



GLOBAL TRANSITIONS SERIES



China's Global Security Vision in a Changing World

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Abstract

This report examines the Global Security Initiative (GSI), a manifestation of Chinese global security agency offering a vision of security based on China's worldview, values, and national interests. It outlines the core principles, priorities and cooperation mechanisms of the GSI, the motivations and intent behind the initiative, and the international reactions to it. Amidst the erosion of the 'rules-based international order', the report finds that the GSI is gaining traction among countries in the Global South that aspire to a more equitable and inclusive international system, and disagree with Western policies and the perceived double standards in the application of international law. The success or failure of the GSI in upholding a just and equitable multipolar order is yet to be seen. The report recommends the pursuit of more 'positive-sum games' with China in handling prominent peace and security challenges and a radical re-appraisal of the Western security paradigm, alongside efforts towards an alternative path of relations with the Global South.

Key Findings

- ▶ The Global Security Initiative (GSI) sits alongside other noteworthy Chinese proposals for global governance. The GSI identifies twenty priority areas of cooperation that outline both the global scope of the initiative and an overarching definition of security governance. These encompass international and regional challenges, traditional and non-traditional security challenges, and the peace and development nexus.
- ▶ The multipolar security order envisioned by the GSI differs from the Western concept based on liberal and universal values. The GSI emphasises national sovereignty instead of interventionism, common and indivisible security rather than military alliances, development and social order instead of democracy and human rights, and government-to-government relations instead of engagement with civil society.
- ▶ Analysis of Chinese and Western sources suggest that the GSI is directly linked to the increased geopolitical rivalry between China and the US, China's heightened sense of urgency in asserting its interests, China's security anxieties, especially regarding its immediate periphery, and China's increased exposure to security risks in fragile and conflict-affected environments.
- ▶ Western countries and their allies are wary of the GSI, but China's proposals fit with the views of numerous countries in the Global South that are dissatisfied with current approaches to global security. They aspire to a more equitable and inclusive international system, disagree with the perceived double standards of Western policies, and are unhappy with American global primacy. The handling of the wars in Ukraine and Gaza has increased the gulf between the Global North and the Global South.
- ▶ The GSI is providing a broad policy framework for Chinese peace and security initiatives in regional contexts such as the Middle East and Ukraine.
 - In the Middle East, China has gained diplomatic recognition by contributing to mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In a delicate balance between Israel and Palestine, China aims to protect its economic interests while supporting Palestine's emancipation. It has offered itself as a neutral peacemaker, proposing a five-point peace plan and an international peace conference on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- In the war in Ukraine, China tries to preserve its strategic relationship with Russia while professing neutrality and seeking de-escalation and a negotiated settlement. Through shuttle diplomacy and the release of a concept paper, China has sought to position itself as a peacemaker, mitigator of the global fall-out of the war, and post-conflict reconstructor.
- ▶ China is making progress in shaping the conversation on changing the rules-based order and building consensus among like-minded countries. Western countries, meanwhile, have yet to offer a convincing and coherent strategy that goes beyond China's containment and provides instead a more 'sustainable security paradigm' for a global order in turmoil.
- ▶ Despite the West and China competing for who will set the global agenda on pursuing peace, there is a degree of commonality in handling prominent peace and security-related problems, and promoting de-escalation and conflict resolution in conflict affected regions, including the Middle East and Ukraine.
- ▶ The success, or failure, of the GSI in upholding a just multipolar order will depend on the willingness of China's local and global partners to cooperate, the state of Sino-US relations, and how China will leverage the political and economic influence at its disposal to promote peace, prosperity, and stability in the decades ahead. Practical contributions towards positive outcomes to conflicts raging around the world will be key tests for the GSI and the opportunity for China to show that, beyond discursive posturing, its actions match its rhetoric.

Recommendations

- ▶ There is a need to further analyse how China pursues its vision of global security and the policy implications and impact of the GSI. Attention should be paid to China's enactment of on-the-ground policies, and their impact on conflict management and resolution; how China promotes its security blueprint; the support garnered from different countries; and why countries align with China's worldviews and interests.
- ▶ A more constructive and sustainable approach to China should be based on 'positive-sum games', starting from handling prominent problems in regional contexts where there is a confluence of interests:
 - In the Middle East, engagement with China should focus on three key areas of common ground: promoting regional stability and preventing a large-scale regional conflict; addressing the humanitarian crisis of Palestinian civilians; and advancing the prospects of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
 - Ukraine and its Western allies should intensify dialogue with China on how to bring the war to an end and mitigate its wider global repercussions. This includes ensuring a just and durable peace, addressing food insecurity, and cooperating on post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.
- ▶ When facing competing claims and strategic interests—such as maintaining stability in both the South China Sea and East Asia, nuclear non-proliferation, regulating artificial intelligence, and preventing an arms race in either outer space or cyber space—efforts should focus on improving crisis management mechanisms, keeping communication open at all levels, and promoting diplomatic and security dialogue initiatives to manage and resolve differences.
- ▶ Whilst Western countries should maintain active engagement with China on areas that are related to different political traditions, value systems and cultures, it is in areas of shared concerns and interests that engagement with China offers likelier positive outcomes. This should be insulated from divergences on values agendas, particularly those based on liberal principles.

- ▶ New forms of Sino-US interactions are needed, especially those that could strengthen ongoing dialogues and help create a framework for more constructive engagement between the two global powers. Track 1.5 frameworks, for example, which have historically facilitated major breakthroughs, should be considered.
- ▶ A back-to-basics approach to international law is needed. This requires restoring the credibility of the UN Charter's principles, especially in relation to non-aggression and respect of sovereignty, as well as the commitments and obligations under the laws of war. A UN international commission should be tasked to investigate the current crisis of international principles.
- ▶ China's proposals for an alternative global security order and its appeal among Global South countries should galvanise Western policy actors to undertake a radical re-appraisal of the current crisis in the global security order and address its underlying causes. They should demonstrate the benefits of their approaches as global security providers, promote peaceful solutions to international conflicts and disputes, and ensure that their policy actions consistently support, not undermine, the rules-based order they champion.
- ▶ Western countries should develop an alternative path of relations with the Global South that offers credible solutions to the challenges of the twenty-first century. They should: acknowledge the legitimate aspirations of the Global South to encourage equity within multilateral institutions; strengthen exchanges and cooperation where there is substantial commonality; and accept that there are areas where cooperation is not feasible due to different political and economic interests, governance, or moral principles and cultures.

Introduction

The post-1945 system of global governance is in turmoil. As wars rage across the world, more people bear the brunt of armed conflict than at any other time in decades ([ICG, 2024](#)), with nearly 300 million in dire humanitarian need ([OCHA, 2023](#)). Amid mounting geopolitical tensions, the rivalry between the US and China grows, Western and Russian relations have broken down, and the UN Security Council is paralysed by internal divisions. A growing narrative around Western hypocrisy and double standards ([Verdélío, 2023](#); [Sennett, 2023](#); [The Economist, 2023](#); [Wintour, 2024](#)) is amplifying global calls for a more equitable and representative international order.

Against this backdrop, China has laid claim to a more significant role in the global governance system, with new concepts and norms that aim to better safeguard peace and prosperity, while simultaneously strengthening Chinese power and interests. China articulated a transformative vision of global governance under former President Hu Jintao; in 2005 he called for building "a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity" ([UN, 2005](#)). Under President Xi Jinping, this became a "community with a shared future for mankind" (人类命运共同体, *rénlèi mìngyùn gòngtóngtǐ*) ([China.org.cn, 2013](#)), a key tenet of "Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy" ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)), which supports a strategy of "national rejuvenation" ([MFAPRC, 2024](#)). More recently, China has proposed specific initiatives to advance its vision of a "common future". In April 2022, at the Boao Forum for Asia's (博鳌亚洲论坛, *Bó'áo Yàzhōu Lùntán*) annual conference, President Xi launched the Global Security Initiative (GSI) (全球安全倡议, *quánqiú ānquán chàngyi*), a Chinese strategy of international cooperation to maintain world peace and security ([MFAPRC, 2022](#)). In February 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a concept paper restating the commitments expressed at the Boao Forum and adding new sections on priorities and mechanisms for tackling deficits in peace, development and security governance ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)).

The GSI sits alongside other prominent Chinese proposals for global governance. At the September 2021 General Debate of the UN General Assembly, President Xi Jinping unveiled the Global Development Initiative (GDI) (全球发展倡议, *quánqiú fāzhǎn chàngyi*) ([MFAPRC, 2021](#)), a blueprint for global economic development and partnerships that builds on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In March 2023, at a CPC high-level meeting, President Xi announced the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) (全球文明倡议, *quánqiú wénmíng chàngyi*), emphasising the right of states to determine their own modernisation based on cultural, historical and "civilisational" differences ([Liu, 2023](#)).

Together, the GSI, GDI and GCI aim to tackle the interconnected challenges affecting peace, development and security, drawing from the ideological basis of "Xi Jinping's thought". They represent China's programme for reshaping global governance and making the international environment more amenable to China's governance model, its national interests and its emergence as a global power. China's efforts to advance its "major-country diplomacy" (MFAPRC, 2023) featured highly in the December 2023 Foreign Affairs Work Conference of the Communist Party of China, "the most comprehensive expression yet" (Glaser & Thomas, 2024) of China's activist diplomacy.

This report focuses on the GSI. It lays out the core ideas, driving factors, and strategy underpinning China's global security vision, as well as the effects and implications of increased Chinese global security agency. It explores the following questions:

- ▶ What is China's vision of global security?
- ▶ Why has China increased its discourse in global security affairs?
- ▶ What has been the international reaction to the GSI?
- ▶ How is China putting its global security vision into practice?
- ▶ What are the implications for the Western security paradigm?
- ▶ What are the cooperation choices on regional and global security with China and other Global South countries?

The paper begins with an overview of the GSI, looking at its core concepts, priorities and platforms for cooperation. It proceeds with an analysis of the strategic considerations underpinning the initiative and the international reactions to it, before delving into two case studies (the Middle East and Ukraine) as illustrative examples of China's engagement in regional security. The paper then looks into the broad policy implications of China's vision of global order, offering recommendations for the strategic communities of Western countries attentive to cooperation with China and other Global South countries amidst shifts in global power balances.

Methodologically, the research draws from a vast array of official documents and a wide spectrum of opinions and insights (including scholarly writings, expert publications in the Chinese and English literature, and Chinese and Western media reports). Additionally, the Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT) has been used to analyse the Global South's media perceptions of China, the US and the Global North.

A Global and Wide-Ranging Understanding of Security

Chinese officials have hailed the GSI as fostering a new type of international relations “to maintain world peace and prevent conflicts and wars” ([SCPRC, 2022](#); [Jing et al., 2023](#)). China's state media has presented the GSI as “another global public good offered by China” ([Xinhua, 2022](#)) that puts forward Chinese solutions to global security challenges (Yang & Zhang, 2023). Chinese scholars have emphasised the novelty of China's proposed vision, an alternative to what they perceive as outdated security concepts, such as hegemonism, unilateralism, Cold War mentality, and zero-sum games. These, according to China, promote the “absolute security” of one country or group of states, and lead to “antagonism, divisions and confrontation” ([Sun, 2023](#); [CICIR, 202](#)) at a time when the world needs a broader concept of security that binds national, regional and international security (Wu, 2023; Wang, 2023). Western analysts have contextualised the GSI within Chinese foreign policy's shift towards “securitization” ([Freeman et al., 2023](#)). Alongside the traditional concept of “developmental peace”, China's bilateral and multilateral diplomacy emphasises “security” as key to ensuring global stability and development. This move is consistent with internal policy developments, particularly the imperative of bolstering national security, a key policy feature of President Xi Jinping's leadership ([Freeman et al., 2023](#); [Abb, 2023](#)).

Core Principles

The GSI centres around six broad policy principles for addressing the world's interrelated global security challenges:

- ▶ Pursuing common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security;
- ▶ Respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries;
- ▶ Abiding by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter;
- ▶ Addressing the legitimate security concerns of all countries;
- ▶ Promoting peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and consultation;
- ▶ Maintaining security in both traditional and non-traditional domains.

The core concepts proposed by China are consistent with the traditional pillars of Chinese foreign policy, as codified in the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence,¹ which China has promoted for decades.² They are also aligned with more recent foreign policy commitments. For example, comprehensive security, which links internal and external security, is a concept that President Xi Jinping has promoted since he came to power in 2013. The President first presented it at a 2014 Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measure in Asia (CICA) ([China Daily, 2014](#)) and reiterated in a 2017 speech at the UN ([MFAPRC, 2017](#)).

The most notable exception is China's official endorsement of the concept of indivisible security. By emphasising the legitimate security concerns of all countries, predicated upon the indivisibility of security, China—after Russia's invasion of Ukraine—has adopted language that echoes a key Russian argument around organising security ([MFAPRC, 2022](#)). The concept, which was developed during the Cold War to establish rules of coexistence between Western countries and the Soviet Union ([CSCE, 1975](#)), indicates that the security of one country should not come at the expense of its neighbours. More recently, the same concept was used by Russia to absolve its aggression against Ukraine ([TASS, 2022](#)), a justification that the Chinese foreign policy community has supported ([MFAPRC, 2022](#); Chen et al., 2022).

While the general principles proposed by China are rather broad and, with the exception of indivisible security, reiterate previous policy commitments, the sections on priorities and mechanisms for cooperation outline how China envisions a new global security architecture and how it intends to pursue and spread its vision.

Priorities for cooperation

The GSI identifies twenty priority areas of cooperation (重点合作方向, zhòngdiǎn hézuò fāngxiàng). These denote both the global scope of the initiative and an overarching definition of security governance, encompassing international and regional challenges, traditional and non-traditional security challenges, and the peace and development nexus ([Abb, 2023](#); [Van Oudenaren, 2023](#); Wu & Zhang, 2022; Ren, 2022). The GSI aims to support the UN's conflict prevention and peacekeeping capacity, encouraging dialogue and cooperation among states to safeguard the nuclear non-proliferation regime and conventional arms control.

It also promotes the political settlement of international, regional and local 'hotspot issues', including the war in Ukraine, the Palestinian question, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes region. It pledges support to ASEAN, the African Union, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and other regional and sub-regional organisations in upholding regional security cooperation. Non-traditional security areas of cooperation target prominent problems like climate change, energy and food security, and public health. The GSI also calls for establishing and strengthening international security governance in areas like the digital space, biosecurity, artificial intelligence and outer space security.

Platforms and Mechanisms for Cooperation

The GSI Concept Paper proposes five major platforms and mechanisms of cooperation (合作平台和机制, hézuò píngtái hé jīzhì).

First, the GSI emphasises the authority of the UN and its institutions, including the UN General Assembly, the Security Council, and UN committees as the main platforms for advancing common initiatives and forging international consensus on addressing global security (Yu & Wang, 2023). Beyond the UN, China calls upon a range of newer organisations and regional groupings, which China has either initiated or actively promoted, to "operationalize the GSI" ([SCIOPRC, 2022](#)) and safeguard global peace. Most notably, these "sinocentric multilaterals" ([Freeman et al., 2023](#)) include the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS+ group of states,³ the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the "China + Central Asia" mechanism, the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Neighbouring Countries of Afghanistan, and the China-Horn of Africa Peace, Governance and Development conference. The concept paper also calls for high-level meetings and conferences to be held under the auspices of the GSI to promote policy communication and intergovernmental dialogue in the field of security. It lists several international dialogue platforms, including the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum and the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum. China has established all these platforms to promote its "discourse power" on global security affairs ([Van Oudenaren, 2023](#)).

The global security architecture envisioned by China differs, both in principles and practice, from the Western concept of a peaceful international order based on liberal and universal values. China's approach prioritises national sovereignty over intervention in domestic affairs, common and indivisible security over military alliances, development and social order over democracy, political and social rights, and government-to-government relations over civil society engagement. Although the GSI calls for multilateralism and in reference to NATO, the G7, and other US-led groupings, the end of 'blocs politics', the range of Sinocentric organisations that China aims to utilise for GSI implementation demonstrates Beijing's intent to strengthen the global partnership network of countries and institutions that is forming around China.

Great Power Rivalry and Growing Overseas Security Risks

The GSI should be understood in the context of intensifying rivalry between the US and China. To understand China's motivation for increased discourse power in global security affairs and therefore the release of the GSI, it is worth examining the strategic assumptions and threat perceptions of both countries.

Many US officials and commentators view China as a country that has re-emerged on a mission of historical redress, with increasing power and influence ([Ford, 2019](#)). Intent on reshaping the post-Second World War global order ([US DoS, 2023](#)) and introducing "a global system friendlier to repressive regimes" ([Schuman, 2022](#)), China is perceived as concealing its intentions while amassing capabilities and pushing its 'hard power' to challenge the US ([US DoD, 2023](#); [Martin, 2021](#)). Whereas China portrays itself as a victim and others as historic aggressors, in Washington's view, China "has become the pacing threat to U.S. military operations in Asia" ([Heath, 2021](#)). Policy analyses emphasise China's intention to build its own power while resisting mutually agreed rules and instead seeking to write its own rules unilaterally ([Anstey, 2022](#)) and through tailored coercion ([Sutter & Campbell, 2023](#); [US DoD, 2023](#)). Moreover, the US blames rising tensions and the erosion of the 'status quo' in the Taiwan Strait on China's internal politics and its mounting political, economic, and military pressure on the island ([Stokes et al., 2022](#)). All together, the bi-partisan view in Washington is that "China is the U.S.' most consequential threat" ([Carpenter, 2022](#)) and competition, rather than cooperation, defines ties between the two countries ([Campbell, 2020](#)).

China's strategic considerations and threat perceptions are diametrically opposed. There are five main strategic observations that reflect contemporary structural changes in the international system, all of which China sees as affecting global governance and relations between China and the US:

- ▶ The belief that great changes in the world are accelerating ([MFAPRC, 2024](#); [MFAPRC, 2017](#); [Gao, 2023](#)), that the US is an enduring power in decline and China should undertake proactive leadership in global affairs as a respected first-class global power ([MFAPRC, 2023](#); [MFAPRC, 2024](#); Su, 2022);
- ▶ The view that American hegemonism stokes conflict ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)) and is responsible for glaring deficits in global governance ([SCIOPRC, 2023](#); Ling & Wang, 2023; Su, 2022);

- ▶ The view that the US and its allies aim to constrain China and frustrate its peaceful rise; China sees alliances—such as the Quadrilateral security dialogue (QUADS),⁴ the trilateral security pact AUKUS,⁵ and bilateral security and military technology transfer arrangements⁶—as military encroachment by the US and its allies and the emergence of an “Asia-Pacific NATO” ([MFAPRC, 2022](#)) that threatens China's own defence and security;
- ▶ The observation that emerging powers like Brazil, India, Russia and South Africa have long objected to American dominance and are working with each other and China, for a more “democratic” and equitable multi-polar world ([Beijing Review, 2024](#); [PRC Embassy, 2024](#));
- ▶ The notion that “Chinese solutions” in governance, development, and security are of global relevance ([Beijing Review, 2024](#); [MFAPRC, 2023](#); [Xinhua, 2022](#); Yu & Wang, 2023) and offer countries aspiring to “independent development” ([Gao, 2023](#)) an attractive alternative to the democratic model prescribed by the US and its allies.

These views encourage the conclusion that the US and its allies are “on the wrong side of history” ([China Daily, 2023](#); [Xinhua, 2020](#)). Believing that the goal of the US is to maintain its global hegemony, Chinese officials and commentators suggest that the US will seek to hinder China's rise. This increased threat perception, especially along China's periphery ([Cheng Wei, 2023](#)), has spurred Chinese policy makers to propose a new international security order. This enables China to counter the US and its allies' initiatives, especially in the Asia-Pacific, while underscoring China's 'discourse power' in global affairs. The latter takes three main directions. First, the GSI offers China an ideological and rhetorical framework to reinforce the narrative that Western countries are responsible for the global order's turmoil. Second, the GSI enables China to perpetuate the idea that its peaceful measures are the solution to international security challenges. Finally, it provides a platform that China can use to build new security relationships to support its expanding global interests and resist what China perceives as US-led anti-China coalitions.

Alongside strategic concerns and Sino-US rivalry, China's increased exposure to "overseas security risks" ([Abb, 2023](#)) in areas of conflict and instability has also given China cause to reassess its role in global security governance. Over the past twenty years, the pursuit of natural resources and the search for new markets and investment opportunities have driven Chinese engagement in highly fragile and conflict-prone environments. This is especially true along the path of the BRI ([Mariani, 2022](#)), where the need to ensure the security and safety of Chinese assets and nationals has made it necessary for China to consider how best to achieve stability. This has required a more interventionist and holistic approach that combines military, diplomatic and development efforts, all of which the GSI encapsulates.

International Reactions

Despite China's calls for all countries, including the US and its allies, to join the GSI (*Global Times*, 2023), Western officials and commentators are wary of the initiative. Analysis in the West offers a critical perspective on the GSI, arguing that alongside the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), it is a tool "to help China achieve global primacy" (*Schuman et al.*, 2023). Such analysis also highlights the risk that authoritarian regimes will have "more leeway to operate with impunity and greater legitimacy on the world stage" (*ibid.*). Others have warned that the initiative will be counterproductive to the interests of promoting international peace and stability, insofar as it will "deepen the world's divides" (*The Economist*, 2023).

European governments have yet to be persuaded that the GSI could improve European security. They are unimpressed by China's professed neutrality in the war in Ukraine (*Mariani*, 2024) and its promotion of "indivisible security", which has been misused by Russia to justify its war of aggression.

In Asia, China's main rivals—Japan and India—have unresolved territorial disputes with China, perceiving it as a security threat and having reservations about its promotion of "indivisible security". ASEAN countries, especially those with Chinese territorial disputes, have largely been silent on the GSI. A survey of the attitudes of Southeast Asians regarding geopolitical developments affecting the region, conducted between November 2022–January 2023, highlights that 68.5% of respondents who saw China as the most influential country in the political and strategic sphere also had concerns about China's increasing regional influence. Meanwhile, 44.5% were not confident that the GSI would benefit the region (*Seah et al.*, 2023; *Cheng Wei*, 2023). The perception of trust towards the US remains strong; indeed, if they were forced to choose between the US and China, 61.1% of respondents would opt for the US (*ibid.*).

However, the GSI is gradually being embraced across parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, where dozens of countries have reportedly joined the initiative. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the GSI is supported by more than 100 countries, and international and regional organisations (*MFAPRC*, 2023; *MFAPRC*, 2024). Some of them relate more closely to the GSI than others.

At a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in September 2022, the Council of Heads of State signed the Samarkand Declaration that recognised China's GDI and GSI ([SCIOPRC, 2022](#)). Six SCO member states—Azerbaijan, Belarus, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan—reportedly expressed readiness to work with China on the GSI ([Tamer, 2022](#)). Russia ([Mo, 2022](#)) and Pakistan ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)) have also stated their support to the initiative.

In Africa, where for many years there has been growing Sino-Africa security cooperation, the GSI is appealing for its emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference ([De Kluiver, 2023](#)). It has traction among countries that see the rise of China's security agency as a positive development in offering a means of tempering US influence. At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue held in Johannesburg on 24 August 2023, co-chaired by President Xi Jinping and South African President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, the African leaders present expressed support for the GSI, the BRI, the GDI, and the GCI ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)). Some analysts have suggested that Africa might be the “testing ground” for China's aspirations “to promote its brand of security assistance globally” ([De Kluiver, 2023](#)). The GSI label has already been attached to important policy initiatives, including the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035 (FOCAC, 2021), and the Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa ([PRC Embassy, 2023](#)). In September 2023, the Chinese Ministry of Defence hosted the third China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, which was attended in Beijing by defence officials from nearly fifty African countries, who debated efforts to strengthen “China-Africa Solidarity and Cooperation” ([Li, 2023](#)), and the implementation of the GSI.

In the Pacific Islands, the GSI has been linked to the establishment of a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” between China and the Solomon Islands ([PRC Embassy, 2023](#)), as well as broader exchanges and cooperation in the region ([PRC Embassy, 2023](#); [Lee & Needham, 2023](#)). In April 2022, China and the Solomon Islands signed a bilateral security pact ([Solomon Islands Government, 2022](#)). The agreement, which has raised concerns about China's growing influence in the South Pacific ([Kabutaulaka, 2022](#)), is also a test case for China's cooperation with governments facing domestic tensions and social unrest. The deal allows China to send police and military personnel to assist the Solomon Islands in “maintaining social order” ([MFAPRC, 2022](#)).

In Latin America, Nicaragua and Uruguay expressed early support for the GSI ([Lau, 2022](#)). In April 2022, at a meeting of Foreign Ministers, nine Caribbean countries⁷ endorsed both the GSI and GDI ([MFAPRC, 2022](#)). China has pursued progress in defence and security cooperation in Latin America through bilateral engagement and multilateral fora, such as the China-Latin America Defence Forum. In December 2022, the Forum was attended by security and military officers from China, and twenty-four Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries ([SCPRC, 2022](#)).

While there are significant differences among the countries embracing the GSI, they also share some remarkable commonalities: a sense that their voices are not adequately heard; the view that the existing international order is unjust and primarily protects the interests of Western countries ([The Indian Express, 2023](#); [Klingebiel, 2023](#)); historical grievances against the West ([Yabi, 2022](#)) and the post-colonial order; and finally, a latent "ideological antipathy to the United States" ([Stent, 2023](#)). In this context, the GSI's promise of a more equitable and inclusive international system holds great appeal.

Operationalisation of the GSI

The GSI is providing a broad policy framework for various Chinese peace and security-focused initiatives. Some of these, including China's engagement in UN peace operations, conventional arms control, and mediation diplomacy build on pre-existing activities. However, by incorporating them into the GSI framework, they serve to demonstrate "early substance behind the words" (Caine, 2022). Throughout 2023, this promotional work has intensified in international and regional forums, including at the UN, China-centric multilateral institutions such as BRICS, CICA, and SCO, alongside international dialogue platforms, like the Beijing Xiangshan Forum (MFAPRC, 2023). In future bilateral and multilateral frameworks, Chinese officials will likely be encouraged to promote the GSI and China's growing capacity to address conflict and instability around the world. Specific actions will depend on evolving policy priorities, the resources available, opportunities for engagement, and the response of other countries (Caine, 2022).

The below case studies provide examples of how China is seeking to operationalise the GSI and position itself as a source of global leadership. They also demonstrate its vision of mitigating and resolving conflicts and the challenges in balancing diverging economic, ideological and geopolitical concerns and interests.

China in the Middle East: Oil, Investments and Peace Facilitation

The Middle East is of great importance to China's economy and global affairs. The region supplies nearly half of China's oil needs and has a pivotal role for the advancement of the BRI. Over the last decade, China has fast expanded its economic and strategic presence across the region (Eslami & Papageorgiou, 2023). Since China proposed the BRI in 2013, its cooperation with Middle Eastern countries has steadily strengthened. In 2016, it became the largest foreign investor in the region (MEMO, 2017), allocating billions of dollars to BRI-related projects in Djibouti, Egypt, Israel, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, China's interests in the Middle East surpass energy security and economic ties. The region has also become a key theatre for China's promotion of its global security blueprint. In the GSI, China calls for a "new security framework in the Middle East" (MFAPRC, 2022; Zhang, 2022; Gering, 2023), which is based on five broad concepts: "advocating mutual respect, upholding equity and justice, realizing non-proliferation, jointly fostering collective security, and accelerating development cooperation" (MFAPRC, 2022). Moreover, China promises to support efforts made by Middle Eastern countries to "strengthen dialogue and improve their relations" (ibid.).

On the Palestinian question it calls on the international community "to advance the two-state solution" (*ibid.*), and to convene "a larger, more authoritative and more influential international peace conference" (*ibid.*). The GSI commitment to engage in Middle Eastern politics casts China as an honest broker ready to serve as a guarantor and provider of stability in the region.

In March 2023, under China's auspices, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to restore diplomatic relations. Chinese officials and scholars have hailed the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia as a Chinese "diplomatic victory" ([Jing et al., 2023](#)) that sets "a new example of political settlement of hotspot issues" ([MFAPRC, 2024](#)). Some analysts emphasise that China found positive conditions that were conducive to the reconciliation between the two sides ([Burton, 2023](#); [e-Haider, 2023](#)). China's diplomatic work was nevertheless significant. It was the first time that China had intervened so directly in the political rivalries between Gulf states, facilitating an agreement that could de-escalate tensions in the region. In 2023, China also attempted to apply economic and diplomatic leverage to renew the Iran nuclear deal ([PMPRC, 2023](#); [MEMO, 2023](#)) and promote the resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine ([Xinhua, 2023](#)). On 14 June, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was on a state visit to China where he and President Xi Jinping announced the establishment of a strategic partnership between China and Palestine ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)). Two weeks later, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that he had also been invited to China for a state visit ([Reuters, 2023](#)), a sign of China's effort to maintain balance. Given the US' strategic shift away from the Middle East and towards the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe ([Sullivan, 2023](#)), debates have increased around China's role in the Middle East and whether China will challenge US primacy in the region ([Jash, 2023](#); [Saaman, 2023](#)).

The Hamas attacks on southern Israel on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war in Gaza, however, are testing China's diplomatic ambitions and strategies in the Middle East. China's position on the war in Gaza is complex. Some analysts dismiss it as opportunistic and ill-fated, alleging that China seeks to diminish American influence in the Middle East ([Lee, 2023](#); [Aboudouh, 2023](#)). However, China is trying to balance different, at times conflicting, interests. Historically, since the era of Mao Zedong, China has supported Palestinian emancipation; in the 1960s and 1970s it provided political and diplomatic support to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). In recent years, however, China has also deepened economic ties with Israel, with significant investments in its technology and infrastructure sectors, including port construction projects in Haifa, as well as a robust weapons and security trade ([Elmali, 2023](#)).

In 2022, China was Israel's second-largest trading partner, with a value of trade of over \$24 billion ([Interesse, 2023](#)). China's criticism of Israel has thus remained within the boundaries of a "pro-Palestinian positive neutrality" ([Elmali, 2023](#)). After the Hamas attacks, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued statements voicing concern, calling for restraint on both sides and lamenting the lack of progress towards a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine. In criticising Israel's indiscriminate bombardment of civilians, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi later stated that Israel's military actions in Gaza were "beyond the scope of self-defense" ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)). On 30 November 2023, China submitted a position paper to the UN on the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)). It offers five broad proposals: a comprehensive ceasefire and an end of the fighting; effective civilian protection; ensuring humanitarian assistance; enhancing diplomatic mediation; and securing a resolution of the conflict by revitalising the political prospects of a two-state solution. China also reiterates its previous proposal for a UN-led international peace conference that would facilitate the implementation of the two-state solution. At UN votes, China has aligned with the majority of the international community and has voted in favour of resolutions calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. China's failure to condemn Hamas' atrocities has attracted the ire of Israeli officials and commentators who have denounced China's actions as "hostile" ([Lappin, 2024](#); Blanchard, 2023), while public perceptions of China in Israel have also deteriorated ([Chen, 2023](#)). After visits to Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, China's special diplomatic envoy to the Middle East, Ambassador Zhai Jun, has not visited Israel ([Zhou, 2023](#); [MFAPRC, 2023](#); [MFAPRC, 2023](#); [MFAPRC, 2023](#)). That precludes, at least for now, any significant peace facilitation role by China. For many observers, China's diplomacy in the war in Gaza has shown the limits of its approach to Middle Eastern geopolitics ([Wishnick, 2023](#); [Saaman, 2023](#); [Singh, 2023](#); [Aboudouh, 2023](#)). Chinese leaders currently have no interest in taking sides in the war. They have historical affinity to the Palestinian cause, but "abhor Hamas" ([Nitzan, 2023](#)) and political Islam, and want to maintain a delicate balance between Israel and Palestine. It is a position that may, at times, expose China to harsh critique, but it ultimately enables China to protect its overall national interests, and gradually become more involved in the region's future. As noted by some analysts, the Chinese stance does not preclude possibilities for China to play a diplomatic role in containing the conflict and preventing its expansion beyond Gaza, especially due to its influence on Iran ([Hochberg-Marom, 2023](#); [Nitzan, 2023](#)).

Strategic considerations also form China's political calculus. China is aware that the international reputation of the US, especially in the Middle East, has been damaged. In a survey of public opinion in 16 Arab countries regarding the war in Gaza, conducted between 12 December 2023 and 5 January 2024, 94% of respondents found the US position to be "bad", while 82% considered it "very bad" ([Arab Center Washington DC, 2024](#)). In other regions, numerous countries also resent the US' unconditional support to Israel, despite the war's massive human costs and widespread violations of the laws of war, which for many fits the legal definition of genocide. South Africa's genocide case against Israel and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s historic ruling on 26 January 2024⁸ has important implications for the "rules-based international order". On the one hand it can be seen as maintaining the rules-based order and deflecting criticism that transnational bodies are biased against developing countries. On the other, reputational stakes are rising not just for Israel, but also for allies such as the US, the UK and Germany. Israel and the West's interpretation of the ICJ provisional orders⁹ exposes them to renewed charges of hypocrisy and applying double standards in upholding the values of justice and the norms of international law. China, on the other hand, appears to be on the winning side of the 'international battle of narratives', continuing to score diplomatic points with most of the Global South, which is crucial to its global ambitions and competition with the US. On 20 November 2023 the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, the Palestinian Authority, and Saudi Arabia travelled to Beijing to publicly seek Chinese support for a ceasefire in Gaza. The meeting did not produce any immediate outcomes, beyond China's reiteration of its position on a two-state solution ([MFAPRC, 2024](#)) with an independent Palestine. It demonstrated, however, that China's "anti-Western neutrality" ([Aboudouh, 2023](#)) is appealing to Middle Eastern countries, while the US stands accused of failing to restrain Israel's worst war excesses and therefore bears responsibility for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza ([Elgindy, 2023](#)).

Media perception analysis confirms the above conclusions drawn from official government statements and diplomatic reactions. The Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT)—a Google-based database of coded global news stories¹⁰—further allows us to assess how news sources in Global South¹¹ countries perceive the policies of China, the US, and other countries in the Global North¹² in a time period that precedes and includes the conflict in Gaza.¹³ Whilst this analysis does not provide a complete picture of how countries have responded to specific events, it can inform an understanding of international reactions. Using a moving average time series with a sixty-day averaging window,¹⁴ we have compared the sentiment¹⁵ of Global South media stories about four groups of countries (Global North countries, Global North countries excluding the US, and China and the US). Generally, countries of the South view Chinese policies more favourably than those of the US. This is especially true after the provisional measures ordered by ICJ in the case filed by South Africa accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza and the concurrent decision by the US to suspend funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) ([Miller, 2024](#)).

The analysis shows a general increase of positive media sentiment in the Global South regarding the US and the wider Global North after the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 and until 12 December 2023, the date of a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. During this period, positive perceptions of China slightly increase before declining. While perceptions of China slightly increase and then decline between 12 December 2023 and 26 January 2024 (the date of the ICJ ruling), there is a more significant decline in perceptions of the US (Figure 1). This indicates that mentions of the US occur in stories that are broadly negative, and the overall perception of the US has deteriorated much faster than that of China. Throughout the seven-month timeframe, media perceptions of the Global North were more negative than those of China. However, the perception of the Global North can largely be attributed to the US specifically. Once the US is excluded from the analysis, the sentiment of the Global South's media perceptions of the Global North are more positive than those of China. This indicates that Global South news sources are likely to be more critical of the US than of other Global North countries. A more specific analysis of MENA media perception shows a similar pattern (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Aggregated GS media perceptions of GN interactions with all GS countries

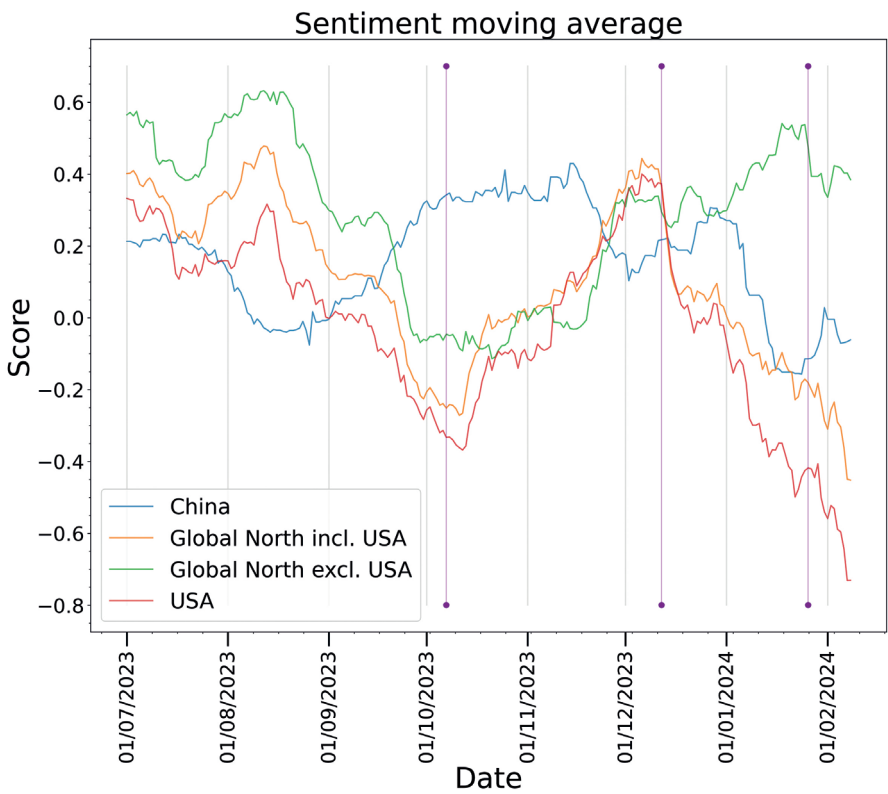
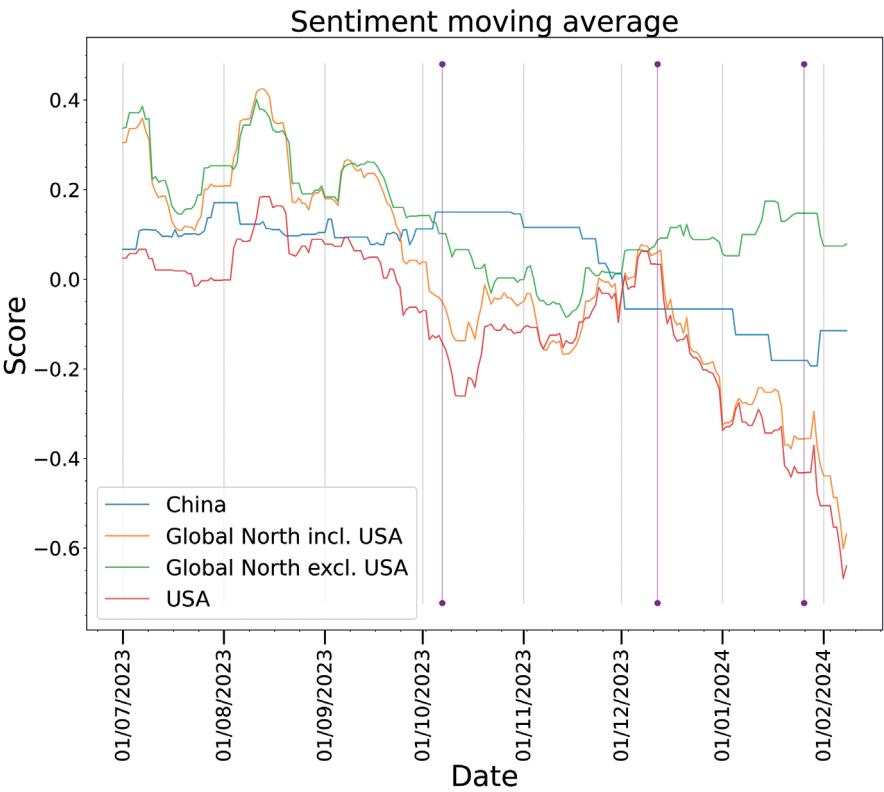


Figure 2: MENA media perceptions of GN interactions with all GS countries



As official government statements, diplomatic reactions, and news stories indicate, China's engagement in the Middle East has become integral to the implementation of the GSI strategy. As China's global influence grows, it seeks, more than just rhetorically, a peacemaker role alongside the US. When China intervenes it brings leverage to mediation efforts, and has notable assets it could use in the Middle East: economic power that translates into political influence; good relations with all major states in the region, including Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey; and, it "carries no religious, political, historical and colonial baggage" ([Chaziza, 2018](#)). It is therefore, theoretically better positioned to mediate conflicts than other international brokers. At present, however, China has neither the political will or military capabilities, especially in terms of power projection, to replace the US as the region's "principal security provider" ([Shea, 2023](#)). Moreover, its political and diplomatic leverage over Iran is often overstated ([Figueroa, 2024](#)). China is well-aware that the US has vital strategic interests in the region, including freedom of navigation and the safeguarding of global oil supplies, from which, despite its criticism of US policy, China benefits too. China's efforts are also hindered by a lack of expertise, with only a few Middle East experts in China, alongside a shortage of field capacity and first-hand information.

As "a newcomer" to international peace and security efforts in the Middle East, China currently shuns a full spectrum conflict management and resolution role, with its efforts primarily aimed at promoting dialogue and peace talks. Nevertheless, continued exposure to security risks—including major disruptions to commercial shipping in the Red Sea, and the danger of a large-scale regional war threatening China's economic interests—will give China cause to deepen its security engagement in the Middle East. This will impact the region's security architecture, offering more diplomatic options to countries that are dissatisfied with Western policies, interventions, and failures in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

China's position on the war in Ukraine

Chinese officials and scholars refer to China's peace efforts in Ukraine as a prominent example of the GSI in action ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)).

Previous analyses have shown that China views the war in Ukraine primarily through the lens of geopolitical rivalry ([Mariani, 2024](#)). There are, however, complex and at times diverging economic, political, and geopolitical concerns and interests that push China to remain officially neutral. These vary from not undermining its strategic relationship with Russia, which is crucial to countering the power of the US, whilst also preserving economic relationships with the US and Europe, and gaining accreditation from the international community, especially countries in the Global South, as a great power that acts responsibly in the international arena.

On 24 February 2023—on the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine—the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a concept paper on "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis" ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)), which was followed by diplomatic missions to Russia, Ukraine, and Western Europe. The position paper outlines a range of proposals on how to achieve peace. It includes calls for a ceasefire, peace negotiations, protection of civilians, humanitarian aid, the impermissible use of weapons of mass destruction, an end of sanctions on Russia, steps to facilitate the export of grain, and measures to support post-conflict reconstruction. These are generic advocations, and do not qualify as a peace plan per se. Moreover, while China emphasises the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, it downplays Russia's violation of a central tenet of the UN Charter that requires UN member states to refrain from the "use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state" ([UN, 1945](#)). China does not call on Russia to withdraw its troops from occupied territories in Ukraine. Instead, following the GSI vision of "common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security", it urges all parties to "help forge a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture" ([MFAPRC, 2023](#)) and abandon "the Cold War mentality" (*Ibid.*).

Many in the West are unimpressed by China's proposals for a negotiated end to the war. However, China's position appeals to numerous countries in the Global South that, while not supportive of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, share China's views on the causes of the war and have an interest in peace talks that might reduce pressure on food, fuel and fertiliser prices. In key UN votes, countries representing nearly half of the world's population ([Serhan, 2022](#)) have been careful not to condemn Russia, while countries accounting for two thirds of the global population have declined to support sanctions against Russia ([EIU, 2023](#)), aligning with China's position. As one analyst points out, the war in Ukraine has exposed "an important disconnect" ([Shea, 2023](#)) between Global North and Global South countries, which has been further exacerbated by the response to the war in Gaza. The US and most Western countries' disinterest in halting Israel's war excesses or promoting a ceasefire in Gaza, compared to stopping Russia's aggression in Ukraine, has discredited the concept of rules-based order, exemplifying for many in the South how the West applies double standards in implementing international law.

At the time of writing (March 2024), the war in Ukraine has entered its third year with no clear end in sight. However, negotiations will be required for any peace, and these will require compromises to encourage a long-term settlement of the conflict. This will likely be a multilateral affair where China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council with close ties to Russia, will be involved, particularly in consultations, peace talks, roadmaps for a peaceful settlement, key negotiations to end hostilities, and security assurances and post-conflict reconstruction pledges ([Mariani, 2024](#)). With its position paper on the war, and the shuttle diplomacy of key officials, China has made an attempt to address the war in Ukraine by positioning itself as a mediator or promoter of peace talks, a mitigator of the wider global fall-out of the war and, potentially, a post-conflict reconstructor. It remains to be seen what exactly China's involvement in negotiating an end to the Ukraine war will be and what tangible deliverables China will provide to the resolution and/or mitigation of the conflict, but helping to find a solution to the war remains a test case for the GSI and China's security agency in the global order going forward.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

This section looks at the policy implications of the vision of global order offered by the GSI and the increasing role and impact of countries in the Global South. While the number and variety of actors involved in the international diplomacy surrounding the GSI is extensive, the recommendations below are intended specifically for the strategic communities of Western countries that seek to address cooperation with China and other Global South countries amidst shifts in global power dynamics.

Assessing the implementation and impact of the GSI

The outcomes and long-term effects of the GSI are difficult to predict. As Chinese officials have explained, the GSI is "a macro thinking of top-level design" ([Fei, 2022](#)), which implies that although the initiative inevitably lacks practical details, it is a harbinger of things to come.

It will be important to observe how China pursues its global vision of security and how the GSI is implemented, particularly as an instrument for addressing conflict, instability, and insecurity. Specific avenues for analysis should include: how China promotes its alternative security paradigm; what role, if any, Chinese embassies play in facilitating GSI promotion in key countries, especially those in conflict areas; Chinese operational, on-the-ground policies and actions, including financial contributions to activities and security programmes under the GSI; the latter's impact in relation to conflict management and resolution; policy adjustments in connection to the operationalisation of the GSI; the support that China garners from different countries; and what drives countries' alignment with China's security blueprint. Collaborative research projects with Chinese scholars studying how the GSI is affecting conflict environments, either positively or negatively, would allow for a better understanding of Chinese global security agency and its impacts.

Pursuing 'positive-sum games' with China

China's proposed global security vision is meant to reform and improve ([SCIOPRC, 2023](#)), not overthrow, the international system. For decades the multilateral rules-based order has benefited China, and it will remain in China's interest to operate within it, to preserve international stability, and to influence and shape the future international order. This, argues one Chinese scholar, is being done with a Chinese style of multilateralism that is "based on America's but transcends it" ([Gu, 2023](#)).

Inevitably, China is bound to become a more conspicuous global security actor, a process compatible with the evolution of a multipolar rules-based order that the US and other Western countries should recognise and accept. Despite major differences in the respective national interests and values systems of China and liberal democracies, there is substantive material in China's concept of global security that Western countries can work with. There is a need for China and Western countries to improve the understanding of each other's domestic positions, increase the number of confidence and security building measures, and work together, both bilaterally and multilaterally, where they share common interests.

Pursuing 'positive-sum games' with China requires approaches that are flexible enough to distinguish between different areas of engagement. This should start from cooperation with China in handling prominent security problems in regional contexts where there is a confluence of interests, for example, in the Middle East and Ukraine:

- Despite having different perspectives on the causes of violence and instability, China, and the US and its allies, also have common stakes in a stable and more peaceful Middle East. Specifically, both China and the West have an urgent interest in ensuring that energy supplies remain unhindered. Western countries and China should concentrate on the areas of commonality in seeking a stable Middle East, addressing the humanitarian crisis of Palestinian civilians trapped in Gaza, preventing a large-scale regional conflict, and advancing the prospects of a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the only path towards a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question. In the short term, openings for cooperative efforts towards de-escalation should be explored. The US should accept that China's calls for a global conference to initiate a peace process will eventually gather more international support. China should assure the US that it will urge Iran to exercise restraint, while the US will have to take similar actions with Israel.

- Ukraine and its Western allies should intensify dialogue with China on addressing the war in Ukraine. Despite diverse interpretations of the war's root cause, there are shared interests between the West and China. Both wish to avoid further escalations and would like to see an end to the conflict. China's proposals for a political settlement do not qualify as a peace plan and demonstrate a pro-Russian stance towards the war. They signal, however, that China seeks to play a role in ending the conflict, mitigating its worst impacts, and providing resources for reconstruction. Building on this seemingly solid foundation for international dialogue between the West and China, debates should focus on how to bring the war to an end by ensuring a just and durable peace settlement, how to mitigate the wider global fall-out of the war, including the need to tackle food insecurity, and how best to cooperate on post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.

When facing competing claims and strategic interests—such as maintaining stability in both the South China Sea and East Asia, nuclear non-proliferation, regulating artificial intelligence, and preventing an arms race in either outer space or cyber space—efforts should focus on improving crisis management mechanisms, keeping communication open at all levels, and promoting diplomatic and security dialogue initiatives to manage and resolve differences (Fan, 2021). Finally, engagement on areas that are related to different political traditions, value systems and cultures should continue to be accounted for. However, these structural and deeply rooted differences between China and the West are not likely to change in the foreseeable future; China and Western countries will continue to disagree on important issues such as internal security, civil and political rights, and democracy. It is in the areas of shared concerns and interests that engagement with China offers greater hope of positive outcomes. These should be insulated by avoiding issue-linkage between divergences on the values agendas, particularly those based on liberal principles, and shared interests.

Developing more collaborative Sino-US interactions

The future of global security will depend to a significant degree on how China and America envision it, and the ability of the two powers to work together. While in the second half of 2023 the China-US relationship showed signs of improvement ([MFAPRC, 2024](#); [Reuters, 2023](#); [MFAPRC, 2023](#)), there are lingering concerns regarding its fragility, as radical differences persist and strategic distrust grows. When they occur, meetings at high political levels between China and the US, as well as backchannel discussions amongst think tank and policy experts on specific issues, are important in improving communication and mutual understanding. However, progress tends to be slow. Parties often prioritise divergent points of view and values, and when meetings involve public participants, especially senior politicians, there is little leeway to step back from entrenched positions that are often linked to domestic political conditions.

There is a need to find new forms of dialogue and interaction on shared concerns, as well as seemingly intractable differences, in order to build a framework in which collaborative behaviour becomes normalised. Efforts should be devoted to: nurturing relationships that are less dependent on political conditions at home; understanding each side's different threat perceptions and devising possible risk reduction pathways; developing a roadmap based on genuine and workable practical actions by both sides for stabilising the China-US relationship; and exploring cooperation on regional and global security issues of highest priority and mutual interest facing the two countries. Alongside high-level meetings and other official interactions, complementary forms of quiet diplomacy, especially Track 1.5 dialogues, which have historically facilitated major breakthroughs, hold greater promise to contextualise emerging challenges and improve the prospects for Sino-US cooperation.

Rebuilding consensus around basic norms of international law

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the US-led War on Terror spanning multiple wars, and the disastrously-conceived war in Gaza—to name a few—have exposed a crisis of compromised international principles and the rule of law worldwide. A critical reflection of China's actions also shows that while the GSI calls for adherence to international law, the UN Charter and a more equitable world order, there are discrepancies between China's professed principles and its foreign policy assertiveness and tougher military posture. This applies in particular to the handling of affairs in China's immediate periphery.

China has increased its military pressure on Taiwan; a resolution of the border dispute between India and China “remains elusive” (ICG, 2023); there are competing territorial claims with several countries in the South China Sea and East China Sea; and China has rejected the ruling by an international tribunal in the proceedings initiated by the Philippines over “maritime entitlements” and the legality of Chinese activities in the South China Sea (PCA, 2016). The reality of what appears to be an international order ‘à la carte’ and the double standards that stymie collective international action within the UN and other multilateral bodies highlight the need to rebuild consensus around the basic norms governing international relations.

A back-to-basics approach to international law requires restoring the credibility of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, especially in relation to non-aggression and respect for sovereignty. This means that internationally recognised borders and the political independence of any state are inviolable.¹⁶ Moreover, it means that territories cannot be annexed by force. It is crucial to rebuild the credibility of the principles of non-aggression and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states. The commitments and obligations under international human rights laws and the laws of war,¹⁷ which governments, military and security forces routinely violate, also need to be restored. In the long run, this will only work if all countries respect the rules they claim to defend and if they impose limits on their external interventions, which are codified in Chapter VII of the UN Charter. A UN international commission of eminent politicians, scientists and academics should be tasked with investigating the current crisis of international principles, and recommending corrective actions to rebuild trust in international institutions and governments, in light of a changing international system.

Re-thinking the Western security paradigm

China's proposals for an alternative global security order and its appeal among countries of the Global South should galvanise Western policy actors to undertake a radical reassessment of the current crisis in the global security order and to address its underlying causes. China continues to establish its role in shaping the conversation and building consensus among like-minded countries (in particular, the lower- and middle-income countries of the Global South). Western countries, meanwhile, have yet to produce a convincing and coherent strategy that surpasses China's containment and provides instead a transition to ‘a sustainable security paradigm’.

Western countries should invest more diplomatic and political capital in demonstrating the benefits of their approaches as global security providers. They should also ensure that their policy actions consistently follow and reiterate, rather than undermine, the rules-based order they champion. For the US and its allies, strengthening their own standing, by promoting peaceful solutions to conflicts and disputes around the world, is a priority. In the Middle East, the US should leverage its political, economic, and military influence to support a resolution of the nearly eighty-year old Palestinian question. This should be in accordance with a two-state solution, in line with the principles of the UN Charter, which is supported by the majority of the international community. A more immediate priority for the US and other Western countries that have paused funding to UNRWA is to resume donor funding, which plays a crucial role in providing aid and protection for six million Palestinian refugees living within and outside Palestine.

A new international cooperation agenda with the Global South

The new geopolitical and geo-economic context is defined by the increasing role and impact of countries of the Global South. They share a widespread sentiment that the global order is not working in their favour and many welcome the opportunity for a new approach to international politics and how the world should be run.

To rebuild trust, especially among the local populations, and make partnerships more sustainable, the West should reassess its engagement with the Global South. In countries affected by conflict and instability, it is crucial to promote actions that strengthen comprehensive conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives, which are traditionally part of the liberal peacebuilding approach, but often suffer from a lack of adequate and sustained resources and investments. This should be alongside a new development cooperation agenda that focuses on themes such as the worsening of poverty and inequality, the localisation and decolonisation of aid, investments in global public goods, and climate change. There is also a need to demonstrate—through the ability to leverage the necessary financial resources that Western countries have—the solutions to the interconnected security and development challenges of a changing world. In countering negative perceptions of hegemony, Western countries should also acknowledge the legitimate aspirations of the Global South to overhaul the unjust structures of the global system and create a more level playing field within multilateral institutions.

A starting point is having more representatives of the Global South in leading positions at the UN and other international organisations, through to commitments to reform the UN Security Council, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Finally, pragmatism demands acceptance that efforts to win back emerging countries by pursuing exclusive partnerships are unlikely to succeed. Global South countries will not abandon their non-aligned policies that better protect their national interests and will continue to have dealings with the US and its allies, as well as with Russia and China ([Shea, 2023](#)). As emerging countries—like Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa and Turkey, each with competing interests and balancing acts ([Rikhotso, 2023](#))—gain increased global prominence Western countries' outreach strategies should be directed towards a flexible approach. There should be concerted efforts to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in those areas where there is substantial common ground, alongside acceptance that there are areas where cooperation is not feasible due to different political and economic interests, governance, moral principles, and cultures.

Conclusions

As an economic superpower and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China has a crucial responsibility to maintain a just and equitable international order. At face value, most of the GSI wording sounds unobjectionable. No country would disagree in principle with true multilateralism guided by the UN Charter, the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, and resolving disputes through dialogue and consultation, rather than brutal force. China's claim for a more significant role in international politics is a legitimate aspiration. It is natural for a rising power to want its views and actions reflected in global governance. But the principles and practices of China's security agenda are primarily based on China's own idiosyncratic non-liberal political values, which differ substantially from those of Western countries. This has already turned "global security" into a new arena for great-power competition. Purportedly, the GSI stands in contrast to exclusive bloc politics. However, in the flexible configuration of competition and alliances among states, significant blocs have already formed: Russia and China have established a 'no limits' partnership in the East; Western countries and their allies are pursuing closer security cooperation; and there is the bloc of emerging economies, including China's fellow BRICS states and numerous other non-aligned actors that do not feel compelled to choose sides and want to have partnerships on both sides of the East-West geopolitical spectrum.

China's ambitious vision and appealing rhetoric of how global security governance should develop are the subject of intense debates. Multiple Western analyses offer a critical perspective of China's worldview, arguing that China is self-interested and seeks hegemony, at least in East Asia. China's counter-arguments reject the assumption that once a country becomes very strong, it will inevitably seek hegemony. These perspectives will face the test of time. The success, or failure, of the GSI will depend on how China upholds its commitments to a just multipolar order, the willingness of China's local and global partners to cooperate under the GSI framework, the state of Sino-US relations and how China will leverage the enormous political and economic influence at its disposal to promote peace, prosperity and stability in the decades ahead. Practical contributions towards securing positive outcomes to conflicts raging around the world, be they in Africa, Ukraine, the Middle East, or elsewhere, will be key tests for China to show that, beyond discursive posturing and national interests, its actions contribute to a more peaceful, just and sustainable international order.

Growing strategic competition among major powers, especially between the US and China, is the undeniable current reality. Great power competition is not inherently negative, if both China and the US excel in their efforts to contribute to international public goods, and countries from around the world have more options on national and international affairs through multiple partnerships. The question however is whether the divergent values, aspirations and interests of the US, China and other emerging powers can be managed and reconciled at a time when the world can ill-afford divisions and concerted efforts are required to resolve conflicts and tackle the existential risks of the climate emergency, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and out of control artificial intelligence, to name a few. Crafted diplomacy and statesmanship will be needed to recalibrate economic, diplomatic, political and security relations, to look beyond national interests, and to provide a new impetus for cooperation to address the challenges on which the future of humankind depends.

Endnotes

¹ Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non- interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

² The principles were agreed to by China and India in 1954. They were later endorsed by the leaders of many newly independent former colonies and formed the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

³ Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

⁴ US, Australia, India and Japan

⁵ Australia, UK and US

⁶ Including those between the US and countries like South Korea, the Philippines and Australia.

⁷ Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

⁸ Pending a verdict over whether Israel has carried out genocide, which will take years to materialise, the ICJ found it "plausible" that Israel could have committed genocidal acts against Palestinians in Gaza and granted protective orders to restrain Israel's conduct in the war.

⁹ The court demanded, amongst others, that Israel avoids killing Palestinians, causing them serious bodily or mental harm and creating intolerable living conditions in Gaza, that it prevents and punish public incitement to genocide and that it takes "immediate and effective measures" to address the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

¹⁰ GDELT uses Conflict and Mediation Event Observations (CAMEO) codes to classify events in news articles. The algorithmic basis of GDELT, known as TABARI, extracts information about actors, actions, and locations from the news article's text. CAMEO codes are then assigned to the news article based on the extracted information. In our analysis, we used CAMEO codes related to cooperation and diplomatic activity.

¹¹ In this analysis, Global South countries include Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates.

¹² For the purpose of this analysis, Global North countries include all G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK and US).

¹³ The timeframe is between July 2023 and February 2024. Key reference point/intermediate dates are: 7 October 2023 (the attacks by Hamas on Israel); 12 December 2023 (UN General Assembly resolution demanding an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" in Gaza); and 26 January 2024 (ICJ ruling on Israel and decision by the US government to suspend funding to UNRWA). The plots before the key reference are therefore the baseline against which we assess the changes in sentiment post-reference. The three date marker events will have stimulated not only articles about the war in Gaza, but also articles related to China and Global North countries more generally.

¹⁴ Moving average time series make the assessment and comparison of changes in volume and sentiment of news stories over time clearer and easier to interpret.

¹⁵ GDELT sentiment analysis uses multiple emotional analysis tools to capture the affective content of news stories ([The GDELT Project](#), 2015).

¹⁶ In accordance with the UN Charter and the Declaration on Principles of International law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States.

¹⁷ These are codified in international humanitarian treaty law, the Hague Conventions of 1907 and the rules of customary international humanitarian law.

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