

**CHINA'S NEW DIPLOMACY AMID
INTENSIFYING US-CHINA
COMPETITION**

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Executive Summary

1. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s visit to China in June 2023 successfully reopened important high-level communication channels between Washington and Beijing, helping to put the relationship on more stable footing and potentially laying the groundwork for Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend APEC in the United States in November 2023.
2. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s follow-on visit to China in July 2023 reinforced the reestablishment of high-level communication channels.
3. The revival of bilateral diplomatic channels will not have a significant impact on the long-term trajectory of US-China competition, which is becoming more global and ideological in nature. The competition has now extended beyond bilateral relations, with each side promoting the merits of its own principles of global governance, economics and security to the international community.
4. From 2021 to 2023, China unveiled three new initiatives: the “Global Security Initiative”, “Global Development Initiative” and “Global Civilisation Initiative”. These initiatives build on China’s stated long-standing foreign policy principles such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference, mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.
5. The initiatives also incorporate new principles consistent with China’s domestic concept of “Chinese-style Modernisation” and international concept of a “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind”.
6. Although the three global initiatives present tangible proposals for addressing global issues, they also seek to reinforce Xi Jinping’s image as a great statesman, thinker and strategist for a domestic audience by remaining at the level of high-level concepts and principles.

7. Beijing is now more actively applying its concepts to tangible global issues, including the Russia-Ukraine war, Iran-Saudi Arabia diplomatic normalisation, Afghanistan and Israel-Palestine conflict. Its diplomatic efforts have accelerated since China's emergence from COVID-19 lockdowns in early 2023
8. Meanwhile, the United States has presented its own concepts of the "liberal rules-based international order" and "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" based on principles of self-determination, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sovereignty, peaceful resolution of disputes, free trade and freedom of navigation.
9. While the Chinese and American visions of global security, development and governance overlap in some ways, especially at the level of rhetoric, they nonetheless diverge substantially in practice.

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Background

- 1.1 US-China relations appear to be set on a trajectory towards long-term competition and rivalry. Despite recent cabinet-level dialogues between Washington and Beijing, communication is unlikely to reverse the trends towards economic diversification. During Treasury Secretary Yellen's trip to China, both China and the United States defended their recent export controls in terms of national security.
- 1.2 Following Yellen's visit to China, China's Ministry of Commerce stated, "[w]hether China and the United States can get along correctly has a bearing on the future destiny of mankind".¹ Simply put, US-China relations are being increasingly couched under Xi Jinping's broader concept of a Shared Future for Mankind.
- 1.3 Similarly, when it comes to US requests for China to cooperate on global challenges, such as debt relief and climate change, the Ministry of Commerce states that China will fulfil its responsibilities under the newly announced Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Development Initiative (GDI) and Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI). Therefore, both the United States and China are beginning to view bilateral relations in the context of their global foreign policy.
- 1.4 The release of China's GSI, GDI and GCI exemplifies Beijing's reemergence as a powerful player on the global stage. While the three initiatives have yet to be

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¹ http://www.mof.gov.cn/zhengwuxinxi/caizhengxinwen/202307/t20230710_3895227.htm, accessed 12 July 2023.

substantiated fully beyond the level of political sloganeering, Beijing is signalling an intent to play a more active role in addressing international challenges.

- 1.5 The release of China's three new initiatives comes at a time of momentous international change. Europe is confronted by the largest land war since World War II. Technological innovation is changing the nature of the global economy, politics and military conflict. The global climate remains under stress. Economic globalisation is pressured by the return of the state over markets. US-China competition is intensifying. Amid these ruptures, Chinese leaders assess that the balance of power is shifting in their favour.
- 1.6 China's promulgation of new concepts for global security, development and governance is not only a response to shifts in the international system, but also a response to the normative challenge posed by the United States in the form of its "liberal international rules-based order".
- 1.7 While the Trump administration withdrew the United States from its traditional role as a promoter of the rules-based order, which gave Beijing more space to claim international leadership, the Biden administration has placed global governance and multilateral diplomacy at the centre of its National Security Strategy. In particular, Washington's framework of democracies versus autocracies has put Beijing under additional pressure to respond with its own international frameworks to defend its interests and values.
- 1.8 China's initiatives are designed to not only protect China's political system in the face of the United States' international normative framework, but also put forward a more proactive and offensive approach to shape global norms and narratives around security, development and governance.
- 1.9 By discrediting Washington's alliance structure, development model and framework of autocracies versus democracies, China is actively seeking to position itself as a diplomatic and political alternative to the United States.

- 1.10 Whether the framework of China or the United States could gain more traction in the international system remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, US-China competition appears to be taking on an increasingly global and ideological character.

The Global Security Initiative

- 2.1 In April 2022, Xi Jinping proposed the GSI at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference.² The timing of the release of the initiative may have been intended to minimise some of the reputational damage Beijing faced for its failure to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine two months prior. The GSI was then expanded upon with the release of a concept paper in February 2023.³
- 2.2 The GSI comprises China's long-standing principles of peaceful coexistence as well as newly adopted concepts such as "indivisible security" which traces its roots to the 1975 Helsinki Accords. The concept implies that the security of one state is inseparable from others in its region and that all states have "legitimate" security interests. This concept is an important part of China's attempt to gain international recognition for its own unresolved territorial claims.
- 2.3 The GSI's stated aim is to promote common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, uphold sovereignty as the fundamental norm in international relations, codify the centrality of the United Nations, peacefully resolve disputes and maintain general stability in both traditional and nontraditional domains.
- 2.4 The GSI attempts to solve the security dilemma—a perennial challenge in international politics—by presupposing that the security of one country is interrelated with the security of others. However, the concept of indivisible security fails to map out an effective solution for resolving international disputes, especially when the inability to clearly delineate between two country's sovereign interests is often the crux of the problem.

² https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202204/t20220421_10671083.html, accessed 12 July 2023.

³ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/202302/t20230221_11028348.html, accessed 12 July 2023.

- 2.5 The war in Ukraine is a case in point for the failure of China's concept to effectively address international disputes. While Russia claims that Ukrainian statehood is illegitimate, Ukraine claims that it has territorial rights that extend to its 1991 borders. China's position that both Ukraine and Russia have legitimate security interests does nothing to address the fundamental dispute resulting from the fact that Russia impinged on Ukraine's sovereignty through the use of force. In other words, the GSI fails to address the fundamental reality that international sovereignty claims often conflict with one another.
- 2.6 The United States often seeks to resolve sovereignty disputes in a "just" manner, including through the process of international arbitration or even just wars, whereas China prefers to de-escalate conflicts even if it means an unjust outcome for the weaker power.
- 2.7 China's role in Saudi Arabia-Iran diplomatic normalisation has been branded as a concrete example of the GSI. Chinese officials argue that Beijing's positive relations with both Riyadh and Tehran allowed it to play a constructive role in mediating tensions between the two countries, whereas the United States' traditional role as a security provider for Saudi Arabia and antagonist of Iran ensured that it would not be able to act as an impartial arbiter.
- 2.8 As a result, the GSI seeks to discredit Washington's militarised alliance system, which is viewed as exacerbating regional disputes in contrast to China's more flexible form of partnership diplomacy. Washington would argue that its alliances are based on the concept of collective defence and act as stabilisers in an otherwise anarchic international system. Rather than feign neutrality, the United States does not hide the fact that it supports its allies and partners in international disputes.

Global Development Initiative

- 3.1 Xi Jinping put forward the GDI at the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022.⁴ Like the GSI, the GDI carries forward many of

⁴ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/gjs_665170/gjsxw_665172/202109/t202109239580159.html, accessed 12 July 2023.

China's longstanding foreign policy principles. Long before the launch of the GDI, China has been an active player in global development particularly with the release of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013.

- 3.2 The GDI seeks to advance the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while also introducing China's unique concepts and insight from China's own experience of rapid development. As such, the GDI prioritises people-centred, inclusive, innovative and ecological development.
- 3.3 In contrast to the "Washington consensus", which often promotes trade and financial liberalisation and free-market capitalism to achieve economic development, China emphasises the centrality of state intervention in economic growth. Distinct from past initiatives, China is taking a more active role under the GDI in emphasising Chinese style of modernisation as an attractive model for developing countries.
- 3.4 The release of the GDI coincided with the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic whereby many countries faced high inflation, slow growth and rising debt financing costs.
- 3.5 The GDI is a broader and more conceptual initiative than the Belt and Road Initiative insofar as the former is less about promoting economic connectivity between China and the rest of the world and more about promoting discursive concepts of Chinese-style development.
- 3.6 The launch of the GDI coincides with growing US-China competition for influence in the developing world, as evidenced by the G7's launch of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which seeks to mobilise \$600 billion in private and public capital by 2027.
- 3.7 The GDI was also released amid disputes between China and international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank over emerging market debt restructuring and relief.

- 3.8 China is seeking to present itself as a leader in the developing world, while casting the United States as promoting economic concepts that reflect its own economic interests to slow down the growth of developing countries. China attempts to portray the United States as promoting protectionism and anti-globalisation in its international economic policy.

Global Civilisation Initiative

- 4.1 The GCI is the newest of China's three diplomatic initiatives. It was unveiled on 15 March during Xi Jinping's speech at the "Chinese Communist Party in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-level Meeting" in Beijing.⁵
- 4.2 The GCI complements the GSI and GDI by presenting an all-around concept for human development. Rather than present a materialistic view of human development rooted in Marxist-Leninism, Xi Jinping appeals to China's traditional, pre-communist history to explain that human civilisation requires not only security and economic subsistence, but also cultural and spiritual development. In essence, the GCI extends Xi's decade-long project to Sinicise Marxism and apply it to current global challenges.
- 4.3 The GCI serves a domestic legitimisation purpose by presenting the Chinese Communist Party as the keeper and protector of China's 5,000-year history. Historical determinism, rather than the consent of the governed, is the ultimate determinant of political legitimacy within modern China.
- 4.4 In the context of the international environment, the GCI seeks to create space for a plurality of political systems, cultures, histories and development phases. In doing so, the GCI appeals to "common" values such as peace, development, equality, mutual learning, dialogue, inclusiveness, justice, democracy and freedom—values that all countries can adhere to regardless of their political system.

⁵ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202303/16/WS6412496da31057c47ebb4b23.html>, accessed 12 July 2023.

- 4.5 In this way, the GCI contrasts with the central organising principle of the Biden administration, which seeks to pit democracies and autocracies against one another. The United States' vision of the liberal rules-based international order seeks to protect and advance plurality between individuals within states, not plurality between states. Illiberal and repressive regimes are viewed as illegitimate given that their authority is based on a monopoly on the use of force rather than the consent of the governed. For this reason, the United States' rules-based order emphasises principles like self-determination, free expression, freedom of religion and other rights of individuals within states.
- 4.6 The GCI also contrasts with the United States' view of bilateral strategic competition, which China equates with an understanding that the United States seeks to outcompete and prevail over the Chinese Communist Party as it did with the Soviet Union. Through the GCI, Beijing instead seeks to promote a model of long-term coexistence between diverse civilisations, including but not limited to the United States.

Conclusion

- 5.1 The GSI, GDI and GCI represent the culmination of Xi Jinping's project to Sinicise Marxism and contribute the wisdom of Chinese-style modernisation to the world in order to cement domestic legitimacy, expand China's international influence and compete with the US liberal rules-based order.
- 5.2 China's vision of global governance, security and development resonates with many countries that are not themselves liberal democracies or who remain sceptical of the US global leadership.
- 5.3 Rather than promote the liberal rules-based order as a normative framework to constrain China, the United States has sought to compete with China in order to strengthen and affirm the liberal rules-based order. Similarly, China's global initiatives are not explicitly intended to compete with the United States but to promote its own affirmative vision of global governance.

5.4 Whether the framework of China or the United States could gain more traction in the international system remains to be seen. In the meantime, however, US-China competition appears to be an increasingly global and ideological phenomenon.

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Best regards,
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