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The Global Security Initiative of China

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SYNOPSIS

China's Global Security Initiative is primarily a response to the intensification of geopolitical rivalry and tension between the No. 1 and No. 2 economic powers of the world and their respective allies, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Strategically, the Initiative is aligned to China's preference for non-military measures, such as economic statecraft and diplomacy, to safeguard its national security.

COMMENTARY

China's Global Security Initiative (GSI) was officially announced by President Xi Jinping during the [Boao Forum for Asia annual conference](#) held in April 2022. According to the [concept paper](#) released by the Chinese Foreign Ministry in February 2023, the GSI includes "six commitments", covering "the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security", "respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries", the role and authority of the UN and its Charter, "the legitimate security concerns of all countries", peaceful resolution of differences and disputes "through dialogue and consultation", and the maintenance of "security in both traditional and non-traditional domains".

Recent official and media coverage of the GSI suggests that China seeks to challenge the existing US-led security order in the Asia-Pacific (that is, the Indo-Pacific as referenced by the US, India, Japan, South Korea, and other countries in the region), and to promote China's characterisation, principles, and vision of international relations and international security that reinforce Chinese norms and interests.

It is germane to ask why China proposed the GSI now. How does the GSI fit into China's broader strategic thinking on its future role and standing in the world? An examination of Chinese scholarly texts and official statements would suggest that China's heightened threat perception about its immediate periphery was an important

basis for the initiation of the GSI. Furthermore, the GSI is aligned with China's broader strategic thinking of ensuring a stable regional environment for itself through non-military measures.

Why GSI Now?

Over the past 30 years, China has engaged itself in regional security initiatives to address threats to its national interests. For example, it was keen to use the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), which has its secretariat in Kazakhstan, to strengthen ties and mutual trust with its neighbours through dialogues and negotiations.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is seen as aggravating China's perceived vulnerabilities within the regional security environment. One interpretation views this war as reinforcing US thinking of the need to expand American military and strategic presence in Asia to [deter China from invading Taiwan](#). Hence, in 2023, the US signed a series of security and military technology transfer arrangements with South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia to provide US military forces with access to their respective facilities during contingencies in the Taiwan Strait.

Earlier, the US expanded the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and created a new security partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom (AUKUS) which will significantly increase the Western nuclear-powered submarine capability in the region. The net effect is deemed a negative impact for China's own defence and security.

These geopolitical developments led Chinese scholars and officials to redesign Beijing's approach to secure itself practically and strategically. This eventually gave birth to the GSI. In fact, this new packaging allows China to criticise US military involvement in the region and its containment of China. As [Zhao Kejin](#) of Tsinghua University wrote, the GSI "supports political dialogues while opposing military force; supports non-interference while opposing the imposition of values on others".

Similarly, during Chinese Defence Minister [Li Shangfu's 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue address](#), he indirectly criticised the US' "Cold-War" mentality while cautioning that "history has proven that bloc politics, division, and confrontation have never delivered genuine security. They can only escalate tensions and destabilise the region". China's GSI can therefore be viewed as a critique of US' actions in the region, while underscoring China's counter approaches to conflict resolution.

The GSI in China's Strategic Thinking

The GSI apparently seeks to ensure a stable regional environment by emphasising peaceful and non-military measures to resolve tensions along China's borders. Beijing has used economic statecraft and diplomacy to cultivate close relations with neighbouring countries and to dissuade them from taking measures detrimental to China's security. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has underwritten enormous Chinese investments in infrastructural development, especially in transportation and urban connectivity facilitating economic and trade growth. To cite an example, China and a number of mainland Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand,

Vietnam, which are member states of ASEAN) have cooperated and implemented the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Framework.

In this way, China could achieve its security interests without resorting to the use of military means, which could undermine its economic recovery after the passing of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was manifested by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to [five Southeast Asian nations](#) in 2021, where he pledged China's support for post-pandemic economic recovery, as well as donating 30 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the neighbouring states.

At the same time, Wang also warned Vietnam against ["magnifying" the South China Sea disputes](#). More recently, in June 2023, China and Vietnam reached an agreement to collaborate on an "effective code of conduct in the South China Sea" and to maintain peace and stability in the region. This agreement followed closely after the visit of the US aircraft carrier, the USS Ronald Reagan, to Danang to commemorate the [10th anniversary of the Vietnam-US Comprehensive Strategic Partnership](#).

However, China's non-military approach have garnered mixed receptions from its immediate neighbours because of unresolved territorial disputes. According to the [2023 State of Southeast Asia Survey](#) (published by ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore), 68 per cent of Southeast Asian respondents had voiced concerns about China's growing regional political and strategic influence, while 44 per cent were not confident that the GSI will benefit the region.

Conclusion

In essence, China's perception of threat along its periphery is the driving force for the inception of the GSI in 2022, although it was purportedly "global" in its outlook. The GSI concept paper has devoted many paragraphs to different regions of the world (where Western governments, especially the US, have specific interests) as well as current challenges to humanity such as climate change, data and information security, energy and food insecurity, governance of the cyber domain, Outer Space issues, transnational crime, world health threats, and so on. Moreover, the GSI aligns closely with China's broader strategic thinking of ensuring a secure regional environment through non-military measures. However, without the resolution of China's unresolved territorial disputes with its neighbours, it is unlikely that the GSI will obtain the anticipated traction of its Chinese designers.

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