security guarantees. The outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict undoubtedly promoted CEE countries' coordination and cooperation with the US in geopolitical security while at the same time reinforcing NATO's role in security. Historically, CEE countries have been implementing security and defence policies within the NATO mechanism, the EU framework, and regional cooperation. Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US has increased its attention to

the Central and Eastern European region, with its officials making multiple visits to the region. Correspondingly, CEE countries further strengthened cooperation with the US within the NATO framework. In February 2023, on the first anniversary of the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, US President Biden visited Poland and held a meeting with the leaders of nine CEE countries, namely the B9 group, as well as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, reaffirming US unwavering support for NATO and the security of the members of the B9 group and seeking greater support from the CEE countries on the Ukraine issue. The leaders of the B9 group responded positively, especially those of Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States, who called for strengthened security cooperation among allies to address “Russia’s military threat”. Polish President Andrzej Duda even declared: ‘Should any country on the eastern flank of NATO be attacked, then NATO will react immediately by invoking Article 5’ (NATO, 2023a). Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, NATO’s forward presence in the Central and Eastern European region has risen markedly, bringing the number of multinational battlegroups from four to eight and scaling up each battlegroup from battalion size to brigade size, totaling 40,000 forces. NATO is set to further increase its troops in Central and Eastern Europe to over 300,000 and claims to establish a deterrence and defence line from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea (NATO, 2023b).

Table 1: NATO’s Deployment of Battlegroups in Central and Eastern Europe

Host nation	Framework nation	Contributing nations	Forces
Estonia	The United Kingdom	Denmark, Iceland	1430
Latvia	Canada	Albania, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Slovenia, Spain	1887
Lithuania	Germany	Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway	1632
Poland	The US	Croatia, Romania, the United Kingdom	1033
Bulgaria	Italy	Albania, Greece, North Macedonia, the US	968
Hungary	Hungary	Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Turkey, the US	900
Romania	France	North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Netherlands, the US	1148
Slovakia	The Czech Republic	Germany, the Netherlands, Slovenia	643

Source: Holland, 2023.

Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe have actively supported NATO's policy of increasing military presence in the region, particularly those bordering Ukraine, who even requested that NATO and the US establish military bases and maintain long-term troops on their own territories. Before the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US established no permanent military bases in Central and Eastern Europe but only supporting bases and military installations in Bulgaria and Romania. In June 2022, during the NATO Summit in Madrid, President Biden announced the establishment of a permanent V Corps Headquarters Forward Command Post in Poland. The inauguration of the US's first permanent army base in Poland was held at Camp Kosciuszko in Poznan on March 21, 2023. Additionally, the Lithuanian government has invested 7 million euros to build a military camp, aiming to attract the US to establish a permanent military base on its soil. Albania has also announced plans to open a military airport in 2023, which will become NATO's first tactical base in the Western Balkans.

CEE countries have generally adopted a tougher stance towards Russia amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict compared to larger Western European countries like France and Germany. In terms of the EU, they have expressed a lack of confidence in the bloc's ability to provide "hard security guarantees", criticising the lack of concrete actions from the EU side in terms of military deterrence against Russia and military assistance to Ukraine. Poland and the Baltic states have repeatedly criticised the EU and Western European countries such as Germany and France for insufficient military assistance to Ukraine in the wake of the conflict. According to statistics, in 2022, Poland offered military aid to Ukraine worth a total of approximately \$2.138 billion, next only to Germany and the UK among European countries. Additionally, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania provided \$150 million to \$300 million in military aid to Ukraine, while France provided only \$219 million in military aid during the same period (Statista, 2023). Considering the economic and military capabilities of the above-mentioned CEE countries, their determination and commitment to military assistance to Ukraine are higher than those of many Western European countries.

In addition, there have been ongoing disputes between Poland, Hungary, and the EU over principles of democracy and rule of law in the past two years. At one point, the EU even cut funds to the two countries over controversies. In June 2021, the EU temporarily withheld the planned billions of euros in

funds to Poland because of concerns about the latter's "judicial independence", and then, in light of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU made concessions to re-assist Poland. In April 2022, the EU announced in a ruling that it would take measures to suspend support payments and other measures to punish Hungary. In September 2022, the European Parliament said in a statement that Hungary could 'no longer be considered a full democracy' (Freund, 2022). In February 2023, the European Commission stated that it would take Poland to the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) in response to two controversial rulings by Poland's Constitutional Court, raising questions about the legitimacy of the latter. This move was met with a strong response from Poland, with Poland's Constitutional Court judge Krystyna Pawłowicz stating on social media that 'the EU no longer has any legislation now' and that the EU's actions would not affect the validity of judgements made by the court (Politico, 2023).

In short, after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the geopolitical security environment Central and Eastern Europe faced has become increasingly complex and dynamic. In view of the primary role played by NATO and the US in European security, most CEE countries rely more on NATO for security and, at the same time, enhance their cooperation with the US in military defence in the hope of gaining greater security guarantees.

### **ACCELERATE DEFENCE AND MILITARY MODERNIZATION**

Since the end of the Cold War, CEE countries have been reforming defence legislation, defence budgets, armed forces, and weaponry, as well as military exchanges, education, and training, to reshape their security and defence policies (Tong, 2019). In recent years, against the backdrop of constant changes in the security situation, especially after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, CEE countries have paid more and more attention to the construction of military defence capacities.



Table 2: Military spending of CEE countries in 2011-2021 (Unit: Million USD)

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albania	197.0	183.2	180.0	178.1	132.4	130.9	144.4	175.9	200.1	187.4	236.4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	211.9	197.3	197.6	190.4	162.2	157.9	156.3	172.1	165.4	167.5	192.2
Bulgaria	757.9	722.1	811.6	747.5	632.5	670.6	720.0	961.3	2158.6	1074.1	1216.6
Croatia	1106.5	955.3	957.0	1063.5	883.2	836.7	920.8	966.4	1001.8	1013.0	1739.8
The Czech Republic	2474.3	2220.6	2148.8	2022.9	1779.9	1954.9	2077.7	2710.0	2910.3	3252.5	3935.6
Estonia	389.2	436.9	479.3	512.1	463.6	497.7	537.4	614.9	637.0	718.1	764.0
Hungary	1472.1	1322.3	1280.1	1209.8	1132.5	1288.7	1463.0	1791.5	2051.1	2771.2	2777.1
Latvia	296.8	255.7	283.6	295.7	282.7	404.6	482.5	709.4	691.9	742.0	826.6
Lithuania	344.6	328.6	354.9	426.9	471.2	635.4	812.1	1056.4	1093.8	1174.1	1240.5
North Macedonia	132.5	119.4	126.5	124.2	100.0	103.5	100.8	119.6	146.1	153.5	214.6
Montenegro	79.4	67.7	64.8	67.5	56.9	61.7	65.7	75.4	74.0	83.0	98.6
Poland	9455.4	8986.8	9275.7	10345.2	10212.8	9164.2	9870.7	12040.7	11786.2	13718.3	13710.7
Romania	2379.9	2102.9	2452.5	2691.5	2580.6	2644.2	3622.1	4359.0	4613.0	5052.3	5563.3
Serbia	987.0	853.6	919.8	913.4	724.2	710.4	801.7	817.7	1143.8	1121.2	1270.8
Slovakia	1064.8	1020.2	967.9	997.7	985.9	1003.0	1049.1	1296.0	1802.5	2047.2	1983.2
Slovenia	665.7	543.5	506.7	486.2	400.8	449.2	473.8	529.5	572.9	567.7	734.4

Source: SIPRI. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database.

Table 2 shows an upward trend in military spending by CEE countries since 2011, especially after 2014. Over the 11 years from 2011 to 2021, countries such as Romania, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia have significantly increased their military expenditures, some nearly doubling and some even tripling, such as Lithuania. Poland has always had the highest defence spending in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Approximately \$13.7 billion was allocated for this purpose in 2021, followed by Romania with approximately \$5.56 billion, the Czech Republic with \$3.94 billion, Hungary with \$2.78 billion, and Slovakia with \$1.99 billion. In 2021, the three countries in the region with the highest per capita military expenditure are Estonia

(\$576.6 per capita), Lithuania (\$461.2 per capita), and Latvia (\$442.8 per capita) (SIPRI).

While increasing defence spending, CEE countries are taking multiple measures to advance their defence capabilities and adapt to modern warfare environments. For example, Poland has invested significant resources and the largest amount of military spending in the region on military modernization, including purchasing new weaponry and improving training and command systems. Hungary has begun upgrading its army and air forces to enhance counter-terrorism and air defence capabilities. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are also enhancing military modernization and increasing defence budgets.

After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, amidst the turbulent geopolitical security environment in Europe, CEE countries accelerated the pace of military modernization. First and foremost, several countries significantly increased defence budgets in order to reach NATO's standard of spending 2% of GDP on defence as soon as possible. Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, countries such as Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania all made plans to invest more in defence to meet the 2% target in the short term (see Table 3).

Table 3: Increase of defence spending by some CEE countries

Country	Increase of defence spending
Poland	The Polish government has approved a defence budget of \$31 billion for 2023. Its military defence will reach 4.2% of GDP.
Romania	In March 2022, the President of Romania announced plans to increase the country's defence budget from 2% of GDP to 2.5% of GDP.
The Czech Republic	In April 2022, the Czech government approved a plan for the massive acquisition of weaponry between 2022 and 2024. The Czech Republic Minister of Defence pledged to reach the 2% target in 2024-2025.
Slovakia	In July 2022, the Minister of Defence of Slovakia announced that the country's defence budget would reach 2% of GDP in 2023.
Slovenia	In March 2022, the Minister of Defence of Slovenia pledged to increase the defence budget from the current 1.4% of GDP to 2% by 2030.
Latvia	In March 2022, the Latvian government announced its plan to increase the defence budget from the current 2.2% of GDP to 2.5% by 2025.

Country	Increase of defence spending
Lithuania	In March 2022, an additional 298 million euros were added to the defence budget, bringing the total defence budget to 2.5% of GDP by the end of the year.
Estonia	In March 2022, the government approved a defence budget of 476 million euros to enhance the air strike capability from 2022 to 2026. This includes an additional 157 million euros in the defence budget for 2022, with the goal of reaching 2.5% of GDP by 2026.

Source: The International Institute for Strategic Studies (2023).

Also, CEE countries are widely acquiring new weapons, phasing out the Soviet/Russian-era weapons. Poland is leading the way in the acquisition of new weapons, especially heavy weaponry and equipment. As of March 2023, Poland has ordered 250 M1A2 tanks and 116 M1A1 tanks from the US, as well as 500 HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) launchers and 45 sets of Army Tactical Missile Systems. Poland has also ordered 980 K-2 main battle tanks, 648 K-9 155mm self-propelled howitzers, 288 K-239 rocket launchers, and 48 F/A-50 light combat aircraft from South Korea. Furthermore, Poland plans to purchase an additional 6 sets of the Patriot-3 upgraded air defence missile system on top of the 2 sets already procured (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2023, pp. 66-67). Other CEE countries also acquired American and European weapons and equipment. Romania acquired multiple F-16 fighters, HIMARS multiple rocket launchers, armoured vehicles, air defence radars, surface-to-air missiles, light frigates, and other equipment. They also collaborated with General Dynamics and Airbus to establish production lines on their own soil for the domestic production of armoured vehicles and armed helicopters. The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and the three Baltic states have all ordered German Leopard 2 tanks, American F-16 and F-18 fighters, HIMARS rocket launchers, and advanced French Rafale fighters, among other advanced Western equipment.

In addition to acquiring new weapons, CEE countries are also phasing out and transforming old Soviet/Russian weapons. Many Soviet/Russian-era weapons are now still in military use in CEE countries. Prior to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, countries in the region were gradually acquiring weapons from the US, Germany, and France or producing new weapons domestically. For example, the Baltic states have completed the transformation of their

armies to NATO standards by acquiring high-tech equipment from NATO members. In 2019, Hungary ordered 67 Leopard 2A7 main battle tanks (the most advanced version of Leopard 2) from Germany, and in 2020, they ordered 218 Lynx infantry fighting vehicles produced in Germany. All the equipment is intended to replace T-72 tanks and Soviet-era infantry fighting vehicles. Poland plans to replace the Soviet-era BWP-1 infantry fighting vehicle with its domestically made Borsuk tracked armoured vehicle in 2023. In 2019, weapons manufacturing companies in the Czech Republic and Hungary collaborated with each other to develop and produce new rifles to replace the Soviet-made AK series rifles in their respective military forces. However, due to budget constraints, many CEE countries are still transforming and modernising their existing Soviet/Russian weapons to save costs and maintain a certain stockpile of heavy weaponry (such as large-calibre artillery, tanks, and fighter jets) in their arsenal. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted, several CEE countries immediately supplied a large number of weapons to Ukraine. The compatibility between the Soviet/Russian-era weapons of these countries and the weapons used by the Ukrainian military made the region a crucial source of military assistance to the latter. The provision of weaponry from CEE countries, on the one hand, serves as important support to Ukraine and, on the other hand, creates an opportunity to clear out old weapon stockpiles and introduce new weapons. More importantly, it accelerated the process of getting rid of the influence of Russian weapon systems and aligning their military equipment systems with those of Western countries.

In conclusion, the geopolitical position of CEE countries makes them highly sensitive to changes in the geopolitical security environment, and therefore strengthening defence capabilities has become an important strategic tool for them to cope with such changes. CEE countries have been gradually modernising their defence and military since the end of the Cold War, but the modernization level is still limited because of the relatively stable European security order from the end of the Cold War until the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as factors such as most countries joining NATO for security guarantees from the US and the West and their limited economic capabilities. However, with the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, CEE countries are paying more attention to the construction of their defence and military capabilities so as to enhance their ability to cope with geopolitical security conflicts.

## ENHANCE THE ABILITY TO COUNTER THE “HYBRID WAR” THREAT

Although the Russia-Ukraine conflict worsened the geopolitical security environment in Central and Eastern Europe, it is not likely that it will spill over to the region at this point. In fact, in recent years, countries in the region have become increasingly concerned about the threat posed by “hybrid war”. Hybrid war refers to the use of various tools and tactics, such as disinformation, cyber attacks, and covert operations, to achieve political and military objectives.<sup>2</sup> Many CEE countries believe that hybrid war has been used by a variety of state and non-state actors, including Russia, to undermine their national security and stability. In response to the “threat” posed by hybrid war, CEE countries have implemented a range of countermeasures, including enhancing military and civilian capabilities, improving cyber security, and strengthening resilience against disinformation.

First of all, CEE countries took the initiative to establish military structures to deal with the threats of hybrid war. The Baltic states, such as Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia, have set up dedicated organisations to coordinate domestic cooperation as well as cooperation with neighbouring countries to counter the threats of hybrid war. For example, Estonia partnered with NATO to establish the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), which provides training, intelligence analysis, and support to the military and government in order to enhance the ability to defend against hybrid war. This centre sent experts to Ukraine prior to the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to assist in tackling cyber attacks from Russia. To address hybrid war, Poland established the Territorial Defence Forces, which are made up of trained reservists to support regular military units in the event of hybrid war or conventional conflicts. The Territorial Defence Forces are considered an integral component of Poland’s defence against hybrid threats, as they can rapidly respond to incidents and provide local support. Hungary established a new military structure within its army, the Defence Forces Peace Support Training Centre, which focuses on training soldiers and civilians for territorial defence and resistance to hybrid threats.

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<sup>2</sup> The modern concept of hybrid war as a military strategic theory was popularised by Frank Hoffman, a former US Marine and a defence scholar.

In addition, CEE countries are placing greater emphasis on strengthening the development of cyber security. Enhancing cyber security is an important part of fighting against hybrid wars, as cyber attacks are often used to disrupt critical infrastructure and services, steal sensitive information, and spread false information. In recent years, CEE countries have been continuously advancing the construction of cyber security in order to improve their ability to withstand cyber threats. In terms of mechanism building, the Czech government established the National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NCISA) in 2017, which is responsible for coordinating the country's cyber security efforts and responding to cyber attacks. In 2018, the Polish government established the National Cyber Security Centre for the same end. Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Baltic states also have established national cyber security centres to coordinate government, military, and social media to improve cyber security.

Furthermore, CEE countries are increasingly emphasising the education of social groups, especially the general public and media, in dealing with disinformation and cyber security issues. They believe that in the Internet era, with the prevalence of self-media, disinformation has a detrimental impact on their people. Therefore, governments are striving to enhance the literacy and critical thinking of their populations and media (especially self-media) in order to combat disinformation and false propaganda. They support independent media institutions and encourage fact-checking and investigation by think tanks and media organizations. To this end, many CEE countries have established the Centre for Strategic Communication, which brings together government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and media outlets to fight disinformation and misinformation.

After the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, CEE countries have become increasingly aware of the real threat of hybrid war at their doorstep. They are particularly concerned about the increased severity of cyber attacks and disinformation. According to think tanks in the region, there has been an increase in anti-NATO, anti-Ukraine, and pro-Russia sentiments in these countries following the outbreak of the conflict. The main reason behind this is believed to be Russia's use of "hybrid war" through online media to spread disinformation and launch "propaganda campaigns" towards CEE countries. The Baltic states and the Visegrad Group countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) are particularly targeted for disinformation. Many people

in Central and Eastern Europe have already been “swayed by misinformation”. For example, surveys have shown that prior to the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2021, 56% of Slovaks, 35% of Hungarians, 34% of Poles, and 29% of Czechs were inclined to believe in misinformation (Ferenčík, 2023). Even after the conflict, a significant proportion of the population in the region still does not consider Russia an “aggressor”, and the reason is false Russian propaganda, according to surveys by think tanks in the region (Faktor, 2023). In response, CEE countries adopted the following measures:

Firstly, the government is strengthening supervision over cyber security and cracking down on disinformation. CEE countries are calling for greater legislative measures at the EU level and are generally in support of the provisions of the EU’s *Digital Services Act* passed in 2022, which aims to combat disinformation and enhance supervision of media on the Internet. The act is intended to create a safer digital space while maintaining the innovation and competitiveness of the digital economy. In order to combat disinformation, CEE countries established relevant governmental organs, such as the Centre for Combating Hybrid Threats under the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, which specialises in identifying disinformation harmful to the public. The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic also established an institution dedicated to handling disinformation. In addition, CEE countries are carrying out anti-disinformation operations through cooperation mechanisms under NATO. What’s more, a number of think tanks in the region have joined the fight against disinformation, including the GLOBSEC think tank in Slovakia, the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), the *Europeum* Institute for European Policy in the Czech Republic, and the Prague Security Studies Institute. They provide policy recommendations to governments on countering the threat of disinformation through policy research, investigation and analysis, and the collection of public opinions. They also guide the public’s understanding and awareness of disinformation and track the sources and dissemination of disinformation on the Internet.

Secondly, CEE countries require large Internet technology companies to monitor and control disinformation. On March 29, 2023, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Petr Fiala, published an open letter on Twitter, co-signed by the prime ministers of Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The letter labels those who spread fake news as “hostile forces” attempting to break peace and stability and calls for

major international tech companies to actively regulate and control disinformation on their social media platforms. The letter writes that disinformation is being used to undermine the stability of their countries, damage democracy, and weaken support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. It urges tech companies to be vigilant and ensure their platforms are not used for propaganda or the dissemination of disinformation. It also calls for tech companies to allocate personnel and funding to combat the threat posed by deepfake technology and artificial intelligence-generated disinformation (TVP World, 2023). CEE countries are trying to exert pressure on multinational tech firms that operate online media, urging these Internet giants to take on the task of combating disinformation in the name of national security and upholding democracy, so as to strengthen the response from the source. In fact, this action by CEE countries is also in line with the EU's demand for large tech companies to combat disinformation. Back in 2018, American tech firms such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Mozilla signed the Code of Practice on Disinformation with the EU, promising to take effective measures to combat deepfakes, fake accounts, and political advertising, among other forms of disinformation. In June 2022, the EU released the latest version of this code, which is linked to its *Digital Services Act*, and signatories who fail to fulfil their commitment to combat disinformation will face hefty fines.

Thirdly, CEE countries are trying to enhance civic education to improve the ability of the population to counter disinformation. According to the Media Literacy Index released by the European think tank in 2022<sup>3</sup>, the ability of CEE countries to resist disinformation is generally lower than that of other European countries. In the ranking of the Media Literacy Index 2022, except for Estonia ranking fourth, other CEE countries rank in the bottom half, especially Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia in the Western Balkans region, who rank at the bottom. One important indicator in this index is the education level of each country, and the index suggests that more educated people are more informed, more critically thinking, and less likely to fall into the trap of fabricated news (Lessenski, 2022). The index shows that CEE countries generally lag behind

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<sup>3</sup> The Media Literacy Index was developed by the Open Society Institute–Sofia, a think tank based in Bulgaria. It has been published four times since 2017 and assesses the ability of 41 European countries (including Turkey) to resist disinformation.



Western and Northern Europe in terms of education, resulting in lower resilience but higher trust in fake news among citizens. In view of the relatively low level of education of their citizens, especially in terms of the ability to detect disinformation, some think tanks in the region call for comprehensive media education to form a strong and independent civil society. The education may include “mandatory media education” and “media literacy programmes” to train people of all classes and ages to improve their ability to discern and resist disinformation. In summary, they believe that a coherent and robust media literacy education is an important and effective tool for combating disinformation narratives (Ferenčik, 2023).

### **FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF SECURITY STRATEGIES IN CEE COUNTRIES AND IMPLICATIONS**

Geopolitical security environment changes brought about by the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict pose various challenges and impacts on the security of CEE countries. In order to address these challenges, CEE countries adopted various strategies and measures in the fields of military defence, cyber security, and countering hybrid threats. These actions will have a variety of effects on their own security, the European security order, and even their foreign relations.

First of all, the US will have greater strategic influence in Central and Eastern Europe, and the latter will further deepen its security ties with the former. In the view of CEE countries, the US not only has strong military production capabilities and advanced weaponry, but the US military also has richer combat experience compared to European armies. These factors can become important pillars of security for Central and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, the strategic goal of the US in Europe is to do its best to contain and suppress Russia, while the strong anti-Russia sentiment of CEE countries makes them reliable allies for the US. In addition, with the prolonged Russia-Ukraine conflict and the fact that European security is unlikely to improve in the short run, US policy towards Central and Eastern Europe in the security field can remain relatively stable. In other words, it is difficult for the US-Russia relationship to recover or “restart” in the foreseeable future, and there is even a possibility of further deterioration. This ensures sustained common strategic interests in security between the two sides, and there is still room for further deepening their cooperation.

Secondly, CEE countries attach importance to safeguarding their security interests within the NATO framework and can thus serve as a hampering force for European strategic autonomy. The most direct impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on European security is to put the EU in a subordinate position to NATO in the defence field, especially in light of the EU *Strategic Compass* document issued in March 2022, which makes clear the EU's dependence on NATO in the field of security. In this context, the security dependence of CEE countries on NATO has been further strengthened, and their status within the transatlantic alliance has been elevated. The pro-American tendencies of CEE countries have made them more cautious about the "European strategic autonomy" advocated by Western European countries such as France and Germany. In this way, the anti-Russian and pro-American tendencies of CEE countries, as well as their strategies adopted, can be leveraged by the US and the UK, making them an important force within the EU to constrain the further development of "European strategic autonomy".

Thirdly, CEE countries will strive for more influence in building a new European security order. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has placed the CEE countries at the forefront of the confrontation between the US and Europe against Russia. Countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and the Baltic States have become strong supporters of Ukraine, a transit hub for Western support for Ukraine, and a rear base for accepting Ukrainian refugees. The status of Central and Eastern Europe in the European geopolitical security order is further rising, which will also lead to their pursuit of more influence in the future construction of the new European security order. They will demand NATO and the EU allocate more security resources to the region, instigate the EU to impose long-term sanctions and repressive measures against Russia, oppose Germany, France, and other countries to engage in dialogue and negotiation with Russia, and rely on the US to gain a more proactive role in transatlantic relations. In conclusion, CEE countries will have more room to take the initiative in the construction of the new European security order, and their efforts to fight for the right to speak will become more apparent.

Fourthly, the military-industrial complex and arms trade in CEE countries will continue to thrive and trigger a new round of military expansion and the arms race. CEE countries will need to import and produce weapons on a large scale to modernise their national defence, creating an important market for American and European arms dealers. Transformations in political, economic,

and social spheres in CEE countries will further drive the transformation and modernization of their defence and military. Additionally, the new forms of warfare demonstrated in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, such as unmanned combat, information warfare, cyber warfare, and propaganda campaigns, will also prompt reflection and learning in CEE countries. They will increase their investment in manpower and resources in the aforementioned areas to meet the demands of the new forms of warfare and the arms race.

Lastly, the response of CEE countries to the threat of “hybrid war” will likely lead to the problem of “pan-securitization”. Since CEE countries are paying more attention to the threat of “hybrid war”, the channels and methods of foreign exchange in the fields of media, think tanks, education, culture, and scientific and technological innovation could be perceived as sources of the threat. This could result in regulation and control under the pretext of national security, giving rise to the problem of “pan-securitization”, which will affect the development of CEE countries’ relations with foreign countries, including China.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has completely disrupted the already fragile geopolitical pattern and political balance of the Central and Eastern European region, resulting in a change in the foreign policies and priorities of the Central and Eastern European countries: Russia has become the most direct security threat to the Central and Eastern European countries, and the United States and its leadership of NATO have become the object of the Central and Eastern European countries’ security reliance. The relatively close relationship between Russia and China has led to an increase in political distrust of China in many CEE countries, while the United States’ role in the region of cooperation and sabotage has made many CEE countries more cautious in their attitude towards China.

Although the security strategies and interest concerns of CEE countries have changed significantly, high-quality promotion of China-CEEC cooperation is still the fundamental purpose of China’s development of its relations with CEE countries. The dramatic changes in Europe’s political ecology and geopolitical security environment have led to a difficult period in its relations with CEE countries, which requires some adjustment for the China-CEEC Cooperation.

First, the countries concerned should not seek to cover all aspects of the basic content of cooperation, reduce the scale of cooperation appropriately, and do a good job in trade, investment, agriculture, tourism, think tanks,

higher education, and other cooperation platforms. They should also cut out inactive cooperation platforms that do not produce results for a long period of time. Second, China-CEEC leaders' summits will be held from time to time according to the results achieved, and ministerial meetings with potential for cooperation and dialogue will be promoted. Last but not least, China should deepen practical cooperation in the areas of trade and investment, connectivity, and green innovation, and instead of pursuing "big projects", it can consider engaging in more small-scale, quick-impact, and good-return projects so as to play a positive role in promoting local employment and development in CEE countries.

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# CHINA'S GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN THE AGE OF NEW MULTILATERAL PARADIGMS

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**Abstract:** Contemporary international landscape is characterised by the emergence of new multilateral paradigms. In such context, China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) has garnered increasing attention as a transformative force with far-reaching implications. This paper examines the evolving dynamics of the GDI amidst the rise of new multilateral approaches to global governance and the structure of the international system. It begins by situating the GDI within the broader context of China's growing influence on the global stage and the shifting multilateral landscape. The text explores how the GDI intersects with emerging multilateral frameworks and institutions, such as the UN, and other mechanisms for its promotion. It examines how China's initiative aligns, complements, or competes with these evolving multilateral approaches and the responses from other major actors in the international arena. The paper concludes by emphasising the importance of a nuanced understanding of China's GDI in the age of new multilateral paradigms. By shedding light on the complexities of the GDI and its interaction with the changing multilateral landscape, this analysis contributes to informed policy discussions and scholarly inquiries about China's role in shaping the future of international relations.

**Keywords:** China, Global Development Initiative, inclusive multipolarity, BRI, geopolitical competition, development, UN.

## INTRODUCTION

China's ascent as a global economic powerhouse has been accompanied by its proactive engagement in global development initiatives, notably the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), established exactly a decade ago. In the ever-evolving global landscape of international relations, the emergence of new multilateral

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The paper presents the findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2023", financed by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia and conducted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade, during the year 2023.

paradigms has reshaped the dynamics of global governance and international cooperation. Amidst these transformations, China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) has emerged as a potent and transformative force, eliciting significant attention and scrutiny. This paper embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the GDI within the context of these new multilateral approaches to global governance and the international system. By analysing its preliminary development phase, underlying principles, and multifaceted components, this paper seeks to illuminate the complex interplay between China's GDI and the evolving multilateral paradigms that define contemporary international relations. The paper situates the GDI within the broader context of China's expanding global influence and the shifting multilateral landscape. The analysis is focused on assessments of the potential benefits and risks associated with China's GDI, particularly in domains such as international trade, investment, infrastructure development, and connectivity. It also addresses some concerns regarding debt sustainability, initial projects performed under its scope, funding, multilateral support from abroad, and the implications of geopolitical competition in the wake of expanding Chinese influence.

Lastly, by shedding light on the intricate complexities of the GDI and its interaction with the changing multilateral security architecture, this paper aims to significantly contribute to informed policy discussions and scholarly inquiries about China's role in shaping the future of international relations. The paper commences by elucidating the foundational tenets and concepts underpinning the GDI, contextualising them within the broader backdrop of an increasingly assertive Chinese contemporary security policy. Following this contextualization, the author proceeds to scrutinise the discernible shift in the multilateral paradigm underpinning the GDI. The ensuing analysis is centred on the meticulous identification of prospective challenges and impediments that the Initiative might confront in the foreseeable future, including potential resistance from individual states within various multilateral forums. Subsequently, a succinct exposition of the limited corpus of academic literature dedicated to the GDI within the realm of international relations theories is provided. This will serve as a preliminary overview of the prevailing scholarly discourse surrounding the GDI. Building upon this, the text proceeds to delineate specific multilateral frameworks and platforms within which the GDI is poised to evolve. It will illuminate the various modalities and prognostications pertaining to the Initiative's prospective development within the complex milieu of multilateral organisations and forums.

## **A NOVELTY OF CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT POLICY – THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**

China's GDI was introduced in a way quite unusual for a superpower. Its president, Xi Jinping, participated in the general debate of the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 21, 2021, during which he delivered a significant address titled "Enhancing Confidence and Collaboratively Addressing Challenges to Foster an Improved Global Order". In his address, Xi unveiled the details of the GDI on the global stage, aligning it with China's recently articulated strategy of 'an inclusive approach to multipolarity' (MFA PRC, 2022a). Through this gesture, China aimed to extend an invitation to nations worldwide to embrace the principles of this Initiative and become active participants, contributing concrete resources to support its effective implementation. Xi further stated that in the realm of global development, it is imperative to emphasise the paramount importance of placing development at the forefront of the global macro-policy agenda. This necessitates a heightened degree of policy coordination among major economies, with a sustained commitment to policy continuity, coherence, and sustainability (Xi, 2021). He furthermore made it crucial to foster 'equitable and balanced global development partnerships', 'augment synergy' among multilateral development cooperation mechanisms, and 'expedite the comprehensive realisation of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development' (Xi, 2021). The centrality of adopting a people-centred approach underscores the imperative of safeguarding and enhancing the well-being of individuals. This approach underscores the need to protect and advance human rights through development initiatives, ensuring that development aligns with the interests and aspirations of the populace.

The commitment to inclusive benefits underscores the need to consider the unique needs and challenges faced by developing countries. Strategies such as debt suspension and development aid are to be employed with a distinct focus on aiding vulnerable nations grappling with exceptional difficulties. That is why Chinese President Xi Jinping highlighted that the core of this commitment lies in the resolve to address disparities in development both among and within countries. In embracing innovation-driven development, it is essential to recognise and harness the opportunities arising from the latest technological revolution and industrial transformation (Xi, 2021). This endeavour demands a redoubling of efforts to leverage



technological advancements for heightened productivity. Simultaneously, it necessitates fostering an environment characterised by openness, fairness, equity, and non-discrimination in the domain of science and technology development. In the post-COVID era, the GDI's primary objective was the cultivation of novel growth drivers, facilitating collective leapfrog development. The commitment to harmony between humanity and the natural world underscores the imperative of enhancing global environmental governance and proactively responding to climate change. This commitment envisions the establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the natural environment, culminating in the creation of a harmonious ecological community. The transition to a green, low-carbon economy, accompanied by green recovery and development, takes precedence. China aims to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, underscoring its resolute dedication to these objectives. Furthermore, China has pledged to enhance support for developing countries in their adoption of green, low-carbon energy solutions while refraining from the establishment of new coal-fired power projects overseas. In the context of results-oriented actions, the imperative is to amplify investments in development. Priority cooperation is imperative in areas encompassing poverty alleviation, food security, pandemic response, vaccine distribution, development financing, climate change mitigation, green development, industrialization, the promotion of the digital economy, and the enhancement of connectivity. The accelerated implementation of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development is pivotal in the pursuit of forging a global community of development with a shared destiny. China has pledged an additional three billion US dollars in international assistance over the next three years to support developing nations in their responses to COVID-19 and the promotion of economic and social recovery.

In 2021, China's State Council Information Office issued a booklet depicting the ideas laying behind China's idea of global development. It sees China as 'an actor having a sense of responsibility as a major country, upholding the universal values of humanity such as peace, development, equity, and freedom', while striving to offer 'more public goods to the international community and join forces to build a better common future' (PRC State Council, 2021, p. 5). Such promotion of global international order with a *shared future* is the very first task of China's international development cooperation (2021, p. 5). What Chinese leaders have always perceived as the

key mission of a modern China is ‘pursuing the greater good and shared interests’, which is also stipulated as the Chinese cultural tradition and its belief in internationalism (2021, p. 5). There are eight principles on which Chinese activities in development cooperation are based: respecting each other as equals; doing the best it can; focusing on people’s lives (and their improvement); performing effective cooperation in diverse forms; providing the means for independent development; ensuring delivery and sustainability; being open and inclusive to promote exchanges and mutual learning; and advancing with the times and breaking new ground (2021, pp. 21-23). Therefore, the GDI serves as an extension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) within the realm of global development. It represents the practical implementation of a human development policy uniquely tailored to China’s specific characteristics. Simultaneously, it embodies the concept of a shared human destiny, which aligns with the principles of Confucian philosophy and is currently championed by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In his exploration of the cultural and philosophical backdrop in which the Global Development Initiative (GDI) was introduced, Ronald Keith (2017) discerns a fundamental distinction between two guiding principles for the conduct of a superpower such as China. Keith contends that ‘harmony’ stands as a response rooted in the logical composition of diverse elements, while ‘uniformity’ seeks merely to replicate and coincide with dissimilar elements. Consequently, ‘harmony’ necessitates ‘independence’ rather than ‘hegemony’ (Keith, 2017). It not only acknowledges disparities between states but also recognises distinctions between civilizations with the goal of transforming them into sources of constructive mutual learning within a future global state of harmony. According to Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily) in Beijing, the lesson to be drawn is that ‘harmony’ should be cultivated through a threefold approach that deconstructs its inherent connotations. Firstly, individuals, and by extension, individual states, are encouraged to take their own initiative. Secondly, individuals or states should allow others the freedom to take initiative. Lastly, individuals must excel at engaging in friendly cooperation with others. Keith (2017) reminds us that the prescription aligns with the five principles and places a new policy emphasis on the ‘democratisation of international relations’ as an alternative to a world dominated by major powers. Significantly, this term appears to offer a potential dividend in China’s pursuit of the influence associated with soft power. The Chinese perspective on the significance of ‘harmony’ sets it apart

from the concept of the ‘clash of civilizations’ and highlights a distinction in how China approaches non-traditional security issues, especially ethnic conflicts and terrorism. The Chinese assertion posits that terrorism does not originate exclusively from ‘civilization’ itself and underscores the importance of recognising differences between civilizations based on the principle of ‘seeking common ground while respecting differences’ to advance human civilization (Keith, 2017).

Wang Lei examines the GDI from three distinct perspectives: historical justification, theoretical underpinnings, and the practical domain of GDI policy. As per the first rationale, Lei believes that the GDI is grounded in a materialist interpretation of world history and that China has introduced the GDI in alignment with the overarching trends of human history. This international Initiative, aimed at fostering global development, holds historical inevitability and sound rationale (Lei, 2022). In the theoretical domain, Wang Lei asserts that the Initiative surpasses the confines of hegemonic stability theory by virtue of China’s proactive provision of international public goods, driven by the dual objective of advancing its own development and that of other nations (Lei, 2022). He contends that, as a public goods initiative rooted in values, the proper alignment of principles and interests establishes a theoretical foundation for international development cooperation. This foundation is predicated on the principles of mutual consultation and common development, aimed at achieving mutual and collective benefits (2022, p. 16). In the sphere of realpolitik, Lei claims that China’s GDI has been severely challenged by numerous geopolitical processes occurring on a global scale. Apart from his argument that ‘protectionism impedes global development’, he believes that confrontation leaves no winners and that retrogression from openness and inclusion to self-seclusion and isolation will dampen the growth of wealth and diminish the momentum of global development. Against the headwinds of globalisation, the GDI has breathed stability and energy into global development (Lei, 2022).

### **The first achievements and the GDI’s multilateral shift**

It is not surprising that the Chinese proposal for the GDI garnered significant support from a substantial portion of the world within the first two years of its existence. During this period, the Chinese government allocated

substantial resources and funds to finance projects within this initiative, some of which have already been implemented. China has also gathered over 100 countries and organisations that openly endorse and support it and has devised several multilateral formats aimed at promoting the GDI. In 2022, the Councillor and Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, Wang Yi, presided over the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative, which garnered the participation of distinguished representatives from 60 nations, comprising four Deputy Prime Ministers and over 30 Foreign Ministers. Additionally, senior officials from approximately ten international organisations and the United Nations (UN)<sup>1</sup> entities, including UNDESA, UN-OHRLS, UNDP, FAO, UNESCO, IMO, IRENA, and the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Africa, were in attendance. During the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative (GDI), convened on September 20, 2022, participants expressed unwavering commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and urged international bodies, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), to play a more substantial role in GDI cooperation to address climate change and promote sustainable development (PRC MFA, 2022). Developed nations were called upon to honour their climate financing pledges of USD 100 billion annually, with support expressed for the Global Climate Fund and Global

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<sup>1</sup> On April 20, 2023, the UN Resident Coordinator in China conducted a briefing on the New Progress of the Global Development Initiative and New Actions to Implement the 2030 Agenda. During the address, it was emphasised that China's GDI is unequivocally linked to the UN 2030 Agenda. The establishment of China's Global Development Initiative in 2021, along with the recent enhancement of the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, presents a significant opportunity to address financing gaps, harness China's technological expertise to support the development priorities of developing countries, and ultimately expedite global progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2023). Furthermore, it was noted that the priority areas of the GDI closely align with many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These areas encompass poverty eradication, food security, health, climate action, preservation of the planet, industrialization, innovation, and means of implementation. The UN welcomed these efforts and expressed its commitment to collaborating with CIDCA and Chinese counterparts to leverage these initiatives for the advancement of south-south cooperation and sustainable development on a global scale in these specific domains (UN, 2023).

Environment Facility to optimise resource utilisation and assist developing countries in their pursuit of sustainable development through climate adaptation and mitigation. Energy access challenges in developing nations were acknowledged as a critical issue, emphasising the need for universal access to affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy and calling for comprehensive engagement in implementing SDG7. Additionally, the importance of promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, diversification of production, and industrialization strategies aligned with national priorities for developing countries was emphasised. Development assistance resource gaps were highlighted, with an invitation for developed countries to enhance communication and align official development assistance with the needs of developing nations. Multilateral development institutions were urged to increase resource allocation for domestic development and the 2030 Agenda implementation, and the significance of strengthening South-South cooperation was underscored. The meeting also addressed the need to overcome supply chain disruptions and enhance regional and cross-regional economic integration and connectivity, with a focus on digital technologies, knowledge sharing, and people-to-people exchanges. Openness and inclusivity in GDI cooperation were deemed essential, inviting the participation of other countries and international organisations, including think tanks, enterprises, multilateral development agencies, and civil society. Finally, UN development agencies were recognised as important partners, with discussions on establishing a task force to strengthen policy dialogues, strategic alignment, and resource mobilisation in priority GDI areas (MFA PRC, 2022a).

In 2022, China made a significant announcement regarding the transformation of the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund into the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, accompanied by an augmentation of its total funding to \$4 billion (Xinhua, 2023). As part of this initiative, Chinese financial institutions have established a dedicated fund of \$10 billion for the implementation of the GDI, with more than 200 cooperation projects integrated into the GDI project portfolio (Xinhua, 2023).

Over the last three years, a variety of politico-security events have shaped the international system on a worldwide scale. For this reason, the analysis of the GDI as a *sui generis* China's policy should include the burgeoning multilateral paradigms, emphasising projects like the BRICS, forums to support

the GDI, and UN efforts in the GDI implementation. In June 2022, President Xi Jinping presided over the High-level Dialogue on Global Development, which saw the participation of 18 nations, including Egypt, Argentina, Indonesia, Iran, the Russian Federation, Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Malaysia, and Thailand (MFA PRC, 2022).<sup>2</sup>

In his speech titled “Forging High-quality Partnership for a New Era of Global Development”, President Xi underscored the enduring significance of development as a paramount human endeavour. He emphasised that continued development is imperative for realising improved living standards and social stability (MFA PRC, 2022). Despite ongoing global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulties in implementing the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, and widening North-South disparities, President Xi observed that emerging markets and developing countries have made notable strides in various domains (MFA PRC, 2022). These countries are increasingly committed to unity, peace, and cooperation, and they are poised to harness opportunities stemming from the ongoing scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation.

## **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF THE GDI**

Drawing from an array of academic sources and policy analyses, it can be observed that China has outlined a series of tangible measures in collaboration with international partners to advance the implementation of the High-level Dialogue on Global Development and Global Development Initiative (GDI) cooperation. These measures span various domains. For instance, China has initiated the release of the initial GDI project implementations to serve as exemplars of collaborative efforts. Additionally, there is a focus on enhancing agricultural technical cooperation to promote sustainable and eco-friendly farming practices. Furthermore, China is actively

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<sup>2</sup> All member states of the BRICS grouping, which encompasses even four of the six nations that extended invitations to participate in the initiative, namely Egypt, Argentina, Iran, and Ethiopia, were counted among the 18 nations in attendance. It is noteworthy that these four countries are slated to become full members of BRICS, effective January 1, 2024. This development underscores the widespread endorsement of the initiative and reaffirms the robust diplomatic and economic ties shared with the People’s Republic of China, as well as its alignment with its foreign policy objectives.

engaging in global clean energy cooperation and facilitating smart customs and connectivity initiatives. It has also taken steps to establish the World Digital Education Alliance, aiming to optimise education resources through digitization. Another notable endeavour involves the promotion of the “Bamboo as a Substitute for Plastic” Initiative in collaboration with the International Bamboo and Rattan Organisation. Lastly, China is committed to the global sharing of data acquired from the Sustainable Development Science Satellite (SDGSAT-1) to inform decision-making in support of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, participants at the Ministerial Meeting expressed gratitude for China’s role in hosting the event and for the release of the GDI project pool projects and related concept papers, affirming their commitment to active engagement in cooperative efforts. They also emphasised the importance of heightened communication between UN development agencies and the participating nations to invigorate the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through GDI cooperation.

Kurita (2021) delves into the examination of China’s development policy in the context of its foreign policy principle of non-intervention. He contends that China has exhibited a decreasing reluctance to engage with non-governmental entities in regions of instability, marking a departure from its traditional approach of exclusively dealing with incumbent governments or a single party during conflicts. He enlists the case of Myanmar, in which China found itself facing local anti-China sentiments due to its perceived favouritism towards a select elite group through its economic presence (Kurita, 2021). To address this, China proactively initiated direct engagement with various local stakeholders, including local businesses, government officials, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the Buddhist clergy. This engagement aimed to garner support for its economic initiatives while also serving as a mediator in resolving conflicts between the Myanmar government and ethnic rebel groups (2021, p. 5). The GDI faces significant challenges due to increasing Sino-scepticism in certain parts of the world, notably in Europe. This scepticism often centres on concerns about China’s political intentions, transparency in its initiatives, and adherence to international norms. To overcome these challenges, China may need to engage in more transparent communication, address regional anxieties, and demonstrate a commitment to the principles of mutual cooperation and inclusivity that underlie the GDI.

Inclusion of China's global development into a multilateral approach is not a novelty. Although it can be argued that some of the most recent attempts made by Beijing are indeed oriented towards a multilateral approach, this idea was presented quite earlier. It thematically stuck to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development with an initial idea to follow 8 areas of interest in which China would actively participate: poverty reduction, food security, healthcare, high-quality education, gender equality, infrastructure, sustainable and innovation-driven economic growth, and eco-environmental protection (PRC State Council, 2021).

The GDI has attracted a lot of attention within the UN system. In June 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the "Progress Report on the Global Development Initiative" (GDI). According to the Report, the GDI's primary objective remains the 'consolidation of global consensus on prioritising development to expedite the realisation of the 2030 UN Agenda' (MFA PRC, 2023). With the midway point in the 2030 Agenda's implementation, it is imperative that the GDI efficiently mobilises and allocates resources to maximise the synergies created for development (2023, p. 39). The GDI, serving as a significant public good and an inclusive cooperation platform accessible to the international community, presents an opportunity for China, as a developing nation, to increase its efforts in rallying international development resources. These resources are vital for advancing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through GDI cooperation. Participating countries in the GDI should explore inventive strategies and cooperative models to engage further developed nations, international financial institutions, development aid organisations, Chinese and international corporations, as well as non-profit foundations. Encouraging increased contributions and participation in GDI cooperation is essential. Furthermore, the GDI must deepen its practical cooperation efforts, yielding concrete advantages for the development of all nations, particularly those in the developing world. It is crucial to prioritise project design and implementation based on actual development needs, adopt a project-centric approach, foster extensive involvement, embrace comprehensive collaboration, and place special emphasis on addressing critical issues.



## CONCLUSION

As of the very beginning of the Initiative's implementation, China has made notable efforts to promote it as a widely spread and universally accepted global policy. In November 2022, Wang Yi emphasised that the Global Development Initiative represented 'another significant global public good championed by President Xi Jinping, building upon the foundation of the BRI' (China Embassy to the US, 2022). This initiative, according to Wang, has played 'a pivotal role in expediting the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and revitalising global development efforts, aligning seamlessly with the aspirations of nations worldwide, particularly those in the extensive developing world' (China Embassy to the US, 2022).

In this manner, this paper reiterated the significance of China's GDI in the age of new multilateral paradigms. It underscores the need for ongoing research and policy discourse to fully comprehend the evolving role of China in shaping the future of international relations. The assessment of the GDI's chances and difficulties in the report also highlights the potential advantages of increased global investment, commerce, and infrastructure growth. It has, however, not shied away from tackling issues like debt sustainability, environmental effects, and the complexity of global competition. A sophisticated understanding of the GDI has also been stressed, taking historical explanations, theoretical foundations, and real-world policy domains into account. The GDI is now seen as a key global public good thanks to Wang Lei's insights on how it fits with historical patterns, theoretical precepts, and realpolitik considerations. As China continues to assert its influence on the global stage, the GDI represents a pivotal component of its foreign policy and development strategy. The GDI's ability to consolidate global consensus on development, foster international cooperation, and contribute to the realisation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is of paramount importance.

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# THE EVOLUTION OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ORDER AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA: A TENTATIVE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** The Russia-Ukraine conflict led to the collapse of the European security order and ended the peace dividend after the end of the Cold War. This paper analyses the evolution of European security from the Cold War era to the post-Cold War era and European security in crisis after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The post-Cold War European order is a transitional order, and the shaping of the order was realised through the expansion of NATO and the European Union as the products of the bipolar order. The expansion of Western power and the contraction of Russian power have caused the asymmetry and imbalance of European power. The Russia-Ukraine full-scale military conflict that broke out on February 24, 2022, was a blow to the European security order after the Cold War. Based on a review of the evolution of the European security order, this paper points out its implications for China. China was not a player in European security in the Cold War era. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, China recognised the new geopolitical reality in Europe. China closely follows the development of the European security situation but never gets involved in European security affairs. Only after the outbreak of the Ukrainian War did China become an interlocutor in European security.

**Keywords:** European Security Order, Geopolitics, Russia-Ukraine Conflict, China.

It has been more than a year and a half since Russia launched its “special military operation” against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The East Slavs have been caught up in bloody fratricide. It is the most tragic war experienced by the European continent after the end of the Second World War. The scale, intensity, and severity of the war far exceed the regional conflicts caused by the disintegration of federal states in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine presages the collapse of the European security order after the Cold War, and the end of the war will reshape the European security structure to a great extent. It will definitely impact Europe as a whole, as well as the Western Balkans. This paper will analyse the evolution of the European security order,

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first by reviewing the European security order during the Cold War, second by examining the European security order in the post-Cold War era, and finally by exploring the main challenges to European security in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Based on the review of the evolution of the European security order, this paper will point out its implications for China.

## **THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ORDER DURING THE COLD WAR**

There were two world wars in Europe in the 20th century, which caused tens of millions of casualties. The United States participated in the First World War, and the 14-point peace plan put forward by President Woodrow Wilson on the eve of the end of the war played a role in shaping the post-war European order. After the war, American troops left Europe. As an anti-fascist ally, the United States participated in the Second World War, contributing to defeating fascist Germany in Europe. With the end of the Second World War, the friendship between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union came to an end, and Europe was increasingly divided. On March 5, 1946, Winston Churchill, the former British Prime Minister, delivered the famous Iron Curtain speech in Fulton, US, saying that 'from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest, and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow' (Churchill, 1946). He called on the Anglo-American alliance to counter the Soviet Union. From the Truman Doctrine to the Marshall Plan, American containment policy towards the Soviet Union took shape. On April 4, 1949, the foreign ministers of the United States, Britain, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, and the NATO military alliance was established. For the first time, the United States has bound its own security to the security of continental Europe and has become an indispensable stakeholder in European security. In 1949, West Germany and East Germany were established one after another, and the division of Germany became a reality. The Treaty establishing the European Defence Community (the Treaty of Paris), signed by the Benelux countries, France,

Italy, and West Germany in 1952, was rejected by the French National Assembly in 1954. Against this backdrop, West Germany joined NATO on May 5, 1955, which was called a “decisive historical turning point” on the European continent by the then Norwegian Foreign Minister Halvard Lange. The Soviet Union, worried about the rearmament of West Germany, established the Warsaw Treaty Organisation with seven Eastern European countries on May 14. Europe formed a security pattern in which two major military groups, NATO, led by the United States, and the Warsaw Pact Organisation, led by the Soviet Union, confronted each other. On May 15, 1955, the Austrian State Treaty that granted Austria independence was signed by the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and France. Austria declared neutrality while the Soviet Union withdrew troops. The erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 became a milestone in the division of Europe.

The confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union is an all-round confrontation in the fields of ideology, social system, technology, economy, and military affairs. In the nuclear age, the intensification of the confrontation between the two nuclear superpowers put the world at risk of nuclear war. Europe was at the centre of the confrontation between the two superpowers, and the shadow of war hung over the European continent. The development of ballistic missile technology had pushed the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union to a new level. The balance of terror caused by “mutually assured destruction” in the nuclear age forced the United States and the Soviet Union to cooperate. After the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the fear of nuclear war drove the leaders of the two countries to sign the first nuclear arms control treaties. In order to reduce the risk of nuclear war, the White House opened a direct telephone line with the Kremlin. Thanks to the relatively harmonious relationship between Nixon and Brezhnev, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union entered a period of detente in the late 1960s. The leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union held a summit and signed many international treaties, such as the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, formally the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space, and Under Water (1963), the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968), and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972).

In the context of the detente between the United States and the Soviet Union, Willy Brandt became the Chancellor of West Germany in 1969, and

“change through reconciliation” was regarded as a noble idea. Ostpolitik was introduced, and a new situation emerged in the detente between the East and the West. In November 1969, West Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In August 1970, West Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Moscow, which stipulated that the border was “inviolable”, including the Oder-Neisse line, which forms the western frontier of the People’s Republic of Poland, and the frontier between the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). In December 1970, West Germany and Poland signed the Warsaw Treaty, which recognised the border of the Oder-Neisse line and declared that there was no territorial claim between them. Willy Brandt’s touching kneeling in Warsaw became a symbol of German-Polish reconciliation. In December 1972, two Germans at the forefront of the confrontation between the two camps signed the Basic Treaty on Relations between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic to normalise their relations. Subsequently, the two Germanys set up permanent representative offices, respectively, and both joined the United Nations. These treaties, based on the inviolability of existing borders and the renunciation of the use of force, have promoted the detente between the East and the West.

In July 1973, 33 European countries and the United States held a conference on European security and cooperation in Helsinki. The issues discussed involved the division of Germany, human rights in Eastern Europe, the level of American military power in Europe, and the future of the Baltic states. As a permanent negotiation forum, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe became an important part of the European security architecture under the bipolar structure. On August 1, 1975, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe adopted the Helsinki Final Act (also known as the Helsinki Accords). Representatives from 35 countries, including the Warsaw Pact member countries, NATO member countries, and non-aligned countries, attended the meeting. The Declaration of Principles Governing the Relations of Participating Countries put forward ten principles: sovereign equality and respect for the inherent rights of sovereignty; no threat or use of force; the boundary is inviolable; the territorial integrity of the country; peaceful settlement of disputes; non-interference in internal affairs; respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief; equal rights and self-determination

of people; cooperation between countries; and sincerely fulfilling the obligations stipulated in international law. These principles have become the cornerstone of the European security order.

Under the bipolar order, the United States pitted against the Soviet Union, the European Community competed with the CMEA, and NATO confronted the Warsaw Pact Organisation. Although there was a military confrontation between the Warsaw Pact and NATO in Europe during the Cold War, the balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union and the balance of terror in the nuclear age prevented the two sides from directly interfering in each other's sphere of influence, and Europe maintained peace for 45 years. While the United States condemned Soviet military intervention in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, it did not take substantive hostile action against the Soviet Union. The adoption of the Helsinki Agreement in 1975 laid the foundation for cooperation between the East camp and the West camp.

### **THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ORDER IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA**

After Mikhail Gorbachev came into power in March 1985, the Soviet Union's foreign policy towards its satellite states changed fundamentally. The Soviet Union abandoned Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty and stopped interfering in the political changes in eastern European countries. In 1989, the dramatic changes of the domino effect in Eastern European countries were dazzling, which shook the European security order formed during the Cold War, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall heralded the end of European division. Gorbachev's "common European home" put forward in the Council of Europe has brought new political imagination to a changing Europe. On December 3, 1989, US President Bush and Soviet leader Gorbachev announced the end of the Cold War in Malta. On October 3, 1990, Germany achieved reunification. In June 1991, the Soviet-led Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) was dissolved, and on July 1, the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact Organisation was disbanded. On December 31, 1991, the Soviet Union, as a superpower, disintegrated, and 15 newly independent states emerged in the space of the former Soviet Union, among which Russia, which inherited the status of the Soviet Union in terms of international law, was the largest country.



The Charter of Paris for a New Europe, adopted by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in November 1990, declared the end of the era of confrontation and division in Europe and the beginning of a new era of democracy, peace, and unity. The Charter of Paris emphasises that 'Security is indivisible, and the security of every participating state is inseparably linked to that of all the others' (CSCE, 1990). In 1995, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe changed from a multilateral conference to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the institutionalization of the OSCE was strengthened. The Istanbul Summit of the OSCE in 1999 and the Astana Summit in 2010 reaffirmed the principle of indivisibility of security and stressed that no country or group of countries 'can regard any part of the OSCE area as its sphere of influence'. The Charter for European Security adopted by the OSCE in 1999 pointed out the new risks and new challenges facing the European continent's security in the post-Cold War strategic environment, reaffirmed some basic principles, and stipulated strengthening of the OSCE's operational capacity in conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict recovery. Up to now, the OSCE has 57 member countries and is the largest regional security forum. The OSCE is regarded as one of the pillars of European security. The decision-making of the OSCE is based on consensus among the participating states. The OSCE has also been criticised. For example, Russia criticised the OSCE as a tool for Western countries to advance their own interests. In his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin accused Western countries of trying to transform the OSCE into a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries (Putin, 2007). Different interpretations of the indivisibility of security are easy to cause controversy.

Although the European Union is becoming more and more unified, it has not yet become an effective security actor. In November 1993, the Treaty on the European Union (the Maastricht Treaty) came into effect, and the European Community was transformed into the European Union. The EU experienced four rounds of expansion in 1995, 2004, 2007, and 2013. In 1995, Austria, Sweden, and Finland joined the EU. On May 1, 2004, ten countries, including Malta, Cyprus, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, joined the EU, bringing the total number of EU members to 25. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007. Croatia joined the European Union in 2013. The end of the Cold War has not

reduced the weight of military power in determining international affairs. In the Balkan crisis in the 1990s, Europe was unable to cope with the international crisis on the European continent. Whether it was the Bosnia and Herzegovina crisis or the Kosovo crisis, the ultimate solution to the crisis depended on the military strength of the United States. In the name of humanitarian intervention, NATO's brutal bombing of Yugoslavia set a bad example in international relations and internationalized the Kosovo issue. The Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union, which came into being in 1999, mainly focused on crisis management and was unable to deal with the security crisis on the European continent independently.

After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact Organisation, the US-led NATO continued to expand. Before the end of the Cold War, NATO had 16 member countries. After five rounds of enlargement, 14 Central and Eastern European countries joined NATO. After the end of the Cold War, politicians in Central and Eastern European countries called for NATO's eastward expansion, which initiated discussions on NATO's expansion. President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia regarded the transformed NATO as the main guarantor of European security and the future security structure of Europe. The politicians of Central and Eastern European countries emphasised the unjust treatment suffered by Central and Eastern European countries from Munich to Yalta. Polish Foreign Minister Dariusz Rosati believed that NATO's eastward enlargement was a historic act of compensation. It ended the division of Europe and laid the foundation for Europe to establish a new political order based on cooperation, common values, and respect for the law. He stated, 'Enlargement is the only realistic way to build a new, effective security architecture for Europe and to overcome the divisions of the continent' (Rosati, 1996). The double enlargement of the EU and NATO shaped the security order in Europe. Both the European Union and NATO tried to integrate Russia into a specific institutional framework, but in the end, they failed. From the partnership and cooperation agreement in 1994 to the four common spaces in 2005 (common economic space, common space of freedom, security and justice, common space of external security, and common space of research and education), and then to the modernization partnership in 2010, Europe-Russian relations have made progress. Since 2012, Russia has decided to kick-start the Eurasian Union, and its interest in the free trade zone from Lisbon to Vladivostok has been greatly reduced. Russia was increasingly wary of the cooperation between the EU and

countries from the former Soviet space. In 2013, Russia took the initiative to prevent Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia from signing free trade agreements with the European Union. After the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the EU imposed sanctions on Russia, and EU-Russia cooperation came to a standstill. After the end of the Cold War, NATO regarded Russia as a partner. In 1994, Russia joined the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme. In 1997, NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, which contributed to the establishment of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) as a mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision-making, and joint action. In 2002, the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council was replaced by the NATO-Russia Council. Since the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine in 2004-2005 and the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, the relationship between NATO and Russia has begun to deteriorate. In 2014, due to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, NATO suspended cooperation with Russia.

The post-Cold War European order is a transitional order, and the shaping of the order is realised through the expansion of NATO and the European Union, which are the products of bipolar order, to some extent. The expansion of Western power and the contraction of Russian power have caused the asymmetry and imbalance of European power. Some Russian scholars assumed that the West did not recognise Russia as an equal creator of the new Europe. Russia also does not agree to play a subordinate role. Russia believes that the West has broken its promise and expanded NATO to Russia’s border, which has damaged Russia’s security interests. Russia believes that the post-Cold War European order has not given Russia a proper position. In 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev proposed to negotiate a new Pan-European Security Treaty and advocated transcending the Euro-Atlantic security order and forming an inclusive new security order from Vancouver to Vladivostok. In 2009, Russia announced the draft European Security Treaty. The West and Russia have different understandings of European security. The West blames the Ukrainian crisis on Russia’s trampling on international law, while Russia blames the Ukrainian crisis on the inadequate European security structure. Former Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov believed that ‘the Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated the fragility and unreliability of the existing institutions of Euro-Atlantic security. Regrettably, Europe does not have a single valid agreement on the control of conventional arms and armed forces. Plans to modernize the OSCE remain on the drawing board, while even in its

heyday, the NATO-Russia Council functioned primarily as a technical body' (The Atlantic Council, 2014). In December 2021, Russia unilaterally published the draft documents of the US-Russia Security Guarantee Treaty and the Russian NATO Security Agreement, which reflected Russia's full rejection of the post-Cold War European security order. Russia assumed that the United States and NATO did not give a concrete and substantive response to Russia's proposals. Some observers perceive Russia's ultimatum as meaning Russia may have decided to change the European security order by force.

### **THE PREDICAMENT OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ORDER AFTER THE UKRAINE CRISIS**

The Russia-Ukraine military conflict that broke out on February 24, 2022, was a fatal blow to the European security order after the Cold War. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz assumed that Putin was demolishing the European security order that had prevailed for almost half a century since the Helsinki Final Act (Scholz, 2022). European countries have increased their military expenditures. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the military expenditures in Western and Central Europe in 2022 exceeded the level in 1989 for the first time (Boffey, 2023). Zbigniew Rau, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE and Polish Foreign Minister, believes that Europe is facing 'the most serious collapse of the security architecture since the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act' (OSCE, 2022). Bulgarian President Radev said that 'the security architecture built in Europe is in disintegration, and that is why the war in Ukraine contributed' (Dukovska, 2023). French President Macron stressed that Europe must begin to prepare for the establishment of a new security architecture on the European continent. In December 2022, President Macron emphasised that the West should consider how to address Russia's need for security guarantees if President Vladimir Putin agrees to negotiations about ending the war in Ukraine (Reuters, 2022). German Chancellor Olaf Scholz believes that if Russia ends the war, Europe should go back to the pre-war "peace order" and resolve "all questions of common security" with Russia after the end of the war (Sharma, 2022).

The war between Russia and Ukraine revitalized NATO, which was called "brain death" by French President Macron several years ago. Neutral

countries Finland and Sweden applied to join NATO, and Finland became a member state of NATO. The border between NATO and Russia has been extended by 1340 kilometers. If Sweden joins, the Baltic Sea will become an “inland sea” of NATO. The relationship between NATO and Ukraine has been strengthened. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, who visited Ukraine on April 20, stressed that ‘Ukraine’s rightful place is in the Euro-Atlantic family. Ukraine’s rightful place is in NATO. And over time, our support will help to make this possible’ (NATO, 2023). After the war, Ukraine’s accession to NATO is a foregone conclusion. NATO still has a place in the future European security order. The Russia-Ukraine military conflict is a serious blow to the Helsinki Spirit. Whether the mission of the OSCE can be redefined and whether Europe can revive the Helsinki Spirit in the new geopolitical environment is still uncertain. The newly-formed European Political Community is still a blank canvas, which may become an integral part of the future European security order.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has pushed the geopolitical centre of gravity in Europe eastward, and the space of the former Soviet Union will become the stage for the game between the West and Russia. As a result of the Ukrainian crisis, Ukraine and Moldova have become EU candidates. In the former Soviet space, frozen conflicts will become the focus of attention. At present, the bloody conflict in Ukraine is still going on, and it is impossible to die down in the short term. Ukraine stressed that peace must be just and sustainable, based on the principles of international law and respect for the Charter of the United Nations, and that the territorial integrity of Ukraine must be restored within the 1991 borders. Russia, on the other hand, emphasises that peace must be based on Russian conditions and that Ukraine has to accept new territorial realities.

Russia has suffered unprecedented international sanctions from the West, and the NATO Madrid Summit called Russia the biggest and most direct threat to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. Europe calls for a new security order after the war. Europe needs a new strategic thinking beyond alliance and balance of power, rethinking the mission of the existing European security architecture and creating a new security architecture for the space of the former Soviet Union. In the discussion of the European security order, the hawkish view emphasises that Russia must be excluded from the European security architecture. Regardless of the outcome of the crisis,

Russia, with the largest nuclear arsenal in the world, will remain an unavoidable neighbour of Europe. Without Russia's participation, it is impossible to have a stable European security architecture, and if Russia is fully integrated into the new security architecture, balancing the interests of the EU and NATO with those of Russia will be a big problem.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has cast a shadow over regional security in the Western Balkans. Bulgarian President Radev stated that 'Europe's security architecture is falling apart, which may lead to instability in the Balkans region, whose peace and stability are threatened by the war on Ukraine' (Radoykov & Ozturk, 2023). Taking into consideration Russia's extensive influence in the Western Balkans, the Albanian authorities in Priština are worried about Russia's efforts at destabilisation in the region (Bllaca 2022). Denko Maleski, the first foreign minister of North Macedonia after independence, believed that the confrontation between Russia and the West heralds a "perilous era" for the Western Balkans (Nikolov, 2022). Immediately after the conflict in Ukraine broke out, the EU sent 500 more peacekeepers to Bosnia and Herzegovina to cope with the possible unstable situation. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, was worried that 'the crisis in Ukraine may spread to the Western Balkans' (BiEPAG, 2022). NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg claimed that Russia might provoke conflicts in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, highlighting Bosnia and Herzegovina as one of the countries at particular risk of further Russian aggression after Ukraine (Čančar, 2022). Some political forces in the western Balkan countries used the Ukrainian crisis to seek political interests.

It should be noted that the eastward shift of the European geopolitical centre of gravity will have impacts on the Western Balkans. The focus of attention of the West has turned to the space of the former Soviet Union. Certainly, Ukraine will be the core. Therefore, the Western Balkans will become the edge of Western attention. Considering the geopolitical importance of the Western Balkans, the United States and Europe will not abandon the Western Balkans. The West will not allow large-scale conflicts in the Western Balkans. The West will try to contain unstable factors in the region and nip the conflict in the bud. The fierce fighting in Ukraine is still raging; it is too soon to know the final outcome. There is no doubt that the outcome on the battlefield will change the geopolitics of Europe. The new

European security order will be formed after the end of the conflict. It is hard to say what kind of new security order will be formed or what the place of Russia will be in the new security order. The conflict has weakened Russia's status as a major power, and Russia's influence in the Western Balkans is likely to decline.

### **Changes in the European Security Order and China**

It should be noted that China was not a player in European security in the Cold War era. After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China pursued the foreign policy of "Leaning to One Side", which means China's diplomacy leans to the side of the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. China's top priority in foreign policy was given to the socialist countries led by the Soviet Union. China committed that its new diplomatic relations with foreign countries should be based on equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for territorial sovereignty. The Soviet Union and Eastern European countries belonged to the first group of countries that recognised the PRC and established diplomatic relations with it in the wake of its founding. China signed the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union in 1950, which served China's own security needs. When the Soviet Union formed the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, China did not join the alliance, as this military alliance mainly focused on European security. Due to ideological differences and conflicts of national interests, China's relations with the Soviet Union started to deteriorate in the late 1950s. The two socialist powers drifted apart in the 1960s, and the Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969 put two countries on the brink of total war. China maintained independent foreign policy and resolutely opposed the attempt of the Soviet armed intervention in Poland in 1956. In August 1968, when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia, Romania was worried about its own security. China's Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, personally went to the Romanian Embassy in Beijing to attend the Romanian National Day reception, strongly condemning the Soviet invasion and expressing his support for the independence of all countries. It was the Sino-Soviet split that pushed China and the United States towards rapprochement, which became an important factor affecting the development of the Cold War and the global geopolitical landscape. After the mid-1960s, China's relations with most Eastern European countries worsened as the foreign policies of the members within the Soviet

bloc had to be in tune with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, China started to establish diplomatic relations with Western European countries. China established diplomatic relations with the European Economic Community (the predecessor of the European Union) in 1975 and kick-started widespread interaction with Western Europe.

With the end of the Cold War, China recognised the new geopolitical reality in Europe. China closely follows the development of the European security situation but never gets involved in European security affairs. On the one hand, China has established normal state relations with the successor states of the Soviet Union and Central and Eastern European countries, and China has established a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination with Russia. On the other hand, China has been supportive of European integration. China views China-EU relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, firmly believing that the development of China-EU relations is in the common interest of both sides. China established a strategic partnership with the European Union in 2003. China took a regional approach towards Central and Eastern Europe. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC Cooperation) was launched as a cross-regional cooperation platform in 2012.

China closely followed the security situation in Southeastern Europe after the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. When Kosovo became a hotspot in the late 1990s, China stated that the Kosovo issue was Yugoslavia's internal affair and should be properly resolved by the Yugoslav parties concerned. Yugoslavia's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected. China insisted that, without Yugoslavia's request, it was not appropriate for the United Nations Security Council to intervene in Yugoslavia's internal affairs. When NATO started air strikes against Yugoslavia in 1999, China highlighted that the NATO actions violated the United Nations Charter and called for an immediate halt to air strikes in the UN Security Council. China assumed that the NATO actions seriously violated the United Nations Charter and the norms of international relations, undermined the authority of the United Nations Security Council, and set an extremely dangerous and bad international precedent in the history of modern international relations. China deeply understood the trauma suffered by the Serbian people. China also suffered casualties and physical losses when the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade became the target of a brutal NATO attack



during the war. China participated in the United Nations peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia and sent peacekeeping police to the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

Only after the outbreak of war in Ukraine did China become an interlocutor in European security. The Russia-Ukraine conflict fundamentally changed the European geopolitical landscape, and the result of the war will reshape the European security order. China is very concerned about the evolution of the European security order and its global implications. Peace and stability in Europe are in China's interest, as Europe is China's major economic partner in terms of trade, investment, and supply chain. The Russia-Ukraine conflict puts China in a difficult position, as China has a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination with Russia and a strategic partnership with Ukraine. China does not want to see Russia and Ukraine at war. When the conflict broke out, China had to take a position. From China's official point of view, the Ukrainian issue has a complex and special historical context. China understands Russia's legitimate security concerns. China advocates that the Cold War mentality should be completely abandoned and a balanced, effective, and sustainable European security mechanism should be finally formed through dialogue and negotiation.

China presented its Peace Plan. On the one-year anniversary of the conflict, China issued a document entitled "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis", which put forward a 12-point Peace Plan (MFA, 2023b). China's position includes respecting the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the Cold War mentality, ceasing hostilities, resuming peace talks, resolving the humanitarian crisis, protecting civilians and prisoners of war (POWs), keeping nuclear power plants safe, reducing strategic risks, facilitating grain exports, stopping unilateral sanctions, keeping industrial and supply chains stable, and promoting post-conflict reconstruction. Although China's Peace Plan has received different reactions, this is the first time that China has put forward a peace plan for conflicts on the European continent. It demonstrates that China has started to constructively engage in European security.

China committed to promote peace talks and a political settlement of the conflict. China's Special Representative for Eurasian Affairs, Li Hui, visited Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany, the European Union headquarters, and Russia from May 15 to 26, 2023, and had extensive exchanges with relevant

parties in an attempt to gather international consensus and promote the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. In his tour of Europe, Ambassador Li called on Europe to address the causes of the conflict in Ukraine. China has maintained communication with major powers in Europe. Chinese leaders reaffirmed China's support for Europe to play an important role in facilitating peace talks and building a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture in Europe. China has insisted that nuclear weapons cannot be used and that nuclear wars must not be fought to prevent a nuclear crisis in Eurasia.

China's constructive engagement in European security is compatible with China's vision of global security. Back in 2014, at the Shanghai Summit of the CICA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia), President Xi Jinping called for common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. At the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference on April 21, 2022, President Xi Jinping formally proposed the Global Security Initiative (GSI). Minister Wang Yi emphasised that the GSI offers a Chinese proposal for addressing global security challenges and achieving durable peace and security in the world (Wang, 2022). Before the first anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China unveiled "the Global Security Initiative Concept Paper", which systematically expounds China's new vision of global security (MFA, 2023a). The GSI rests on the following "six commitments or pillars": pursuing common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security; respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; adhering to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter; taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously; peacefully resolving differences and disputes between countries through dialogue and consultation; and maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains. It should be noted that the concept paper makes no reference to European security; it may reflect China's circumspect attitude towards European security due to the complicated dynamics of geopolitics. China's position on the Ukrainian crisis largely reflects the main commitments of the Global Security Initiative, for example, sustainable security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; adhering to the UN Charter; considering the security concerns of all parties; and peaceful resolution of differences and disputes through dialogue and consultation.

China is no longer a spectator of the evolution of the European security order. China has become an interlocutor in European security after the Ukraine crisis. Despite the fact that China is not an actor in the European security architecture, this does not preclude China from clearly expressing its views on the European security architecture. China does not strive for geopolitical interests in Europe. China will constructively and responsibly engage in European security affairs and play a positive role in world peace and security.

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# CHINESE FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY AND EU COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY FROM A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** The policy paper provides a comparative study of China-EU relations from the point of view of their foreign and security agendas and interests in the international system. The evolution of their foreign and security policy profiles has been analysed in different historical and geopolitical contexts. Based on the specificities of their political and developmental models, China and the EU use different sets of principles and tools to project power in international affairs. The primary source of knowledge for the topic comes from a detailed examination of the major strategic documents (concepts and strategies) of China and the EU in the field of foreign and security policies. These documents shed light on Beijing and Brussels' strategic culture, their level of ambition, an assessment of the regional and global strategic environment, the nature of security-driven partnerships they pursue, their foreign (diplomatic) and security tools, priorities, and goals. The EU and China's foreign policy and decision-making systems from the point of institutionalisation, stakeholders involved, policy planning, coordination, policy advice, and policy execution have also been observed.

**Keywords:** EU-China relations, international system, geopolitics, multilateralism, foreign and security policy, strategic culture.

## INTRODUCTORY REMARK

China and the EU are major actors in the international system, each driven by the specificities of their development, strategic culture, foreign policy, security profiles, and interests. Yet, there are very different actors.

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## **EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S DEVELOPMENT, FOREIGN, AND SECURITY POLICY AND POWER PROJECTION**

The People's Republic of China as an embodiment of modern China emerged after a long historical period of internal turbulence, foreign intervention, and civil war in 1949. It then went through critical milestones of state development and maturation. Starting from Mao Zedong's establishment of the republic based on Marxist social ideology and the principle of national unification (later defined as the One China Principle), followed by internal political, economic, and cultural commotions caused by the Cultural Revolution, and undergoing through Deng Xiaoping's profound economic reforms (that produced the present developmental model, defined as "a socialist market economy"), up to the new wave of societal transformation and strategic development under the leadership of Xi Jinping since 2015, defined as 'gaining wisdom, marching forward' (The Economist, 2018).

The Chinese developmental model demonstrates a remarkable ability to adapt to internal and external pressures. The country's leadership learns from its mistakes, as the country has permanently been in a state of opening up and reforming. It is not surprising that one of the key operative bodies responsible for national strategic medium-to-long economic planning is called the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

Chinese foreign policy concepts, such as "community of a shared future for mankind" and the Belt and Road Initiative's push for "global connectivity and shared development", are derived from Chinese strategic thinking and culture. It is therefore right to assume that the cultural dimension has a significant impact on the formation of modern Chinese statehood and its foreign policy-making (apart from socio-economic and ideological considerations). The cultural dimension consists of five major elements: a) contextuality: seeing things from a broader perspective; deductive approach: analysing the context (mega trend) in international relations; b) changeability: being flexible to a constantly evolving environment; change and adaptation to what is going on in the world; c) correlativity: seeing things in comparison; things are correlated to each other; d) complementarity: there is no difference between different identities, but they complement each other and still be one; e) civilizational depth: Chinese traditional values understood as living in harmony but not in uniformity, respect for otherness in world politics, and a country's choice of developmental model and foreign policy orientation. In

addition, China's political system rests on the synergy of Marxist ideology and the traditional values of Confucianism.

China's modern foreign and security policy profile has evolved throughout the years. During the Cold War, Beijing managed to utilise the US-USSR bipolarity confrontation in its geopolitical favour. The normalisation of relations with the West, and with the US in particular, during the early 1970s of the last century helped China regain its place as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The period was also marked by the establishment of official relations between China and the European Community (through its European Commission's representation) in 1975. EU-China relations first developed through trade, education, and cultural exchange, while dialogue in the field of strategic security was included much later in the bilateral agenda. On the global stage, China was among the founders of the Non-Alignment Movement. It utilised the process of decolonization to develop pro-active relations with the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is in this context that China has always represented itself as one of the leaders of the developing world (currently defined as the Global South). All this contributed to Beijing's reintegration into the international system.

During the Cold War and in the initial post-Cold War period, Beijing performed more as a regional security actor, where it mainly pursued its vital foreign and security policy interests. Beijing's vital security interests were focused on neutralising threats to the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its regional vicinity. China's policy of re-unification (in relation to Macao, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) continued to be conducted in line with its main foreign policy principles and tools ("One-China" and "One country, two systems" principles). In addition, the geo-strategic context of Beijing's modern relations with the West (incl. the EU) needs to be deciphered through the country's drive to overcome the historical legacy of the "century of humiliation" (a period linked to the Middle Kingdom's semi-colonised status during the 19<sup>th</sup> century). It is in this context that Xi Jinping's reference to the "Chinese Dream" should be viewed as national rejuvenation by overcoming the traumas of the past and the rise of the country's international influence.

From the 1980s until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China's foreign policy was centred around the creation of favourable external conditions for its internal economic development, the gathering of internal strength, and societal stability. The Chinese political and party leadership was focused on



integrating the country into the global economy (including the importance of joining the multilateral trading system, the WTO) and building a robust and sustainable economic model. The economization of foreign policy-making helped to attract significant foreign investment, accompanied by technology transfer. This was critical for turning China gradually into an economic and technological powerhouse.

In economic terms, today's China has become the biggest trading nation and a manufacturer of industrial goods with a significant share in global supply chains. China state-owned companies (SOCs) in the energy, engineering, and telecom fields rank high in the list of global "multinationals". In financial terms, leading Chinese policy banks (investment and commercial ones) have assumed a considerable share of the global finance markets and services. In technological terms, Beijing's has been developing a home-grown, globally competitive R&D and hi-tech sector. The country is one of the leaders in Artificial Intelligence development. Chinese technological companies have emerged as digital infrastructure and e-business platform providers. They strive to become global technical standard-setters. China has its own satellite and navigation system and is already a leading space explorer with an advanced space program. In civilizational terms, Beijing has utilised its language and culture as tools of influence and outreach (soft power projection). The study of the Chinese language worldwide is likely to increase, especially in regions where Beijing has been expanding its economic and cultural influence. In military terms, today's China possesses an advanced military-industrial complex (backed by a solid military budget). The People's Liberation Army (Chinese armed forces) continues to grow in size and capabilities. In 2022, China had the largest armed forces in the world by active-duty military personnel, with about 2 million active soldiers (Statista, 2023). The country is developing robust maritime capabilities (deep-water fleet) (Lenon and McCarthy, 2023).

In geopolitical terms, China has created a critical mass to make it a country with a robust foreign policy and security profile, assuming greater responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security. China's vital security interests are in the neighbourhood where it has demonstrated assertive involvement. Disputed territorial waters in the South China Sea, reunification of Taiwan with mainland China, and an unresolved border dispute with India are critical red lines for Beijing's foreign and security policy. China is

closely monitoring the development of the US-led security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, based on the US-led strategic security dialogue with India, Japan, and Australia (QUAD) and the trilateral security and intelligence-sharing partnership between the US, the UK, and Australia (AUKUS). Beijing's ultimate goal is to prevent the emergence of an Asian NATO in the Indo-Pacific region.

These factors have pushed Beijing to move away from a low-profile security posture. It plays a lead role in the UN System as a permanent member of the UNSC and the largest peacekeeping contributor. China has been spreading its geopolitical influence through mediation and conflict resolution diplomacy (e.g., it contributed to the Iran-Saudi Arabia normalisation of relations and influenced security arrangements in the Middle East). Beijing positions itself as one of the poles of power in a multipolar world by actively utilising regional and global multilateral foreign policy and security platforms such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

### **Who does what in China's foreign policy?**

China's foreign policy-making process is not as straight-forward as it initially appeared. It is rather a combination of centralised decision-making at the top and the participation of a network of stakeholders at the level of foreign policy recommendation and policy execution.

The centre of power, the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC, under the leadership of Chairman Xi Jinping, has a final say on major foreign and security policy issues.

In 2018, further institutionalisation of the foreign policy-making system handed over significant responsibilities to the newly formed Central Foreign Affairs Commission (CFAC). The Politburo empowered the CFAC to provide strategic policy advice, coordinate, and supervise the country's foreign affairs implementation. The Commission, which is chaired by Chairman Xi, includes heads of line ministries (foreign affairs, economy, commerce, defence, state security, and public security), important departments, and offices (the International Liaison Department, the Department of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan Affairs, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, and the State Council Information Office). Ministries indirectly influence the foreign decision-making process through policy reporting and briefs, maintaining partial power in the process. Mostly, they behave as interest groups. For instance, the Ministries

of State and Public Security push for securitization of foreign policy (e.g., call for a more restricted visa regime for foreign tourists and students coming to China due to internal security concerns). While the ministries of foreign affairs and commerce seek a more welcoming foreign policy (e.g., insisting that the influx of foreign tourists and students is good for the economy and will boost the country's international image) (Yanzhuo, p. 58-58), apart from the FCAC, the NDRC, and the State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, the Ministry of Finance and National Bank, the Ministries of Science and Technology, and Industry and Information Technology, are integrated in the planning and implementation of foreign policy in line with their institutional powers and competences. The NDRC provides policy analyses and suggestions on a wide spectrum of issues related to the country's foreign policy (from the performance of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to climate, trade, and investment-related multilateral negotiations). The powerful Central Military Commission ensures the party's control over the military establishment. It provides an overall coordination of defence and security policies (both in their domestic and external dimensions). It has been a decisive factor both in domestic and foreign security policy execution at dramatic junctures in Chinese history.

Some state executive agencies affiliated with the central Chinese government (the State Council) are integrated into the implementation of foreign policy. The International Development Agency (IDA) is a case in point. It serves as an inter-institutional coordination and information-sharing point between the ministries of economy, foreign affairs, and commerce in the management of foreign aid (Yanzhuo, 2022, 60-61). The Official Development Aid is part of the country's cooperation and development policy. Both China and the EU use foreign aid as an important tool of their diplomacy towards the Global South.

Provincial and municipal governments are integral elements of the Chinese system of governance. As stakeholders in the foreign policy-making process, they contribute to its decentralization. They are instruments of China's foreign policy and diplomacy, as the State Council authorises them (Yu and Ridout, 2021, pp. 13-14.). For instance, they are empowered to manage the implementation of large-scale investment projects abroad (under the BRI), provide policy recommendations on how the central government should act on border disputes with neighbouring lands, or run Chinese

cultural centres in foreign lands abroad (for instance, the Ningbo municipal government manages China's Cultural Centre in Sofia, Bulgaria, including its finances and organisation of activities).

The SOEs play a role in the accomplishment of China's broad foreign policy strategy. Heads of the MOCOM or the NDRC can be chosen as chief executives of the SOCs. The SOCs may be governmental or semi-governmental in nature. The SOCs in energy, shipping, transport, and infrastructure fields (e.g., the Oceanic Shipping Group [COSCO]) help Beijing project power globally. However, their business interests may sometimes come into conflict with the implementation of the country's foreign policy goals. They find it difficult to balance the functions of profit-driven market enterprises and state-run economic agents simultaneously.

And finally, the Chinese think tank community has carved itself a niche in foreign policymaking at the level of policy analysis and recommendation. Mainline ministries have set up research institutes under their organisational umbrella that provide expert advice on a wide range of issues, including those in the field of foreign and security policy. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a major think tank, furnishes the central Chinese government structures with valuable reporting, assessment, and policy recommendations on China's relations with the EU, the BRI, and the China-CEEC cooperation platform.

### **GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF CHINA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY PARADIGM**

The Global Security Initiative (GSI) has been conceptualised and launched as a strategic document (at the Boa Forum, April 2022). It is meant to upgrade China's foreign and security strategy in times of turbulent strategic environments (MFA of PRC 2023, GSI Concept Paper). It should be analysed in tandem with the other two strategic documents, the Global Development Initiative (GDI, 2021) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, 2023). All three documents provide a framework for Beijing's vision of a revised world order and shed additional insight into China's strategic culture.

The GDI is an instrument of China's developmental diplomacy, linking development to security and promoting the Chinese brand of developmentalism and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Beijing

considers an international peaceful environment as a basis for security (Xi Jinping, 2021). However, there are a considerable number of experts who view Beijing's growing assertiveness in global affairs and increased military posture in its geographical neighbourhood. It may be considered a sign of Beijing's departure from the concept of development. However, it is also worth noting that beyond the Asia-Pacific region, Beijing expands its influence predominantly through trade, investment, people-to-people exchange, and resource-driven diplomacy.

The GCI as an instrument of China's cultural diplomacy emphasises the importance the country places on cultural exchange, mutual learning, equality, dialogue, and inclusiveness among civilizations (Xi, 2023).

Beijing upholds the current international system. However, through its Belt and Road Initiative, it also promotes alternative principles and practices in international cooperation and security. For instance, multilateralism with Chinese characteristics is built around the following principles: "cooperative and universal security" as opposed to "collective, bloc-based security"; "global community" as more encompassing than "international community"; "shared development" as more inclusive than "common development"; and "political inclusiveness" (accepting the diversity in the choice of development paths and political systems; the term opposes the "democracy" vs. "autocracy" liberal matrix of comparison).

The GSI rests on six declarative principles: comprehensive and sustainable security; respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter; taking the legitimate concerns of all countries seriously; peaceful resolution of conflicts; and maintaining security in traditional and non-traditional domains (Pevzner, 2023).

It is therefore not surprising that China (alongside Russia) has articulated a very different vision of how the post-Cold War European and global security architecture should be built. Both countries have a very different understanding of threat perception and the security paradigm. Both are highly critical of the bloc-based security approach on which the Euro-Atlantic community thrives and call for an all-inclusive security system. In their strategic discourse with NATO, they insist that any future security arrangements should be built around the principle of indivisibility (the security of one side ends where the security of the other side begins).

Through the GSI, Beijing has opened up a debate on how to address traditional and non-traditional security threats. Traditional threats are the arms race, nuclear wars, the arms race, regional security hotspots, trans-boundary rivers, and outer space. Non-traditional threats are local conflicts, sea piracy, terrorism, water resource politics, food security, energy security, and biodiversity. New areas are information security, cyber threats, AI, and protectionism in emerging technologies (Rao, 2023).

The GSI should be considered an extension of China's national security strategy concept (and is reinforced by other security concepts, namely the New Security Concept, the Major Power Concept, and the Asia-Pacific Security System). China's GSI is aimed at fostering the country's international image, engaging with partners, protecting overseas assets, and driving the global security order.

From a European strategic perspective, China's emergence as a global security actor extends into four dimensions: a) China as a diplomat: it creates a network of security partnerships in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere through tools of security and defence diplomacy (incl. conflict resolution and crisis mediation); b) China as a soldier: it develops needed military capabilities to project power, incl. in cyber space and space; c) China as a trader: it employs economic means to pursue its national and international security interests (incl. development of bilateral defence-related relations with respective partners, for instance in Africa and Latin America); and d) China as a shaper: it strives to externalize its security concepts and shape global security norms and institutions in its favour, using diplomacy to promote its version of global security multilateralism, incl. in the UN security fora. (Huotari et. al., 2017, pp. 9-13)

Under the auspices of the GSI, Beijing strives to conduct a series of high-profile bilateral and multilateral security dialogues as well as provide training programmes for military and police staff in foreign partner countries. These efforts can be described as China-led coalition-building diplomacy across traditional and non-traditional security domains.

## **THE EU IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM: DIMENSIONS OF EU EXTERNAL ACTION, EU COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY**

The EU was created as the European Economic Communities (EEC) after the Second World War. During the Cold War, it was a geo-economic extension

of NATO in Europe. It was conceived as an obstacle against the resurgence of nationalist regimes and the prevention of any future war outbreak in Europe. Sixty-six years later, Europe has failed to reach that goal in the context of the on-going devastating Russo-Ukrainian war.

From institutional and internal law perspectives, the Union continues to stand as a very complex formation in the international system. It evolved as a delicate synthesis of supranational and intergovernmental institutions (incl. agencies) and instruments of governance. This state of affairs impacts the EU's external action and the way Brussels projects itself in world affairs. Throughout its history, the Union has been divided between the push towards federalization (with the aim of raising it to a quasi-state) and remaining a union of sovereign states. This competition between these two strategic visions for the EU continues to this day. It is evident through the on-going debate at the Conference for the Future of Europe, which started in April 2022.

### **Dimensions of the EU's External Action**

The EU's external action (a broad understanding of EU foreign policy-making and diplomacy) is operationalized through mechanisms and instruments of intergovernmental cooperation and supranational coordination. The Council of the EU (Council of Ministers structured alongside policy area configurations), the European Commission, and the European Parliament (EP) are major EU institutions responsible for planning and carrying out the EU's external action. Policy areas in trade and investment, development cooperation, agriculture and fisheries, transport, telecommunication and energy, competition, and environment provide a broad vision of EU foreign policy-making and address soft security challenges within the EU's external action.

For instance, the Common Commercial Policy (CCP) falls within the exclusive competence of the EU and is conducted via supranational coordination. It is a tool to develop foreign trade and investment relations with third countries, major trade blocs, and international economic organisations. The Member States (MS) pool their sovereignty to accomplish a common interest. The EU Commission gets a mandate to negotiate international agreements on behalf of the Member States and the whole Union. The EU CCP is conducted via: 1) the multilateral diplomacy track at

the World Trade Organisation (WTO), where the EU speaks in one voice (the MS pool their sovereignty through the EU's collective representation in the WTO); 2) the conclusion of bilateral agreements with EU external partners on matters of trade promotion, customs union, etc. (e.g., EU-CETA with Canada, EU free trade agreements with Japan and Switzerland, EU-Mediterranean Partnership, the EU-APC Partnership Agreement or the Cotonou Agreement with African, Caribbean, and the Pacific group of countries, and the Customs Union with Turkey). The agreements come into force upon signing by the Council of the EU and ratification by the MS and the European Parliament. For instance, the European Parliament blocked the ratification of the long-negotiated EU-China Comprehensive Agreement of Investment in 2020. The EU CCP does not only consolidate the EU internal market but also helps Brussels act in favour of economic globalisation, especially in times of growing protectionist practices, trade wars, and the imposition of economic and political sanctions.

On the other hand, foreign affairs, security, and defence are shaped via the CFSP and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) within the intergovernmental domain by the MS (more precisely, the Foreign Affairs Council). These policy areas tackle hard security challenges within the EU's external action. The supranational European Parliament (representing the interests of the EU citizenry at large) has been elevated to co-legislator together with the Council of the EU in the adoption of policy decisions concerning the EU's external action. The Parliament oversees the CFSP budgeting, debates international issues, and adopts political declarations and resolutions. The European Commission (the executive organ, "EU government and guardian of the EU treaties") drafts policy decisions in the field of external action and plays a substantial role in their implementation.

The EU decision-making system has been streamlined by the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) for most policy areas, but unanimity remains intact for foreign policy, security, and defence. Germany reinvigorated the debate on the introduction of QMV for the CFSP/CSDP, but Berlin faces serious opposition from Central European countries, most notably Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic. It is important to highlight the place of the European Council (Summits of Heads of State and Government), which, although not part of the legislative (respectively, decision-making) process, outlines the strategic priorities and goals concerning the EU's external action



in the form of the European Council Conclusions (key policy instrument of the European Council).

### **The CFSP and EU diplomacy**

The CFSP derives from the European Political Cooperation (EPC) that began in the 1970s. The EPC emerged as a loose platform for information-sharing, foreign policy consultations, and coordination at the level of foreign ministries of the MS, but with limited objectives. The EPC produced joint political declarations on a number of international armed conflicts and crises (namely the Arab-Israeli war in 1973 and the Spanish and Cyprus crises in 1974) but failed to produce a coordinated response to the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981.

The institutionalisation of EU foreign and security policy-making was accomplished after the European Economic Communities were transformed into the European Union following the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1993). The CFSP empowered the Union with a set of common tools. These are “common positions” (to be passed by unanimity), “joint actions” (the implementation phase may be passed by a qualified majority), dispatch of election observation missions, exercise of “instructive abstention” (a MS does not implement but also hinders a joint action in line with the solidarity principle), and common strategies. Common positions and joint actions were taken on a wide range of thematic (e.g., weapons of mass destruction, etc.) and geographical issues (covering various countries, ranging from major powers such as Russia and China to Sudan, Libya, the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, and Indonesia, etc.). Joint actions under the CFSP also include the dispatch of special envoys to represent EU common interests in the Middle East and the Great Lakes Region of Africa. The historical record of these CFSP instruments is mixed. Wars in ex-Yugoslavia serve as emblematic examples of ineffective EU peace-making intervention, as the US and NATO replaced the EU in settling the conflicts. The common strategies provide long-term policy options for the EU (in regard to the Mediterranean region, the Black Sea region, the Baltic Sea region, and Central Asia, to name a few). It is hard to judge how effective they are since they repeat in broad terms the EU foreign policy objectives stated in other EU strategic documents.

The CFSP was incorporated into the EU's external action and became a delivery system for the conduct of common EU diplomacy. The creation of the European External Action Service (2009) provided new impetus for the EU's external action. The EEAS does not act as the EU foreign ministry and does not substitute the MS's national diplomatic services but complements them. EU foreign policy-making was consolidated into a single body. The consolidation was achieved by pooling external action resources and tools (from the EU Council General Secretariat, the Commission DGs dealing with foreign relations, and finally the Member States' national diplomatic services) and by double-hatting the High Representative (who chairs the Foreign Affairs Council and is vice president of the European Commission at the same time). The external delegations that were previously run by the Commission were integrated into the EEAS and acted as EU delegations to third countries and international organisations. The goal was to produce integrity in the EU's external action. The Commission retained competences to oversee trade, development, enlargement, civilian protection and humanitarian assistance, energy, and the environment, but the EEAS became a key player in the management of the foreign policy dimension of these policy areas. The EEAS incorporated the whole spectrum of diplomatic instruments that were at the disposal of the CFSP. In terms of the EU's highest external representation in world affairs (in the fields of foreign policy, security, and defence), the High Representative of the Union's Foreign Affairs and Security Policy shares this obligation together with the President of the European Council (a post introduced under the Lisbon Treaty).

### **EU FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY STRATEGY IN THE EVOLVING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT**

Between 2003 and 2022, three key strategic documents (in relation to foreign, security, and defence policies) were produced: the European Security Strategy (ESS) (European Communities, 2009), the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EU Global Strategy) (EEAS, 2016), and the Strategic Compass of the EU (EUSC) (EEAS, 2022). Among other things, they provide an assessment of the evolving external strategic environment and the EU foreign and security strategy.

The EU has strategized and prioritised its CFSP in line with the evolving external strategic environment and various geopolitical contexts.

The ESS was adopted in 2003, when the EU was at the peak of its development, and was described as prosperous, secure, and free. It was a period of substantial eastward enlargement (2004-2007). Brussels was confident in overcoming the Cold War legacies and long-sought re-unification of Europe under the EU liberal democratic model. The ESS was also meant to mend the transatlantic rift caused by the US-British invasion of Iraq (opposed by key EU players, France and Germany) and the surge of American unilateralism.

Adoption of the EUGS in 2016, on the other hand, was an attempt to consolidate the EU amid new geopolitical realities: 1) Brexit; 2) an intensification of international crises caused by Russia's Crimea's annexation and the Libyan, Syrian, and Yemeni civil wars following the "Arab Spring"; 3) the rise of "Islamic State" and terrorist attacks hitting major European capitals; 4) the EU internal quarrels about the irregular migration flows destabilising the EU's internal security environment; 5) the rise of normative divisions in Europe between "liberal" and "conservative" political values and agendas; and 6) undermining the centrality of the EU-NATO partnership for the European security architecture by the Trump administration. It was the first time that an EU strategic document stated that the Union was in an existential crisis, forced to act in contested (fragile statehoods and spread of ungoverned space) and complex circumstances (driven by geopolitical shifts, challenged by China and Russia, and power diffusion through networks of state, interstate, and non-state actors). Yet the EU was operating in a connected world through economic globalisation.

Thirdly, the adoption of the EUSC (in March 2022) has been taking place against the backdrop of fundamental geopolitical changes that question the established international order (defined by Brussels as a rules-based global order based on effective multilateralism with the UN at its core). The international system has entered a new phase of profound strategic uncertainty. The present strategic environment has been characterised by the following trends: 1) Brussels imposed the widest possible range of political, economic, financial, and other sanctions aimed at isolating Russia and undermining its economic, military, and technological potential. Moscow reciprocated with targeted contra-sanctions mainly in the energy, strategic

mineral resources, and civil aviation transportation sectors; 2) The world has never been so close to major global conflict since the Cuban crisis in 1962. The war should not be understood in military terms only. It is multi-dimensional with increased cognitive warfare (a combined use of cyber, information, psychological, and social engineering capabilities); 3) The Russo-Ukrainian war has become a point of reference for a whole set of states in the Global South on how they position themselves towards the war. The choices they make are along strategic and civilizational lines. A great number of them are taking a neutral stance (adopting a wait-and-see approach); 4) The emerging of countries grouped around China and Russia as an alternative grouping to the G7 (namely the BRICS with expanding membership), which start to challenge the West-dominated world order (based on the Washington consensus that secured the West a dominant place in global trade, finance, ICT, and the US dollar as the world's reserve currency); 5) India's choice seems to be bipolar, standing to some degree with Russia while on the other side siding with the US. We are currently witnessing a competition between Delhi and Beijing for the leadership of the Global South, as both leading developing countries stand as partners in the BRICS but are strategic rivals in the vast Indo-Pacific region (or Asia-Pacific as China defines it); 6) Some experts tend to believe that the current geopolitical transformation is triggering a new phase of decolonization and political emancipation of the Global South (citing the African continent as an example).

The EUSC should be seen as a recalibration of Brussels's strategy towards the above-mentioned trends. The re-calibration will include steps towards further Euro-Atlantic community consolidation to counter the external challenges. These challenges also extend to contested access to the high seas and space competition in the digital and space spheres. The EUSC offers a concrete action plan in terms of security and defence (re-enforcing the EU CDSP missions and operations with rapid deployment capacities and strengthening EU military command and control structures). The issue of strategic autonomy continues to be present in the EU strategic debate and is embedded in the EU's level of ambition. But it does not question the centrality of the US and NATO in providing a strategic security shield for the EU.

Brussels has been facing two main strategic dilemmas. Firstly, there is the dilemma of shared NATO and EU membership for the majority of European countries. The EU's main goal is to protect its citizens (which is an issue of

internal security), while NATO is focused on collective defence, including military defence and response to external invasion. Most EU countries prefer to use NATO's defence track to counter external security threats, in which the EU's defence capabilities mainly play a supportive role. The EU is good at using tools of diplomacy, mediation, and sanctions. However, Brussels has historically had a problem developing autonomous defence capabilities, including an integrated European defence identity. Secondly, the Union has been founded on liberal democratic values and principles, including the rule of law, human rights, and a democratic system of governance. They are embedded in the EU's strategic culture and are the guiding principles of the EU's external action. At the same time, the EU is split between acting as a normative actor and a geopolitical one. Should it strive to "uniform" the world in line with proclaimed democratic values and principles, or seek to develop relations based on "principled pragmatism" (a term stated in the EU Global Strategy)? The EU-China relations are, to a certain extent, impacted by the second dilemma.

### **The evolving nature of the EU-China relationship**

The EU-China relations enter a period of incremental, prolific growth after the establishment of official relations in 1975. The relationship was institutionalised through EU-China high-level summits (as the highest policy and decision-making platform), followed by different formats of formal and informal expert-level political consultations and dialogues. The sectoral dialogues on trade and investment, agriculture, environment, education, science, technology, and transport connectivity, to name a few, became an integral part of relationship-building. The strategic environment from the 1980s until 2015 was favourable to the EU-China relationship. The relationship went through stages of constructive engagement (1995), maturing partnership (2000), and strategic partnership (in line with the EU-China Strategic Agenda 2020). Geopolitically, the EU-China relations have always been observed in a broader context of China's relations with the Western world (based on the premises of the Washington Consensus). During the above-mentioned period, the West hoped that the implementation of far-reaching market reforms and the policy of opening and integrating China into the Western-based trade and financial system would transform Chinese society and its political system (including the adoption of the liberal

democratic model). Realising that such a scenario was impossible to achieve, the West recalibrated its strategy towards China, which in turn impacted the EU-China relationship. The strategic luxury for China was over. Beijing began to be regarded as a revisionist power challenging the Washington Consensus with growing technological, military, and economic capabilities (and, more importantly, with its developmental model). In addition, the ideological factor began to impact the entire architecture of the EU-China relationship. Since the beginning of 2017, in the EU strategic documents, Beijing began to be referred to as a systemic rival and economic competitor (promoting alternative forms of governance), while occasionally leaving some room for partnership in areas where interests converge (e.g., global green and digital transformation).

The extensive review of the academic and policy research literature (related to the topic) illustrates the application of competing paradigms/theories of international relations. Some European scholars emphasise the dichotomous nature of EU policy towards China, presenting it as a choice between the promotion of economic (material) relations and normative idealist interests based on human rights and democracy. They use international political economic theory to describe China as a rapidly growing power that, at some point, could challenge the US global leadership. In this respect, a possible strategic partnership (in the form of a techno-political alliance) of major European countries, such as France, Germany, and Italy, is considered a real danger to EU-US relations and transatlantic unity. Other European countries (namely the UK, Poland, and Scandinavian states) caution against getting too close to illiberal China (putting an emphasis on liberal values) (Wong, 2013). On the other hand, researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Shandong University analyse the nature of the present EU-China systemic rivalry, firstly, from the perspective of material power symmetries (in which relatively sound trading and investment partnerships have been undermined by competition for leadership in high-tech industries), secondly, from the angle of normative and ideologically-driven competition (expressed in divergence of political, social, and cultural norms, values, and narratives), and thirdly, from the point of comparing EU and China strategic cultures and their adjustment to new geopolitical realities. China's strategists acknowledge the country's move away from the strategy of keeping a low profile to a more assertive foreign policy and security posture. In its quest to assume the power of a global player, the EU works to

materialise the recently developed concept of strategic sovereignty (Yuan and Zhigao, 2022). Chinese analysts place the EU-China relations within the framework of the geopolitically driven US-China-Europe triangle. The US factor has been instrumental in shaping the dynamics of the EU-China relationship (as one between rivalry and partnership). Julia Gurol (a lecturer at the Chair of IR at Freiburg University) argues that the EU and China's strategic identities lie at the core of the formation of their distinct foreign and security policy principles. It is in this respect that she identifies three EU-China cleavages: sovereignty vs. integration (at some point federalization of foreign policymaking); principled (effective) multilateralism vs. multilateralism with Chinese characteristics; and good governance vs. "China first" (Beijing strives to navigate the international system in line with its strategic interests and economic benefits). Thus, Brussels and Beijing diverge in their conceptual approaches to statehood and power, the concept of sovereignty (shared vs. absolute), and the notion of multilateralism. Despite the differences in the EU and China's foreign and security policy profiles, Gurol believes that both are destined to cooperate in the security domain (Gurol, 2022, pp. 38-48).

The brief literature review indicates that the EU-China relationship can be deciphered only through the combined application of different international relations paradigms. When it comes to EU-China economic interdependence, then the liberal school of thought has to be applied (with the states and international organisations/institutions as the main actors and drivers of cooperation). When elaborating on geopolitically driven great power politics (e.g., Beijing and Brussels' positioning vis-à-vis the current Ukraine war), then the instruments of classical realism or/and neo-realism should be used, such as addressing security dilemmas, coalition-building, military power, and state diplomacy. When dealing with the issues of the EU and China's participation in global governance (aimed at developing collective norms and rule-making, articulation of shared interests, etc.) with the involvement of state and non-state (transnational networks) actors, then the tools of social constructivism should come into play. Last but not least, a broader picture of EU-China systemic rivalry involves a civilizational component. Beijing and Brussels have experienced a long history of inter-civilizational familiarisation, interaction, rivalry, and cooperation via trade, culture, and diplomacy. It is worth noting that the Chinese School of IR (comprised of a loose network of Chinese thinkers, scholars, policy

researchers, and political analysts) has complemented Anglo-Saxon-led paradigms of IR with Confucianism and Chinese traditional political thought.

## CONCLUSION

China and EU policies in the field of foreign policy and security (with an emphasis on external security) have been analysed first and foremost based on their positioning in the international system.

A periodically evolving strategic environment has resulted in tactical adjustments to their foreign policy and security agendas and interests.

Yet, Beijing and Brussels have core interests that remain unchanged based on their political models, values, and principles they restate in foreign affairs. Beijing's core national interests rest on ideology, traditional culture, preserving the unity and stability of the state, and reinforcing the centrality of China in relation to the outside world (in particular in the geographic neighbourhood). Brussels's core interests derive from the Union's liberal democratic values and standards (embedded in the EU treaties), which it strives to promote globally. On one hand, the EU struggles to reconcile its role as a normative actor and a pursuer of pragmatic foreign policy. On the other hand, China's foreign policy (starting with Deng Xiaoping) has been guided by the principles of pragmatism, realism, and commercialism (incl. the pursuance of basic foreign and security policy principles of non-interference in internal affairs and respect for absolute sovereignty in foreign relations).

Both China and the EU are active participants and promoters of economic globalisation. In so doing, they are partners and competitors at the same time. It is especially difficult in times of worsening global security environments, which seriously undermine the integrity of the global trading system and disrupt global supply chains. The EU-China relations in the field of trade and investments have proved most successful, although the issues of market reciprocity, level playing field, and unfair business practices (incl. those of selective protectionism) increase mistrust in their relationship. In addition, the value-driven human rights dialogue has been tough. Recently, preserving biodiversity and combating desertification and climate change (through decarbonisation and renewables) as soft security issues have emerged as a zone of convergence and cooperation. Brussels and Beijing have produced



tangible results in the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue and the High-Level Digital Dialogue.

Furthermore, Brussels has included in its foreign and security portfolio issues related to emerging and sensitive technologies. It has adopted a strategy of di-risking (which is different from the US version of de-coupling). In line with this strategy, the EU wants to reduce its dependence on the import of critical materials for its economy from China and to ban the export of sensitive European technologies to China that Beijing may use for military purposes (through export controls and export screening). China counters such a policy, defining it as discriminatory.

The Russo-Ukrainian war since 2022 has led to the intensification of bilateral consultations on issues of global security and strategic stability. As indicated in the analysis above (based on the review of their main security concepts and strategies), the EU-China strategic security dialogue has been difficult because both sides have very different visions on what the regional and global security architectures will have to look like, including different interpretations of multilateralism (though both put the UN at the core of the system) and a security threat perception. On the issue of strategic autonomy, China believes that the EU can raise itself to the level of an independent global actor, provided it is able to emancipate itself in terms of security and defence (incl. the capabilities development and deployment) from the US and NATO.

China, as a nation-state, has been a unitary actor in the international system by default. While the same cannot be said about the EU, the Union continues to be a union of nation-states with an increased degree of supra-national coordination. China's foreign policy and decision-making are more institutionally and politically centralised than those of the EU, although a network of stakeholders impacts the Chinese foreign policy-making process at the level of policy recommendation and policy implementation. The CFSP (and CSDP as its continuation), on the other hand, continue to be managed through mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation with some degree of influence from the EU Commission and European Parliament (as the core supranational institutions in the EU system of governance). The institutional process and mechanisms of policy and decision-making are complex and rather cumbersome. This often considerably slows down EU foreign policy decision-making when managing acute international crises.

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**SOFT POWER AND  
DISCOURSES:  
CHINA'S NEW-OLD  
IMAGE**

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# INFLUENCE OF CHINESE SOFT POWER ON STRENGTHENING THE COOPERATION BETWEEN SERBIA AND CHINA WITHIN THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Jovana DUBONJAC\*

**Abstract:** Soft power, as one of the concepts expounded by Joseph Nye, has been recognised by the Chinese leadership as a good way for this faraway Asian country to improve cooperation with countries along China's Silk Road. With the Belt and Road Initiative, cooperation in the fields of economy, infrastructure, education, and culture is recognised as an important link on which China's partnership with Serbia could be strengthened. In addition to political cooperation, the two countries deepened relations to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016, with a tendency for further progress. Regarding that, this paper will focus on the following aspects of Sino-Serbian cooperation in the context of the expansion of Chinese soft power: economy, infrastructure, culture, and education. Within this research, the author will try to briefly introduce some of the projects in Serbia that are the result of the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as their impact on the local economy. Through a structural-functional analysis, the author will present the development of relations between China and Serbia in the context of the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, the author will use comparative analysis to compare some of the aspects of Sino-Serbian cooperation in order to highlight important elements concerning the challenges and potentials for future cooperation.

**Keywords:** soft power, China, investments, education, Chinese culture

## INTRODUCTION

Having crossed the road of a thousand miles, China has turned from an internationally isolated country into an influential member and an active international player in the 21st century. As the second economic and first trading power in the world, it became able to continue giving aid and investing abroad. By encouraging state-owned enterprises to engage in market competition within the unified framework of the World Trade Organisation, but also by giving them concrete assistance for business ventures abroad,

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China is able to achieve broader diplomatic goals (Arežina, 2018). One of the most important diplomatic goals was to spread soft power within the countries where China had already established good political and economic cooperation. The concept of “soft power” was originally developed by Harvard University professor Joseph Nye to describe the ability of a state to attract and co-opt rather than to coerce, use force, or give money as a means of persuasion. The term is now widely used by analysts and statesmen in Europe, China, and the United States. As originally defined by Nye, soft power involves the ability of an actor to set agendas and attract support on the basis of its values, culture, policies, and institutions. In this sense, he considers soft power to often be beyond the control of the state and generally includes nonmilitary tools of national power, such as diplomacy and state-led economic development programmes (Huang, 2013). As Nye states, soft power is the ability of a government to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payment. Nye emphasises that soft power is only one component of power and is rarely sufficient on its own. What is necessary for the successful use of soft power tools is the ability to combine hard and soft power into effective strategies. A proficient blend of these two tools is also referred to as ‘smart power’ (Nye, 2017).

When mentioning soft power in the context of China, the Belt and Road Initiative (One Belt, One Road Initiative) is one of the primary ways through which Beijing has been spreading its soft power since 2013, when Chinese President Xi Jinping officially introduced it during his visit to Kazakhstan. The general idea of the Belt and Road Initiative is to strengthen cooperation between China and countries that are along the way of the new Silk Road.<sup>1</sup> The cooperation should be implemented in various ways, such as economic, infrastructural, cultural, and cooperation regarding education, health care, etc. President Xi said that the way to enjoy closer economic ties, deeper cooperation, and greater space for development was to build an economic belt along the Silk Road and also the maritime Silk Road. The way to implement that idea is to strengthen policy communication, improve thoroughfare connectivity, facilitate unimpeded trade, enhance monetary circulation, and increase understanding between people, which is the key to relations between

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<sup>1</sup> The Initiative is also known as the New Silk Road.

states because, in order to successfully implement all of the mentioned areas of cooperation, the support of the people is a must (Xi, 2019).

Serbia is one of the countries that has highly developed bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China. At the same time, Serbia is the most active member of the China-CEEC cooperation framework (previously known as "16+1", or "17+1") and therefore an important part of the Belt and Road Initiative. For China, cooperation with Serbia is a confirmation of excellent interstate relations but also a good example for other countries to show the benefits that country can achieve if it has the People's Republic of China as a collaborator and friend (Obradović, 2021). In this paper, the author will try to show some examples of good cooperation between Serbia and China in the framework of the mentioned initiative. First of all, the author will present some of the global information regarding Chinese soft power, then take a look at how it is manifested in Serbia. The author will briefly present the relations between Serbia and China, some of the projects that have supported the local economy and have been implemented in the last ten years since the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, and finally, some information regarding culture and education as one of the other important factors in the display of soft power.

### **CHINESE SOFT POWER WITHIN THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE**

A comprehensive assessment of China's soft power on the global stage necessitates the examination of several multifaceted dimensions. Predominantly, the discourse pertains to the economy and extensive infrastructure undertakings, both of which constitute pivotal facets within the sphere of international cooperation. Concurrently, the confluence of cultures and the forging of interpersonal bonds must not be relegated to a peripheral consideration (Glaser & Murphy, 2009). From 2013 to 2023, China cultivated collaborative relations with nations positioned along the New Silk Road; albeit, the magnitude and profundity of cooperation exhibit noteworthy variance amongst these nations.

In the contemporaneous epoch, China has achieved a commendable degree of synergy and witnessed the realisation of myriad initiatives in partnership with over 140 countries. China has spent \$1 trillion on projects that were agreed upon within this framework (Nedopil, 2023). Analysts



estimate that the largest project so far is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with an estimated value of \$62 billion.

In Europe, Chinese investments helped modernise Greece's Piraeus port. One of the most important multilateral projects on which Chinese companies are working is the development of the Budapest-Belgrade railway in Serbia and Hungary, with substantial financial backing from Beijing (Berman et al., 2023). In Croatia, the 2.4km structure, Pelješac Bridge, was built by a Chinese state-owned company, and it was the first Chinese company to win a bid for a project co-funded by the European Union (Borak, 2022).

In Africa, China invested in many countries, such as Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola, etc. In Egypt, China invested in the Suez Canal Corridor (Dianjaya, 2019). China's involvement in Africa includes the construction of an extensive network comprising over 6,000 kilometres of railways, an additional 6,000 kilometres of roads, and the establishment of nearly 20 ports across the continent. In Ethiopia, China has spearheaded a revolution in hydropower production, and its efforts have been instrumental in the creation of numerous expansive industrial parks (Omoruyi, 2023). As of the end of 2020, China had established over 3,500 companies throughout Africa, employing millions of workers, with approximately 80% of these employees being local residents. Several projects have made a significant impact on African society. One notable example is the construction of a 56.5-kilometre-long asphalt road in Ethiopia's Oromia region. Another remarkable project is the Mombasa-Nairobi railway, which has generated approximately 46,000 direct and indirect jobs within local communities. Similarly, the 1,344-kilometre-long Benguela Railway in Angola has introduced numerous new employment opportunities to the region (Xinhua, 2022).

In Latin America, besides exporting products to China, there is a significant emphasis on improving ports, airports, highways, and railways throughout the region. Furthermore, the China Development Bank has offered financial support for substantial solar and wind projects, as evidenced by the largest solar facility in Latin America located in Jujuy, Argentina, and the Punta Sierra wind farm situated in Coquimbo, Chile. Between 2000 and 2018, China channelled \$73 billion of investments into Latin America's raw materials sector, including the construction of refineries and processing plants in countries rich in coal, copper, natural gas, oil, and uranium. Additionally, China is actively investing in lithium production within the "Lithium Triangle" countries,

comprising Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, collectively housing approximately half of the world's known lithium reserves, a vital component for battery production. Additionally, China maintains its commitment to advancing "new infrastructure" domains, encompassing artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, smart cities, and 5G technology, often in collaboration with prominent telecom firms like Huawei. An illustrative instance is Huawei's launch of a two-year "5G City" pilot project in Curitiba, Brazil, in 2022 (Roy, 2023).

A quintessential manifestation of soft power resides in the realms of culture and education, where China has embarked upon a deliberate and systematic endeavour to expand its influence by means of linguistic and cultural diffusion. This cultural and educational outreach strategy is most conspicuously articulated through the establishment of dedicated institutions in countries traversed by the Belt and Road Initiative. It is within this contextual framework that the pronounced role of Confucius Institutes (there are around 500 institutes in the world) and cultural centres (around 40 in the world) is, which serve as eminent platforms for the propagation of Chinese language and culture, concurrently enabling a deeper intercultural exchange. In tandem with the establishment of the institutes and cultural centres, China has directed substantial investments in the realm of educational exchange. In recent epochs, China has ascended to preeminent status as a coveted destination for scholarly pursuits. Scholarships are conspicuously aimed at fostering academic proficiency in the facets of Chinese language, culture, society, history, and politics. This conception is predicated upon the assumption that the ensuing generations of well-versed individuals will expeditiously disseminate this reservoir of knowledge, thereby catalysing the global promulgation of the Chinese idiom.

Initially, China's educational provisions were primarily oriented towards the acquisition of Chinese linguistic proficiency and cultural cognition. However, in more recent times, China has expansively broadened its pedagogical purview by extending undergraduate, masters, and doctoral programmes across heterogeneous domains to foreign scholars.

This symphony of cross-cultural engagement and economic cooperation resonates with the broader objectives underpinning China's soft power projection. It is emblematic of a strategy that not only facilitates infrastructural development and economic growth but also underscores the indispensable

role of cultural diplomacy and knowledge exchange in fostering enduring global relationships and promoting the understanding of China's multifaceted identity.

### **POLITICAL COOPERATION AS THE BASIS FOR EXPANDING CHINESE SOFT POWER IN SERBIA WITHIN THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE**

Serbia and China have very good relations, characterised by traditional friendship and a comprehensive strategic partnership. The elevated level of relations between the two countries primarily stems from Serbia's steadfast support for the "One China" policy, coupled with China's unwavering respect for Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Building upon a foundation of robust political cooperation, collaboration extended into other domains. This culminated in the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2009, which was further strengthened in 2013, ultimately evolving into a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in 2016. When discussing cooperation within the Belt and Road Initiative, China sees Serbia as an important link due to its geographical position, traffic, and energy connections with the region and beyond. During the ten years of cooperation within this initiative, the two countries initiated and implemented a large number of various projects that significantly contributed to the strengthening of China's soft power. As a consequence, Serbia has been one of China's leading partners in Europe, playing a particularly prominent role within China's multilateral mechanism of cooperation with 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (previously known as "16+1", or "17+1") (Obradović, 2021).

There has been an augmented frequency of diplomatic interactions that have transpired over the recent years, both at diverse hierarchical strata and at the apical echelon of executive leadership, such as the visit of President Xi Jinping in 2016 and the visit of Aleksandar Vučić, the prime minister at the time, to China in 2015, when the Memorandum of Understanding on the Joint Promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative was signed. Subsequently Aleksandar Vučić had several visits again, but in the role of president of Serbia in 2017, 2019, and 2022. During the high-level meeting, numerous agreements were signed across various fields, resulting in a significant enhancement of cooperation. Thus, numerous Sino-Serbian infrastructure and energy projects were implemented in the previous period, such as the Pupin Bridge, sections of the highway on Corridor 11, and the Kostolac

thermal power plant project (Janković, 2017, p. 135). The number of agreed-upon and successfully implemented projects increased significantly after the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative.

### **CHINESE SOFT POWER IN SERBIA**

Over the course of successive years, the collaborative ties between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Serbia have exhibited a consistent trajectory of improvement. This trajectory is substantiated by a burgeoning portfolio of projects that unequivocally attest to the deepening partnership between the two nations.

While it is noteworthy that the diplomatic relations between China and Serbia have historical roots dating back to the 1950s (Arežina, 2020), the substantial inflection point in terms of significantly amplified investments and the execution of novel projects spanning diverse sectors was unequivocally catalysed by the formal inception of the previously mentioned Belt and Road Initiative. This showed China's soft power in Serbia through the assessment of cooperation in the field of the economy, which has increased in the number of infrastructure projects as well as education and culture.

Among the Balkans, Serbia has the most robust ties with China, and despite the criticisms from Western countries regarding its collaboration with China in the context of EU membership candidature as the most important foreign policy goal, Serbia remains committed to nurturing these bilateral relations (Obradović, 2021).

### **Economy and Infrastructure projects**

China has established itself as the preeminent trading partner for Serbia. This year, China ascended to the position of being Serbia's second-most consequential foreign trade partner, underscoring the historical zenith of exports from Serbia to China. Ten years ago (in 2013), exports to China were around 6 million dollars, and last year they were around 1.3 billion dollars. It is expected that after the Free Trade Agreement enters into force, exports from Serbia will exceed the amount of two billion dollars, which means that it will be poised to offer an expanded array of products to the Chinese market,

thereby inevitably generating a demand for increased employment opportunities (MIETRS, 2023).

The synergy between these two countries is particularly conspicuous within the ambit of infrastructure and energy projects. Among the myriad collaborative initiatives, several projects merit special mention. Foremost among these is the construction of the Pupin Bridge, a vital infrastructure link connecting the areas of Zemun and Borča. Further endeavours encompass the ongoing construction of segments of the Miloš the Great Highway, the comprehensive rejuvenation of the Kostolac Thermal Power Plant, and various other infrastructural undertakings (MFARS, n.d.).

In the realm of foreign direct investment, China's substantial financial commitment within the Republic of Serbia is notably characterised by the formidable presence of corporate entities such as HBIS (Hesteel) in the acquisition of the Smederevo steel factory in 2016 and Zijin, which effectuated a pivotal investment in RTB Bor in 2018. Additionally, the enterprise Hesteel etched its name in the annals of economic collaboration by consummating. Besides that, there is the pioneering investment of the Shandong-based Linglong Company, which embarked on the construction of a tyre manufacturing facility in the city of Zrenjanin in 2019. The establishment of the Yanfeng Automotive Interiors plant in Kragujevac in November 2019, dedicated to the production of automotive interior components, exemplifies another noteworthy facet of the Sino-Serbian investment nexus. In consonance with the China-CEEC cooperation framework, notable strides have been taken towards the materialisation of the trilateral railway modernization initiative along the Belgrade-Budapest corridor. This collaborative endeavour, involving the Republic of Serbia, the People's Republic of China, and Hungary, epitomises the strategic alignment and developmental commitment shared within the multilateral framework of cooperation (MFARS, n.d.).

All the companies mentioned above employ both Chinese and Serbian workers, which leads to the development of the economy, both at the local and state level. If it is taken into account that there are local companies in Serbia that deal with exports from Serbia but also with the construction of infrastructure projects, it is evident that the presence and investments from Chinese companies are of great importance for local development. The Smederevo steel plant, the largest in Serbia of its kind, employs nearly 5,000 people, as does the Linglong factory in Zrenjanin, which employs over 700

people. Strategic partnerships can also be seen in the field of mining and smelting complex copper in Bor, the largest of its kind in Serbia, with 5000 local employees (Subotić & Janjić, 2020). In addition to the importance that companies have at the local level, the preferential loans that Serbia takes from China are also of great importance, which contribute to the faster implementation of certain infrastructure and other projects, thereby supporting the development of the entire country. The construction of new roads opens up a whole range of new jobs that play a major role in local development, not only in terms of business but also in terms of the development of local tourism and other industries.

The following table presents some of the biggest infrastructural projects that were and are currently being carried out by Chinese companies in Serbia, as well as some information regarding the financing and value of those projects.

**Table 1. Chinese projects in Serbia**

Project name	Estimated value and finance	Contractor	Year
<b>1. Novi Sad-Ruma expressway (Fruškogorski Corridor) 47.7 km</b>	Financing: RS budget 15%, loan from EXIM Bank 85%. Estimated value: 715.7 million USD	China Road and Bridge Corporation	Commercial contract for construction signed on October 6, 2020.
<b>2. Highway E-763, Section: Preljina-Požega 30.96 km</b>	Financing: RS budget 15%, loan from EXIM Bank 85%. Estimated value: 523.5 million USD	China Communications construction company Ltd.	Commercial contract for construction signed on November 27, 2017.
<b>3. Section: New Belgrade-Surčin 7.9 km</b>	Financing: RS budget. Estimated value: 70.5 million USD.	China Communications construction company Ltd.	Commercial contract for construction signed on August 18, 2019.
<b>4. Bypass around Belgrade, Sector B (sectors 4, 5 and 6): Ostružnica-Bubanj Potok 20.4 km</b>	Financing: RS budget 15%, loan from EXIM bank 85% (loan funds were fully used in 2022). Estimated value: 1.69 billion CNY	Power China	Commercial construction contract signed November 2016.

Project name	Estimated value and finance	Contractor	Year
<b>5. Iverak-Lajkovac expressway</b> <b>18.3 km</b>	Financing: RS budget 15%, loan from EXIM Bank 85%. Estimated value: 158 million EUR	Shandong Hi-Speed Group	Commercial contract for construction signed on June 12, 2020.
<b>6. Požarevac-Golubac expressway</b> <b>70 km</b>	Financing: RS budget 20%, loan from domestic commercial banks 80%. Estimated value: 337 million EUR	Shandong Hi-Speed Group	Commercial contract for construction signed on August 28, 2021.
<b>7. Highway E-763, Section: Požega-Duga Poljana-Boljare</b> <b>107 km</b>	Financing: RS budget and credit (not provided).	China Road and Bridge Corporation	Commercial contract for Section: Požega-Boljare signed on November 5, 2021, and for Section: Požega-Duga Poljana (75 km) was signed on December 26, 2021.
<b>8. Bypass around Novi Sad with a bridge over the Danube</b> <b>2.4 km</b>	Financing: RS budget 15%, loan from EXIM Bank 85% (pre-financing by the Contractor until the loan is secured). Estimated value: 175.5 million EUR	China Road and Bridge Corporation	Commercial contract for construction signed on March 19, 2022.
<b>9. The new bridge over the Sava River in Belgrade</b> <b>1,046 km</b>	Estimated value: 94 million EUR	Power China	Contractual agreement signed on December 11, 2020.

Project name	Estimated value and finance	Contractor	Year
<p><b>10. Belgrade-Zrenjanin-Novı Sad highway (110 km)</b>  <b>*Spatial plan of the special purpose area adopted on October 20, 2021. year.</b></p>	<p>Estimated value: 1.6 billion EUR</p>	<p>Shandong Hi-Speed Group</p>	<p>Memorandum of understanding on the preparation of planning and technical documentation for the construction project of the highway Belgrade (Borča)- Zrenjanin and Zrenjanin- Novi Sad, in Belgrade on January 22, 2021, with Shandong Hi-Speed Group</p>
<p><b>11. Bypass around Gornji Milanovac (9.5 km).</b></p>	<p>Financing: RS budget                      Estimated value: 30.4 million EUR</p>	<p>Power China</p>	<p>Commercial contract for construction signed on November 12, 2021.</p>
<p><b>12. Bypass around Uđice (4.85 km)</b></p>	<p>Financing: in accordance with the possibilities of the RS budget.                      Estimated Value: 29.8 million EUR, the final value will be determined after negotiations with the Contractor.</p>	<p>Power China</p>	<p>Commercial contract for construction signed on March 11, 2022.</p>
<p><b>13. Bypass around Pođega (3.8 km)</b></p>	<p>Estimated value: about 14 million EUR.                      Financing: in accordance with the possibilities of the budget of RS.</p>	<p>Power China</p>	<p>The project is part of the Agreement of December 11, 2021.</p>



Project name	Estimated value and finance	Contractor	Year
<b>14. Project of construction of communal (sewage) infrastructure and infrastructure for municipal solid waste disposal in the RS- <i>Clean Serbia</i></b>	The project is partially financed from the BANK OF CHINA LIMITED HUNGARIAN BRANCH loan, which amounts to 203.4 million EUR	China Road and Bridge Corporation Ltd.	The commercial contract on design and execution of works was signed on February 5, 2021.
<b>15. Construction of a sewage treatment plant in Veliko Selo</b>	The value of the first phase is around 270 million EUR, and the funds are mostly secured from loans.	China Machinery Engineering Corporation	Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China on economic and technical cooperation in the field of infrastructure, signed in 2009, the Government of the Republic of Serbia concluded the "Agreement for the Implementation of the Wastewater Collection and Purification Project of the Central Sewage System of the City of Belgrade" which refers to Phase I of the project
<b>16. Reconstruction and modernization of the railway section Rasputnica G–Rakovica-Resnik total length 7.5 km</b>	Finance: EBRD loan Value 24.5 million EUR	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation	Completed in 2019.

Project name	Estimated value and finance	Contractor	Year
<b>17. Reconstruction and modernization of the railway section Novi Sad-Subotica- state border with Hungary. Total length: 108 km.</b>	Finance- loan from the Chinese EHIM Bank. Total value: 1.16 billion USD	China Railway International; China Communications construction company Ltd.	Commercial contract, July 2018.
<b>18. a. Reconstruction and modernization of the section of the Belgrade Center- Novi Sad railway (total length 75 km); b. Reconstruction and modernization of the section Belgrade Center- Stara Pazova Total length: 34.5 km</b>	Finance- loan from the Chinese EHIM Bank a. total value of about 1.1 billion euros EHIM Bank, credit of the Russian Federation and the budget of the RS b. Total values: 350.1 million. USD, with additional works around 475 million USD	China Railway International; China Communications construction company Ltd.	a. On March 19, 2022, commercial traffic was established

Source: MCTIRS, n.d.

In addition to the previously delineated projects spearheaded by Chinese enterprises, projects that notably bolster local employment during their execution, tourism constitutes a pivotal economic driver with a substantial impact on the local economy. During the period from 2012 to 2019, the number of Chinese tourists visiting Serbia witnessed a remarkable thirty-fold increase. This substantial surge in Chinese tourist arrivals was exemplified by an important event: the 44th Belgrade International Tourism Fair, where China was honoured as the guest of distinction. This distinction underscored the elevated level of bilateral relations between the two countries (CCCEC, 2023). Great importance for Serbia-China relations is the agreement on visa-free cooperation since 2017. This made travel much more convenient, which led to an increasing number of Chinese tourists coming to Serbia, which

improved the local economy. Other industries also have great benefits from this. This growth was temporarily interrupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, owing to the stringent containment measures enforced at the time. Subsequently, a rapid resurgence in tourist numbers ensued, exemplified by a remarkable projected increase of 350% in the span from 2022 to 2023 alone (MTYRS, 2023).

On March 3, 2022, the Chamber of Chinese Companies in Belgrade was opened. During the opening, it was stated that the two largest exporters in 2021 were two Chinese companies: Hebei Steel and Zijin (GRS, 2022). Many of the Chinese companies that have branches in Serbia are part of the Chamber, such as Hebei Steel, Zijin, Power China, Shandong Hi-Speed Group, Huawei, China Road and Bridge, etc. The goal of the Chamber is to serve as a platform for networking, information exchange, advocacy, and collaboration to help when it comes to cultural understanding, especially for Chinese companies understanding Serbian local culture and organising B2B meetings, which will contribute to potential cooperation between the two sides.

### **Education and culture**

Every year, the Chinese government offers scholarships to the best students from Serbia, both for undergraduate and master's studies. This is a great contribution for young sinologists, because in this way they have the opportunity to acquire knowledge in the country they want to study. Confucius Institutes also provide opportunities for those interested to go to various types of training, so these programmes have enabled a large number of young people to go to China and complete their studies there. In the decade spanning from 2013 to 2023, the Confucius Institute located in Belgrade, in collaboration with its Chinese counterparts, disbursed over 90 scholarships to its students. These scholarships encompass one-semester and one-year awards designated for both undergraduate and master's-level studies. The prevalence of scholarships temporarily dwindled during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is anticipated that their availability will witness an augmentation in the ensuing years (IKB, n.d. b). In addition to the mentioned scholarships, several scholarships to Serbian students are awarded every year by the government of the People's Republic of China through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia.

At the moment, there are two Confucius Institutes and one Chinese Cultural Centre (CCC, still not formally opened) in Serbia. The Confucius Institute in Belgrade was officially opened on August 27, 2006, at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade (IKB, n.d.). In response to the burgeoning interest in the Chinese language and culture in Serbia, an additional institutional milestone was achieved with the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Philosophy in Novi Sad in 2014. The goal of these two institutions is to connect all individuals and institutions in Serbia that deal with the Chinese language and culture in any way, creating a reference base for all materials on Chinese culture and language available in Serbia, as well as other activities of cultural and educational cooperation between Serbia and China. Some of the activities that have been organised are screenings of Chinese films, exhibitions of Chinese paintings, lectures on Chinese culture, economics, philosophy, medicine, etc.

Owing to the assiduous efforts of both aforementioned institutes in the sphere of disseminating Chinese culture and language, coupled with the consequential economic expansion of China, there has been a discernible year-on-year upsurge in interest in the Chinese language. The statistics from 2013 to 2023 depict a fluctuating pattern. In 2013, approximately 300 participants attended courses at the Confucius Institute in Belgrade for the entire year. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, this figure surged to encompass 1,500–1600 per year and beyond, underscoring heightened interest in Chinese language education. This trend is notably exemplified by the gradual proliferation of Chinese language courses, which were initially introduced in schools in the capital city of Belgrade before disseminating to other urban centres across Serbia (Smederevo, Niš, Užice, etc.) (IKB, n.d. a). Widespread embrace of the Chinese language underscores an emerging societal trend wherein an increasing number of cities and educational institutions are endeavouring to introduce their constituents to the rich tapestry of Chinese culture. This eagerness is underpinned by the contemporary milieu, wherein there exists a palpable exigency and fervent desire to cultivate a deeper understanding of China.

Media is also considered a valuable tool when it comes to spreading Chinese soft power. Leading TV and radio stations (CCTV, Xinhua, China Radio International, and China Daily) can be seen and heard in numerous countries around the world. In the case of Serbia, China Radio International is one of

the Chinese media outlets based in Serbia. Its platform is translated into Serbian, and this media channel employs the Serbian language to inform the public about news related to or originating from China (CRI, n.d.).

The coverage of China-related news and topics is steadily gaining prominence within Serbia. An increasing number of Serbian individuals are engaging in the authorship of articles pertaining to China, encompassing both journalistic pieces and scholarly contributions. Moreover, there is a burgeoning corpus of literature available in the Serbian language, encompassing not only academic texts but also translated works of fiction originally composed in Chinese.

### ***STEEL FRIENDSHIP IN THE FUTURE***

Given the robust relations between the two nations and cooperation within the Belt and Road initiative, Sino-Serbian friendship and cooperation are often referred to as the *Steel Friendship*. Over the past decade, after promoting the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, China and Serbia have formally ratified more than 60 distinct agreements at various levels, each designed to facilitate and enhance collaboration between the two countries.

The augmentation of cooperation under the auspices of the Belt and Road Initiative is evident not solely in the realm of economic and infrastructural initiatives but also in the mutual comprehension of the respective cultures. The acquisition of familiarity with the Chinese language and culture is no longer an alien endeavour; Chinese is now audible in diverse locales, and the presence of Chinese media in Serbia is a conspicuous phenomenon. Through a myriad of business prospects and the avenue for educating the youth within Chinese universities, China no longer appears as distant as it once did. The visa-free arrangement between the two nations buttresses the tourism sector, thereby affording an array of opportunities for the local economy's advancement.

Despite the Western influence that has, in recent years, reinforced a critical narrative surrounding China, contending that its initiatives such as the Global Gateway and the Build Back Better World, also known as "B3W", are competitive with the Belt and Road Initiative, Serbia continues to assert its commitment to deepening cooperation with China. While diplomatic relations between the two nations have consistently maintained a positive

trajectory, the Belt and Road Initiative has emerged as a potent catalyst for the augmentation of Chinese soft power, consequently ushering in a new epoch in Sino-Serbian relations.

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# CHINA'S GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE: UNRAVELLING POLITICAL SLOGAN OR EMPOWERING DISCURSIVE FORCE?

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**Abstract:** The Global Security Initiative (GSI) put forth by the Chinese leadership amidst their decades-long politics of reforms and opening up warrants scrutiny in light of its potential as either a mere political slogan or a newfound discursive power hailing from China. As China's power continues to ascend, its global initiatives garner escalating attention from nations and the international community alike. Within the purview of this article, we shall delve into an examination of the GSI, an initiative introduced by China during a perplexing juncture, a tipping point that confronts international society. This particular moment has laid bare the long-suppressed incongruities inherent in North-South relations, thus signifying not only the unsustainability but also the potency of these disparities. Moreover, this moment does not merely symbolise the rising clout of emerging economies and their endeavour to secure their rightful place and sphere within international relations. Hence, the GSI has drawn considerable global attention. Our endeavour shall be dedicated to ascertaining whether the GSI embodies an empty political slogan or heralds a novel discursive power emanating from China. In the contemporary landscape, the concept of global security surpasses traditional conceptions reliant solely on physical dimensions. It necessitates the inclusion of discourses encompassing normative perspectives regarding how security should be safeguarded, encompassing the methods and strategies employed. In comprehending the GSI, we shall adopt two approaches: the path dependence approach and the soft opening approach. The GSI's emergence transcends the realm of a mere slogan, signifying China's intention to exert influence over global discourse and the construction of reality.

**Keywords:** China, Global Security Initiative (GSI), Discursive Power, securitization, tipping point.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Probing China's Global Security Initiative: A Critical Examination**

The ascent of China's power on the global stage has ignited widespread interest and scrutiny, particularly concerning its pronounced initiatives that are enveloping the globe. One such initiative, the Global Security Initiative (GSI), presents an intriguing subject of research within the backdrop of China's enduring trajectory of reforms and its concurrent policy of opening up to the world. The GSI, as advanced by the Chinese leadership, occupies a pivotal juncture, both temporally and conceptually, raising questions about its underlying essence: is it merely a political slogan crafted for international posturing on China, or does it indeed wield the potential to emerge as an influential tool in discursive power originating from China?

As global attention converges upon China's endeavours, a multifaceted inquiry into the GSI becomes imperative. This initiative has surfaced at a juncture that lays bare the intricate incongruities inherent in the dynamics between the global North and South. This exposition of disparities not only highlights their unsustainable nature but also underscores the latent potency they hold. This juncture, replete with complexities, signals a turning point that confronts the international community.

In dissecting the GSI, our investigation will be guided by two distinct yet interconnected approaches: the path dependence approach and the soft opening approach. The former scrutinises the historical context and trajectory that have shaped China's stance and subsequent pursuit of the GSI. This approach recognises the weight of history and the role of accumulated policy choices in delineating the contours of China's contemporary initiatives (Zeng, 2020). Conversely, the soft-opening approach acknowledges the evolving nature of global security paradigms. The traditional dimensions of security, characterised by their physical manifestations, have transcended their conventional boundaries (Zeng, 2020). In this new epoch, China offered its understanding of security and how security should be secured. China offered its initiatives as a general context, which should be filled by analysing the reactions of the international community to that particular initiative, project, strategy, etc. That does not mean that the international community or the most vociferous apologists giving criticism or praise to China are shaping

China's future behaviour. China is using their reactions as an outline for overcoming barriers to becoming a pivotal state in creating new international partnerships or in parallel to the current web of existing ones.

As we navigate this intricate landscape, it is imperative to unpack the GSI's fundamental nature. Is it a rhetorical tool wielded to provoke international reactions on China's ascending to global power, or does it signify a more profound transformation—a discursive power emerging from China, capable of shaping the contours of global security reality? By delving into this dichotomy, we seek to unravel the essence of the GSI, its implications for global security dynamics, and its potential to usher in a new paradigm that transcends traditional notions of power politics.

The following chapters will engage in a comprehensive analysis, employing the lenses of historical trajectory and contemporary discourse, to shed light on the enigmatic facets of China's Global Security Initiative. Through rigorous examination and contextualization, we aim to discern whether the GSI is a mere veneer or, indeed, a transformative force that will leave an indelible mark as a confirmation of China's prowess on the global stage.

### **DISCOURSE AND DISCURSIVE POWER: THEORETICAL DEFINITIONS AND THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION**

In the contemporary world, the power of influence, both in shaping our understanding of reality and the very reality we inhabit, holds profound significance in the projection of a nation's authority, the establishment of global trends, and the formulation of codes of conduct that are universally applicable. In this vein, a nation that operates from such a vantage point of power inevitably, and in accordance therewith, exerts its influence over the crafting of foreign, security, and economic policies of other nations, as well as the manners and intensity of their interconnectedness. It becomes not merely an architect but also a craftsman in the intricate weaving of the international order, global security architecture, and global supply and production chains, all prerequisites for global advancement. China constructs and transcends normative barriers, thereby causing its strategic delineations in apprehending reality to be embraced as morally universal. Such a form of power is discerned by academics as discursive power.

Before embarking upon an analysis of discursive power, we deem it imperative to furnish a theoretical delineation of discourse. As elucidated by Michel Foucault, discourses are the apparatus we require to confront the future (Foucault, 1990, p. 132). For certain scholars, discourse is not solely a linguistic and rhetorical phenomenon; it is also a pivotal cognitive mode that assumes a paramount role in the constitution of the human conceptual framework (Zheng, 2021, p. 1053). Grounded in these stated definitions, we discern the pivotal role of discourse in the dissemination of information, the establishment of a value system, modes of thought, perception, and reaction, extending its influence not merely to individuals but to nations as well. Within the contours of this logic, international communication is more than a mere stylized form of propaganda; it emerges as a discourse-driven communicative behaviour, underpinned by specific intentions and specific information (Zheng, 2021, p. 1054).

It is of paramount importance to emphasise that international discourse does not inherently generate discourse power. It is only when it exercises its influence over reality that it can give birth to discourse power. Discourse and power are indissolubly intertwined, and authentic power finds its embodiment through discourse (叶淑兰, 2017, p. 28). Thus, for discourse to evolve into influence, it necessitates meeting the prerequisites that render it audible, responsive, acknowledged, and actionable. Discourse assumes the function and role of constructing social reality, and the practical embodiment of discourse becomes the culminating stage of its transformation into discourse power (叶淑兰, 2017, p. 28). Furthermore, researchers illustrate that the economic prowess of a nation does not directly translate into the development of its discursive potency, much less into a global dominion. This assertion is buttressed by the explication of Sun Jinsheng: upon retrospection of world history, the swift escalation in the economic might of a rising power does not automatically presuppose a commensurate elevation of its international discourse power. The augmentation of its international discourse power mandates a conscious strategic blueprint, multidimensional configuration, and comprehensive enhancement (孙吉胜, 2019, p. 3).

In the evolution of discourse power, a certain systematicity must be present. This is because discourse power does not haphazardly materialise; it arises with intent, through meticulously planned steps, as the power of communication begets influence and discourse power begets initiative (叶淑兰, 2017, p. 27).

Various theoretical articulations surround the conceptualization of discourse power (话语权 - *Huayuquan*). Wang Weinan underscores that within the lexicon of the Chinese language, discourse power literally denotes the privilege of discourse, signifying the qualification and prerogative to articulate one's viewpoints on a specific matter. It is often closely intertwined with the discourse used by individuals to contend for their economic, political, cultural, and social entitlements. Succinctly put, the international right to discourse encompasses the qualification and liberty to express individuals' perspectives on a given pivotal issue on the global stage (Wang, 2010, p. 45). However, this may constitute an idealistic apprehension of discourse power, which is untenable given that the world operates driven by individual interests defined as the vital national interests of states, which in myriad aspects both collide and, simultaneously, complement one another. Thus, in actuality, discursive power finds itself more aligned with potency than parity. Consequently, in a more fundamental essence, the international discourse power of a nation pertaining to a certain matter signifies the guiding authority or control over the delineation, adjudication, and governance of said matter, predicated upon its national interest. The acquisition of this dominion hinges on its national vigour and the relevance of its policies (Wang 2010, p. 48). Additionally, discursive power constitutes the manifestation of a nation's international influence and might. It stands as one of the most pivotal facets within the realm of great power dynamics. Seizing the mantle of international discourse power entails a greater degree of agency and the entitlement to vocalise (孙吉胜, 2019, p. 4). Li Qiang, in relation to this form of power, espouses the perspective that it constitutes a core concept for gauging the comprehensive potency of a sovereign state in the epoch of globalisation. Top of FormBottom of FormIt is the weight and influence of a country's claims in international affairs, reflecting its determination to maintain its core values, making the developmental model more appealing, and realising its core interests. International discourse power is based on the comprehensive strength of a sovereign state, with the fundamental goal of safeguarding the fundamental interests of the country, but at the same time, it is deeply constrained by the background of the times and the international situation (李强, 2022). Certain theorists perceive discursive power from an institutional perspective. In line with this, we find that institutional discourse power is characterised as the crystallised discourse power emanating from international institutions. It pertains to an entity's capability to comprehend and apply discourse in convincing other entities, as well as in shaping the regulations and framework of the international

governance system (Yang, 2021, p. 306). The institutional definition of discursive power carries a significant role in understanding discourse power, for in order for power in the contemporary world to be deemed legitimate and in adherence to predictable rules ordained by it and translated into actionable practices, that same power must be institutionally grounded, or, in other words, it needs to be institutionalised power.

Simultaneously, scholars, through their theoretical delineations, underscore the strategic and, thus, pragmatic and flexible facet of discursive power. This arises from the fact that discursive power operates in the capacity of advancing the national interests of the People's Republic of China, all the while ensuring that it doesn't arouse suspicion among other players in the international arena. Hence, in such a defined context, discursive power holds immense relevance within Chinese diplomacy, given that diplomacy stands as one of the paramount avenues through which a nation accrues international discourse power (孙吉胜, 2019, p. 4). At this juncture, we must not lose sight of the Chinese diplomatization of international relations (Stefanovic-Stambuk & Popovic, 2022) and the construction and comprehensive promotion of major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics in navigating the intricate interplay of the two pivotal realms—domestic and international (叶淑兰, 2017, p. 26). Ergo, from this, it becomes patently clear that the objectives of major country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics are aimed at resolving the challenge of converting power into international influence through the bolstering of China's diplomatic prowess and power (叶淑兰, 2017, p. 27; Стефановић-Штамбук, 2010). In alignment with this, diplomacy is always an interactive endeavour that shifts strategic paradigms. Furthermore, diplomacy constitutes an idiosyncratic system of harmonised changes within the strategic paradigms themselves (Stefanović-Štambuk, 2012, p. 149). Through diplomacy and diplomatic practice, a nation embodies its diplomatic ethos, prioritised values, and national interest imperatives through the formulation of foreign policies. It exhibits its standing and potency via an array of diplomatic engagements, thereby articulating and effectuating its foreign propositions and requisites (孙吉胜, 2019, p. 4).

Within the Chinese academic community, there exists a distinctly objective viewpoint that Chinese discursive power rests at a modest echelon. Concomitantly, this inference implies that China's role, prestige, and global power standing are significantly circumscribed in this context, not

commensurate with the actual might of the Chinese state. Cited as reasons for this state of affairs are the dominance of American discourse, the arbitrary and historically imposed isolation imposed upon China by Western colonialism, and the ambiguity that shrouds the form and content of Chinese discourses themselves, despite their finesse and sophistication (Mitrović, 2016; Mitrović, 2017; Popović & Stević, 2020; Stević, 2022; Zheng, 2021). Bearing in mind that international influence directly presupposes the capacity to shape the agenda of paramount international challenges and to define diplomatic practice as a strategy for surmounting them, on an official level, China has designated the development of discursive power as one of its priorities. Should discursive power remain underdeveloped, this then entails the fact that China's diplomatic discourse similarly fails to mirror its actual strength. Discursive power evolves through diplomacy and the emulation of the diplomatic practices of powerful states (Jiemin, 2016). Having in mind that China evades securitization and that every security issue has to be diplomatized, that is, to become a matter of diplomacy, it is becoming obvious why it is necessary for China to be a diplomatic leader in shaping the perception of reality and the very reality we inhabit.

Thus, in the *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, we encounter the following exact and ambitious commitment:

We will stay firmly rooted in Chinese culture. We will collect and refine the defining symbols and best elements of Chinese culture and showcase them to the world. We will accelerate the development of China's discourse and narrative systems, better tell China's stories, make China's voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable (Xi, 2012).

In the subsequent section of the paper, we shall delve into an analysis of the political slogans to gain deeper insights into China's ambitious Global Security Initiative, through which it has proffered its understanding of reality and how it seeks to establish a state of peace and security.

### **POLITICAL SLOGANS IN CHINA'S OPENING AND STRENGTHENING PROCESS**

One avenue that the People's Republic of China employs to render its image more open and receptive to the international community while



simultaneously examining formulated perceptions and intended behavioural practices towards China within international relations is through political slogans. In China's recent political history, especially since its inception in 1949, political slogans have exerted significant influence in shaping internal political dynamics as well as projecting the Chinese perspective onto the international stage. By disseminating these political slogans and their rhetoric, Chinese leaders and representatives from the academic community have incited reactions from the international community, which have been used as insights into how China is perceived. The perceptions of Chinese leaders concerning external reactions have formed the bedrock of China's diplomatic practices. Since these perceptions were, in certain periods, more subjective than outcomes derived from objective analyses, they led to incongruous diplomatic responses from the People's Republic of China. In this sense, the pivotal political slogans signify not only China's novel vision but also carry implicit connotations of power dynamics. In other words, these slogans constitute political gestures designed to affirm China's regional, if not global, leadership (Zeng, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, apart from their rhetorical function, akin to discourses, political slogans also execute the following four roles: (1) declarations of intent; (2) assertion of power and assessment of domestic and international backing; (3) state propaganda as a mechanism for mass persuasion; and (4) a summons for intellectual endorsement (Urdang & Robbins, 1984, p. 28). Political slogans can be comprehended as succinct and impactful political phrases wielded to concentrate attention and galvanise action (Urdang & Robbins, 1984, p. 17).

In their analyses, certain theorists posit that the leaders of the Communist Party of China (CPC) introduce political slogans as vague ideas to accommodate the interests of international actors, thereby creating room for these actors to influence those concepts (Zeng, 2020, p. 8). Within this conceptual framework, political slogans ought to be construed as multifunctional concepts rather than meticulously conceived and precisely defined geopolitical strategies (Zeng, 2020, p. 6). Given that China is a distinct entity, even a civilization unto itself, upholding values divergent from those of the West, which the Western political sphere perceives as universal, this has prompted some theorists to advance the assertion that Chinese political slogans indeed constitute Beijing's calculated strategic maneuvers aimed at constructing a Sino-centric world order (Zeng, 2020, p. 1). Within the insights they present, political slogans, or encompassing concepts, are frequently

regarded as cohesive, organised strategic plans that mirror Beijing's or Xi Jinping's explicit geopolitical visions (Zeng, 2020, p. 1). This line of logical thinking is echoed by theorist Tobin, who contends that political slogans are not 'vague or empty propaganda'; rather, they encapsulate Xi's vision for transforming global governance' and consequently represent 'a strategic challenge for Washington and its allies' (Tobin, 2018, p. 155). Top of Form Bottom of Form

In both approaches, we can observe not only China's steadfastness and industrious efforts but also its flexibility and relational tendencies in engaging and interacting with the international community, weaving a global network of partners. According to scholar Qin Yaqing, China employs the concept of relationalism as a significant parallel to the Enlightenment's 'rationalism', emphasising 'becoming' as opposed to 'being'. This underscores a processual construction wherein ongoing social relations become nurturing grounds for collective emotion, identity, and the cultivation of a fiduciary community and moral order (Qin, 2011, p. 252).

As was the case with discourse, the extent and intensity of discursive power hold true for the radius, types, and intensity of reactions to the political slogans that the People's Republic of China disseminates globally (Zeng, 2020). Therefore, if China is a state without the capacity to alter the existing order, formulate new norms, or enhance the prevailing ones, the ideas from its leaders or prominent intellectuals would scarcely draw global public attention. Nonetheless, every stride taken by China is scrutinized closely, demonstrating the international community's sensitivity to the newly growing influence of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Nevertheless, CPC leaders must acknowledge that the high level of global attention does not necessarily equate to effective communication (Zeng, 2020, p. 86) or a guarantee of China being accepted as a partner in global security.

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the fundamental role of political slogans is to convey information and prompt action. When Chinese leaders introduce a slogan, they anticipate that local actors will actively resonate with it and act accordingly. The extent of response and action it can elicit depends not only on the popularity of this information but also on the authority of the slogan's originator (Zeng, 2020, p. 24). Herein lies another characteristic of the relationship between slogans and policy-making: slogans emerge at the highest echelons of power and are then transmitted through

a vertically complex bureaucratic apparatus to lower levels of authority. Representatives at lower tiers of authority are obligated to adhere to these slogans in both domestic and foreign policy-making, as well as in the formulation of strategic worldviews. Top of Form Bottom of Form

In the following section of the paper, we will delve into the analysis of the Global Security Initiative, one of China's pivotal steps in addressing the research question posed in the title of this paper.

### ANALYSIS OF THE GLOBAL SECURITY INITIATIVE

Upon analysing China's White Papers on National Security, it is evident that Chinese officials consider a multi-polar world, peace, development, and win-win cooperation as irreversible trends of the times. While China finds itself in a crucial period of strategic opportunity for development, the international community, including China, is still confronting diverse and complex security challenges (MFA China, 2019). As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the largest trading power, and the second-largest economy, China is obligated to share an appropriate part of international responsibility in securing global security. In line with this, the People's Republic of China offers its wisdom to "enlighten" and "better" the world in collaboration with other partners (Zeng, 2020).

According to China's understanding, international security is indivisible. Attempts to seek absolute security at the expense of others will eventually result in negative consequences (CGTN, 2023). Guided by these goals, China, specifically President Xi Jinping, proposed the Global Security Initiative in his keynote speech titled *Rising to Challenges and Building a Bright Future Through Cooperation* at the opening of the 2022 BOAO Forum. Thus, the GSI is not a strategy, agenda, programme, or project, but rather an initiative. By presenting it in this manner, China signals that the GSI is an open and "win-win" global "initiative", transcending exclusive blocs or military alliances (Zeng, 2020). By introducing the GSI, China encompasses the entire world, sidestepping the pitfall and criticism of dividing countries while allegedly forming an anti-Western discourse. In this initiative as well, China persists in its view that alliances are outdated forms of relationship-building and that they need to be replaced by partnership logic that transcends bloc politics.

In his speech, Xi Jinping stated that China remains committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, working collaboratively to uphold world peace and security. He likened countries worldwide to passengers aboard the same ship, sharing a common destiny. For the ship to navigate through challenges and sail towards a brighter future, all passengers must work together. The idea of abandoning anyone is simply unacceptable (Xi, 2022). In the same speech, Xi emphasised that humanity, as a unified entity, needs to embrace a global governance philosophy founded on extensive consultation, joint contribution, shared benefits, promotion of common human values, and advocating exchanges and mutual learning between civilizations (Xi, 2022). We understand that China advocates diplomatization as a means to address global challenges and establish a context of collective progress. As mentioned above, diplomatization signifies a country's diplomatic practice, wherein every challenge becomes a matter of diplomacy rather than a reason to escalate arms races and securitization (Stefanovic-Stambuk & Popovic, 2022). It is quite expected that with the initial presentation of this initiative, China has provided a broad framework and general guidelines for ensuring global security. As expected, the content of the GSI has been further developed over time. Furthermore, the GSI serves as a continuation and, to a certain extent, a reshaping of earlier Chinese security concepts, such as the New Security Concept, harmonious world, and common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security. This reshaping is done in a manner that doesn't disrespect the previous generations of CPC leaders.

The first operationalization of the GSI and the concrete determination of its individual aspects were undertaken this year when China released *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*. In this document, it is underscored that the matter of security is crucial for the well-being of people in all nations, the noble cause of global peace and development, and the future of humanity (MFA China, 2023). Therefore, upholding global peace and security and promoting worldwide development and prosperity should be a shared pursuit for all countries (MFA China, 2023). However, this document presents a degree of concretization of the GSI, as the world is undergoing an era of unprecedented changes and the initiative itself is still relatively young. The operationalization of the initiative begins by highlighting six core concepts and principles, which are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, constituting an organic unity through dialectical synthesis. Their determination has been

strategically aligned with the promotion of China's diplomatic practice and geopolitical interests, defining these six core concepts and principles as follows: the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security provides conceptual guidance; respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries is the fundamental premise; adhering to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter is a primary benchmark; taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously is an important principle; resolving differences and disputes between countries peacefully through dialogue and consultation is a necessary choice; and maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains is an inherent requirement (MFA China, 2023).

Alongside these six core concepts and principles, the prioritisation of collaboration is unequivocally established as essential, if not the sole means, for achieving the following goals: peaceful and common development; the prohibition of nuclear weapons use; safeguarding sovereignty; active participation in formulating a New Agenda for Peace; and other proposals put forth in Our Common Agenda by the UN Secretary-General, addressing issues of international cyber, energy, climate, biodiversity, food security, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence. Additionally, the GSI aims to strengthen the UN's central coordinating role and more precisely define international norms for cooperation in outer space (MFA China, 2023). The fundamental form of collaboration highlighted is inclusive multilateralism, in which all participants are considered equal.

From a strategic perspective, it is evident that through the GSI, China has provided enough space for actors to pursue their security interests, thereby establishing an additional framework for creating cooperative rules. Rather than imposing regulations, the GSI offers a platform for shared participation, collaboration, and joint efforts in crafting cooperation norms that reflect the interests and contributions of all involved parties.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of this study was to delve into the Global Security Initiative (GSI) to address the question of whether this initiative remains merely a political slogan or evolves into a pivotal component of China's discursive power. In other words, this analysis aimed to determine whether the unveiling of the

GSI signifies China's desire to observe how the global public perceives its unquestionable development or if China unequivocally intends to influence the perception of reality. Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the GSI surpasses the boundaries of mere political slogans. It is not solely a method of probing the international community's paradigm and prism regarding China; rather, it represents a significant catalyst in bolstering China's discursive power—its ability to shape and influence the perception of reality and the very reality we inhabit. Along this trajectory, China expects more positive responses in regard to its activities aimed at enhancing the world order.

Furthermore, the analysis confirms the assertion that China still faces a deficit in discursive power. Nevertheless, Beijing is gradually, consistently, and non-provocatively enhancing its discursive power both as a centre of political power and in collaboration with lower levels of authority, following the framework of vertical political power. This progression raises questions about domestic society's innovation and openness. The strengthening of discursive power aligns with China's overall empowerment strategy, intensifying its influence and amplifying its voice on the global stage, particularly in the perception and formation of reality. Yet, the journey towards augmenting discursive power is not linear. The deficit in China's discursive power, as acknowledged, underscores the complexities inherent in reshaping global narratives. China's pragmatic approach, characterised by incremental progress and engagement, indicates a conscious effort to bridge this gap. This gradual enhancement of discursive power involves cultivating partnerships, open dialogues, and mutually beneficial cooperation that resonate with China's vision of a harmonious world order.

In conclusion, the GSI's emergence transcends the realm of a mere slogan, signifying China's intention to exert influence over global discourse and the construction of reality. While the deficit in discursive power persists, China's incremental and consistent efforts towards its enhancement mirror its broader process of empowerment. As China strengthens its discursive power, it aligns with its increasing influence and presence globally, contributing to the shaping of global narratives and perceptions. In the complex arena of global politics, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) emerges as more than a slogan; it embodies China's strategic intent to forge a path towards an interconnected world. As the GSI seeks to foster a new framework for cooperation and security, it

becomes apparent that China's motivations extend beyond mere rhetoric. By unveiling this initiative, China is not only inviting the international community to reflect on its trajectory of development but also asserting its role as a significant contributor to global stability.

The analysis undertaken in this study emphasises that the GSI marks a pivotal juncture where China endeavours to shape the narrative surrounding its rise and global role. Rather than remaining confined within the boundaries of a political catchphrase, the GSI demonstrates China's commitment to collaborative and sustainable security mechanisms. It signifies China's proactive stance in addressing multifaceted security challenges, transcending traditional notions of national interest, and aligning with the broader pursuit of global well-being.

China's ambition to bolster its discursive power aligns with its broader aspirations for international leadership and influence. The GSI, while marking a significant step, is part of China's larger agenda to reshape global paradigms and narratives. It underscores the nuanced interplay between realpolitik and the power of ideas. Through this initiative, China acknowledges that shaping the discourse is an essential facet of shaping global reality. As China navigates the global stage, it does so not merely as a passive observer of international perceptions but as an active contributor to global conversations. The GSI is emblematic of China's evolving role as a global actor, strategically steering the discourse and contributing to the collective endeavour of building a secure and interconnected world.

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# THE “BELT AND ROAD” INITIATIVE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AREA STUDIES IN CHINA: A CASE STUDY OF THE CENTRE FOR STUDY OF CIVILIZATIONS OF CAPITAL NORMAL UNIVERSITY

Li JIANJUN\*

**Abstract:** Over the past decade, more than 450 centres and institutes of area studies have been established in China. In addition to the need for a rising China to build its own knowledge system about different areas and countries in the world, the Belt and Road Initiative has played an important role in promoting it. China’s institutions for area studies are not based on “you” and “I”, nor regard the target countries as “imaginary enemies”, but are based on “we”, committed to exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations and a “community of shared future”, which is consistent with the goal of the Belt and Road Initiative. In order to achieve this goal, China has set area studies as a first-level discipline for awarding doctorates, which signifies that area studies have entered a new stage of discipline construction and talent cultivation. The development of the Centre for Study of Civilizations (CSC), focusing on Balkan studies at Capital Normal University, bears witness to the whole process.

**Keywords:** “Belt and Road” Initiative, community of shared future, area studies, Balkan studies, Centre for Study of Civilizations.

## THE RISE OF AREA STUDIES IN CHINA

Since 2011, in just over a decade, area studies<sup>1</sup> have been rolled out and promoted in stages in nearly 200 colleges and universities across the country, growing out of nothing and expanding from small to large, as a result of concerted efforts by many parties. Now that area studies are entering the discipline construction stage, although there are still some problems and challenges, discipline development has a good prospect.

Area studies originate from the practical needs of foreign exchanges when major countries develop to a certain extent. Britain, France, the

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<sup>1</sup> There are several different names for internal and regional studies in Chinese; the term “area studies” is used here in international use.

United States, and other developed countries have started the process of area studies early. China is also a big country, but due to the aggression of foreign powers in the golden era of world industrialization, its economic and social development was curdled. Since it was a weak, diplomatically underprivileged country, it was unable to act in international affairs. Therefore, old China naturally lacked motivation for the construction of extraterritorial knowledge. The founding of the People's Republic of China ended the trend of China's economic decline and started the process of industrialization and modernization in independent countries. The reform and opening up after 1978 allowed the Chinese economy to enter a historical period of rapid rise on a global scale. After 2010, China became the second-largest economy in the world (World Bank, 2011, p. 17). With the historic leap in economic strength, China's overseas interests are expanding day by day, its international status is constantly improving, and its influence on the international stage is getting bigger and bigger. At this time, China has a new urgent need for the construction of a knowledge system outside the country in both quality and quantity.

With the continuous breakthrough and rise of China in various fields, the hegemonic status of the United States and its allies has been greatly challenged. The United States is inducing or even forcing its Western allies to jointly "cut" economic ties with China. In the process of promoting the construction of the "Belt and Road", Chinese enterprises often encounter major setbacks in their overseas investment. China's economy urgently needs to overcome difficulties, cope with risks, and fully develop economic and trade cooperation with emerging markets and developing countries along the "Belt and Road". It is the responsibility of scholars of area studies to serve the realities of diplomacy and economy, which can help China take advantage of the situation, improve China's economic diplomacy, and change the world's view about China's rise; that is, China's participation in the construction of the new international order is based on understanding and sharing of interests rather than a simple game.

In this context, the Ministry of Education of the PR China began to promote area studies in 2011. There were two promotion stages. The first objective was to establish the area studies centres. In 2011, the Ministry of Education initiated a dedicated programme focused on area studies within universities, and 42 area studies centres had been established across 28

universities by 2012. These centres primarily focus on key countries, regions, and organisations, including the United States, Russia, and Britain, as well as the “Belt and Road” key areas. Area studies in universities have begun to take shape (Luo, 2022). In January 2015, the Ministry of Education issued guidance and administrative measures for these bases, requiring universities to deeply understand the significance of area studies, steadily promote the cultivation and construction of research bases, and strive to provide intellectual support and talent guarantees for national reform and development (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2015).

The next stage is the full-scale roll-out of the centres of area studies on record. In 2017, in order to serve the overall situation of national strategy and diplomacy and comprehensively promote the Belt and Road Initiative, the Ministry of Education again issued guiding documents and organised local universities to set up area studies centres. More than 400 centres of area studies have been registered at more than 180 universities. After ten years of layout and construction, the number of participating universities has increased by five times, and the distribution of research centres has increased by ten times, achieving full coverage of countries and regions of research objects. The area studies of universities have entered a track of rapid development, ushering in a golden period of development (Luo, 2022). In 2020, the Ministry of Education launched the first round of evaluation of these centres, eliminating a number of unqualified centres but adding some in 2021.

After two rounds of promotion, many countries and regions that were not paid attention to and could not be taken into account in the past, such as Albania, Cambodia, Pacific Islands countries, and the Balkans, have special research platforms, research teams, talent training, and academic journals, and have achieved a series of basic research and applied research results. Taking the base of the Centre for Study of Civilizations as an example, Balkan studies were formed in 2012 with the support of the Ministry of Education and Capital Normal University.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, the direction of Balkan studies was

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<sup>2</sup> Capital Normal University, located in Beijing, is a national “double first-class” university jointly built by the Ministry of Education of the PR China and the Beijing Municipal People’s Government. It is one of the first universities that proposed to carry out area studies and also one of the first universities to set up a base for area studies.

expanded on the basis of the original study of civilizations. After focusing on Balkan studies, a Balkan research team of more than 20 people has been gathered to plan and publish Balkan academic research series, Balkan Studies translation series, Overview of Balkan Countries series, the first journal of Balkan Studies, Balkan News, and Balkan Insight in China. Moreover, under the first-level discipline of world history, the second-level discipline of area studies has been established to recruit master's (2018) and doctoral degrees (2021) in Balkan studies.

It should be emphasised that the purpose of arranging area studies in batches in China is not to seek world hegemony like Western countries do. Some countries tend to hold the Cold War mentality, stand on the opposite side of the target country and the target region, and study the other side as a means to “know the other”, with the purpose of establishing hegemonic discourse and consolidating the Western dominance of the world (Liu and Li, 2022). Based on “we”, not “you” and “me”, China's area studies are committed to the interaction and symbiosis of civilizations and the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind.<sup>3</sup> China's researchers shoulder the mission of the era to break the hegemony of Western discourse through in-depth field investigation and research, build a Chinese discourse narrated by multiple civilizations, find the common value of different civilizations, and build a knowledge bridge between China and the world. As a result, we designed the “Approaching the Balkans” series, which plans to publish more than ten books on the culture and history of the Balkans.

### THE ADVANCE OF AREA STUDIES

The two roll-outs and promotions of area studies by the Ministry of Education have made area studies develop fast and vigorously. However, area studies cannot be sustained only by the expansion of distribution and scale, and their sustainable development depends on the cultivation of young talents. Before 2021, more than ten universities in China had set up

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<sup>3</sup> The community of shared future for mankind advocates an international concept of equality, justice, peace, and inclusiveness, which is a modern inheritance of the Confucian thought that ‘the whole world is for the common good’ (see: Xu, 2022).

second-level disciplines of area studies, breaking the original situation of training talents engaged in area studies only by relying on the subject of international politics, international relations, and the history of the world and country. However, the establishment of the second-level discipline of area studies is far from meeting the quality and quantity requirements of the country for the talent cultivation of area studies, so it must set up its own first-level discipline. At the end of 2021, area studies will be included in the “Doctoral and Master’s Degree Awarding and Talent Training Discipline Catalogue (Draft for Comments)” issued by the Office of Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the Ministry of Education. By September 2022, area studies had been officially listed in the new edition of the postgraduate education discipline catalogue published by the Ministry of Education and had become a first-level discipline under the interdisciplinary category, from which they entered the new stage of formal discipline construction and institutionalisation.

With the introduction of the new discipline catalogue, cross-disciplinary platforms for area studies have sprung up, and the information about the establishment of new platforms is dizzying. For example, Sichuan International Studies University, Shenzhen University, Beijing International Studies University, Northwest University, Capital Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University, Northeast Normal University, etc., have all set up institutes of area (or regional and international) studies, among which Northwest University and Beijing International Studies University have also set up colleges of area studies. In addition to institutes of area studies established by more than a dozen units, such as Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai Foreign Studies University, and Beijing Language and Culture University, at least 60 similar platforms have been established in China. In addition, on October 23, 2022, Beijing Foreign Studies University, together with a number of universities across the country, proposed the establishment of the “China Community of Area Studies (中国区域国别学共同体)”, which was a follow-up to the “The Faculty Alliance of Talent Training of Area Studies in Chinese Universities (高校国别和区域研究人才培养院系联盟)”.<sup>4</sup> It is the second-largest

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<sup>4</sup> It was jointly established by a number of universities in December 2019. It was renamed “The Alliance of Talent Training and Discipline Construction of Area Studies in Chinese Universities” after the establishment of the first-level discipline of Area Studies.

academic organisation of area studies in China, and it is also one of the landmark events of the prosperity and development of area studies after it became a “discipline”.

The Working Secretariat of Area Studies of the Ministry of Education, the Alliance of Talent Training and Discipline Construction of Area Studies in Chinese Universities, and many universities organised various academic conferences and forums for in-depth discussions on the construction of area studies. According to the theme of the conferences, they are divided into three categories: the first is on the discipline construction of area studies, such as the Symposium on Interdisciplinary Construction of Area Studies held by Capital Normal University on June 10, 2023, where most of the most important scholars in this field were present; the second is the collaborative innovation between area studies and various disciplines such as foreign linguistics, world history, international relations, and geography. For example, the “Geography and Area Studies Forum” held by Shanghai International Studies University on June 30, 2023; and the third is a target country or region studies conference from the perspective of the discipline of area studies. For example, on April 20, 2023, the Henan Institute of Foreign Studies hosted a roundtable forum on “Area Studies and Japanese Studies”.

Chinese universities have seized this rare historical opportunity and are actively preparing for the construction of a first-level discipline in area studies. Many universities have held special conferences on discipline construction and the application of doctoral programmes, indicating that they take the initiative to align with national needs and coordinate resources inside and outside the university. Some universities with independent degree authorization have begun to promote the setting of doctoral degree sites, and some have been successfully set up. For example, in October 2022, Sun Yat-sen University independently established internal procedures and reported them to the Ministry of Education and the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council. Some have even begun to explore as undergraduates. Other universities are also integrating resources and creating conditions for this discipline. Since foreign language universities have fewer disciplines than comprehensive universities, in order to fully show the diversity of interdisciplinary disciplines in the application, some of them set up other adjacent disciplines in advance.

Capital Normal University is also taking active action. On the basis of the Centre for Study of Civilizations, the Institute of Global and Area Studies (IGAS) was officially inaugurated in June 2023. It will focus on the Balkans, characterised by the coexistence of multiple civilizations, with the goal of building a Balkan research institute with certain world renown and laying the foundation for Balkanology in China. The IGAS has organised several expert demonstration meetings to review the texts of the first-level discipline of area studies. As an open platform, the IGAS implements the Balkan research elite gathering project to create a “high ground of scholars”. The IGAS hopes to attract foreign scholars to join its scientific research and talent cultivation through flexible employment forms. The IGAS also hopes to send its graduate students to Southeast European countries for exchange.

### **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

It must be pointed out that under the momentum of all colleges and universities, China’s area studies must also face up to the following problems and challenges:

1. The distribution of disciplines is unbalanced, with more research on large countries, developed countries, key regions, and important international organisations such as the United States, Russia, Britain, the EU, and the ASEAN, and less research on small countries, backward countries, Latin America, Africa, and other unpopular regions. It is necessary to make up for shortcomings as soon as possible, increase funds, and strive to achieve a relative balance of different national and regional research forces.

2. There is no consensus on the theory and method of area studies. Although many books on area studies have been published in China, it is still impossible to say what theories and methods of area studies should be covered and which theories and methods of area studies with Chinese characteristics should be further explored.

3. The challenge of the formulation of the talent training programme, especially the problem of “how to set up a curriculum”. The setting of the curriculum is related to the quality of the training of compound area studies talents and is crucial to the development of area studies. The curriculum should not be “adopted” and simply reorganised, but should be well designed at the top level.



4. The management of area studies, including the looseness of interdisciplinary teams, the management of degree<sup>5</sup> awarding, and the lagging evaluation mechanism of area studies, are all urgent problems that need to be solved as an interdisciplinary discipline.

Each centre of area studies faces different problems. On the first issue, the IGAS is deeply aware and involved. When it turned to Balkan studies in the summer of 2015, there were only a few scholars doing Balkan studies across the country. As the first physical Balkan research institute in China, the IGAS has increased its output by adjusting its academic committee, recruiting foreign researchers, applying for specialised research projects and publishing projects, cultivating postgraduate students in Balkan studies, offering courses, cooperating with foreign universities, and publishing articles online. By promoting domestic counterparts and the general public to pay attention to Balkan studies and Balkan issues, it reinforces people's perception that this region is closely linked to the world situation and is an important node area of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Scholars are increasingly aware of the theory and method of area studies. On June 25, 2023, the second Forum of 50 Scholars of Area Studies in China issued an initiative for the establishment of second-level disciplines of area studies. The third article of the initiative stipulates that 'there are generally no less than three and no more than seven second-level disciplines of area studies in the same unit, one of which is "the Theory and Method of Area Studies"' (The Alliance of Talent Training and Discipline Construction of Area Studies in Chinese Universities, 2023). This will be instructive for universities that attach importance to the construction of area studies.

Setting the curriculum for academic talent training is closely related to its goal. Two professors of the IGAS believe that 'people engaged in area studies should at least have the following characteristics: first, be proficient in the language of the target country, cannot only engage in professional research, but also carry out cross-cultural communication; second, have a good knowledge of the history and culture of the target country, have life experience in the target country, understand the local social customs and habits, and be able to use the local first-hand contacts and social relations

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<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Education stipulates that the discipline of area studies can be awarded one of four degrees as an interdisciplinary subject: history, law, economics, and literature.

to carry out social activities; third, have professional academic training, can independently carry out basic research, can also carry out field investigation and countermeasure research; and fourth, have a strong emotion of nation and country, have the ambition and ability to devote himself to area studies' (Liu and Liang, 2022). Therefore, the curriculum should be set up around these requirements, including language courses, theory courses, national and regional conditions courses, professional courses, field investigations, etc., which need multidisciplinary support.

The IGAS also thinks the middle two problems can only be solved by using its own advantageous disciplines and through cooperation with other universities (including foreign universities), and the last problem needs special policy support from universities and even the Ministry of Education.

### **PROSPECTS OF AREA STUDIES IN CHINA**

At present, researchers in area studies are actively exploring in practice while vigorously discussing in academia. If the problem of discipline is solved, the following points should be done well in the future, and the area studies will certainly answer the questions of the era and the needs of the country, and they will be brilliant and promising.

It is necessary to fully understand the mission of area studies. It is a realistic need for China to build a modern socialist state and promote the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind under the great changes unseen in a century. It is the only way to build a discourse system of civilizations of all countries and regions with Chinese characteristics and an important channel to promote the independent voice, prosperity, and development of diverse civilizations in the world.

It is necessary to have a clearer awareness of the discipline of area studies. Area studies are an important part of improving the discipline system of higher education in the new era. In the discussion, it is necessary to distinguish between the general theories and methods of area studies and the special theories and methods for a certain country or region, explore the establishment of teaching and research paradigms generally recognised by the academic community, and establish and improve the discipline evaluation system and the discipline guarantee system that match

the characteristics of the discipline so as to ensure the long-term development of area studies.

Universities must do four things in the fields of talent introduction and education. Under the circumstances that the development of area studies is urgent, most area studies are weak, and the need for talent training is strong, Prof. Dr. Liu Xincheng of Capital Normal University, who has been actively promoting and leading the development of discipline in area studies, pointed out that the strengthening of the country through talents, gathering dispersed talents, using existing talents, building first-line talents, and cultivating future talents are the power points of discipline construction.

Scientific research should be organised. Researchers in area studies come from multiple disciplines, and the team is relatively scattered. Only by taking problems and needs as the driving force, through organised scientific research, can we promote the cross-accumulation of respective knowledge and multi-field integration, realise the mutual empowerment between area studies and neighbouring disciplines, and form a holistic new knowledge system for specific countries and regions.

Scholars should strengthen the concept of collaboration in talent cultivation. It has become a consensus that it is impossible to cultivate the compound talents of area studies through a single discipline, and it is necessary to take the road of interdisciplinary, cross-faculty, cross-university, and cross-country collaboration. It is necessary to carefully design a cultivation programme with “large and deep interdisciplinary” thinking through multi-party collaboration so as to solve the problem of “one curriculum” mentioned above.

Keep in mind the social service function. One of the differences between area studies and other studies is the function of social services. It is necessary to actively integrate into the service needs of the country, adhere to the problem-oriented approach, take into account basic research and applied research, so that the two can be in one line, complement each other, and improve the quality of policy services.

In short, universities should seize the new opportunity of the discipline construction of area studies, provide policy support, encourage scholars to do a good job in area studies, build a knowledge system of area studies with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and deepen mutual learning

and coexistence of civilizations. The Belt and Road Initiative would also benefit from abundant academic support from area studies.

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