

CHINA: What is the Global Security Initiative?

- China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) aims to build a diplomatic and security architecture to rival the US-led system of multilateral treaties, alliances, and institutions.
- So far the GSI remains ill-defined and largely re-packages existing Chinese-led forums, multilateral institutions, and security concepts, but Beijing will flesh out the initiative gradually.
- Process may matter more than results; even absent clear policy outcomes, engaging countries in vague diplomatic initiatives can cultivate a network of friendly international relationships.

China's foreign ministry issued a "[concept paper](#)" on its Global Security Initiative (GSI) on 21 February, after President Xi Jinping debuted the GSI concept in April 2022 without elaborating. The gradual rollout of the GSI resembles the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which Xi first mentioned in 2013 but which took several more years for policymakers to flesh out. As with BRI, the focus of engagement for GSI is the developing world, which Beijing assesses to be more receptive to closer relations.

Also like the BRI, GSI will serve as an umbrella under which Beijing can promote a range of diplomatic initiatives involving various multilateral or plurilateral coalitions. The ultimate objective is to build a global security architecture to rival the US-led system of treaties, alliances, and institutions. The concept paper references a variety of security issues: terrorism, transnational crime, drug trafficking, public health, natural disaster, nuclear proliferation, climate change, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and biosecurity. Beijing will likely also frame its role as mediator or peacemaker in various regional conflicts, including the [Russia-Ukraine war](#), as constituent of the GSI.

Even as the concept remains ill-defined, Chinese diplomats will loudly trumpet the GSI in the coming months and years. Speeches, diplomatic readouts, and bilateral memorandums of understanding will reference GSI alongside BRI and two other new Chinese diplomatic initiatives, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative. Keeping the objectives relatively vague might help in attracting adherents. Just as Chinese banks and state-owned enterprises rebranded preexisting foreign investments as BRI initiatives, diplomats will repackage various security initiatives as elements of the GSI master plan.

For example, Beijing will use the GSI as a common thread connecting various multilateral institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS cooperation mechanism, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the "China+Central Asia" mechanism, and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation initiative. GSI will also be a theme in China-sponsored multilateral forums like the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Middle East Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, and the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum.

In terms of norms and principles, GSI emphasizes familiar Chinese foreign policy concepts like "non-interference in internal affairs," which aims to delegitimize criticisms of domestic human rights, and "sovereign equality," which denotes equality under international law, regardless of a country's size or income level. By implying opposition to Western hegemony and the outsized influence of rich countries, this latter principle is designed to appeal to developing countries.

Though Beijing intends for the GSI to serve as an alternative to Western-led security institutions like NATO, the Quad, and Aukus, the initiative affirms the centrality of the UN. The concept paper's call for "a bigger UN role in security affairs" implies

a belief that the UN is less subject to Western hegemony than other international institutions. Meanwhile, Beijing will seek to expand its influence within UN institutions. The paper pledges increased resources for UN and African Union peacekeeping operations and promises to "further leverage" the Chinese-funded UN Peace and Development Trust Fund.

Another element of GSI will be training foreign military and police. The paper calls for "more exchanges and cooperation among university-level military and police academies" and pledges to 5,000 training opportunities for developing countries over the next five years "to train professionals for addressing global security issues."

Ultimately, process may matter as much as results for the GSI. Even if most specific elements of GSI produce few concrete policy results, the overall initiative may still serve to cultivate a network of friendly international relationships. These relationships would prove useful both in an acute conflict over Taiwan or in a long-term, cold war-type scenario of increased global bifurcation between US- and Chinese-led blocs.

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